



## Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

### Briefing for the UN Security Council High Level Open Debate

*“Keeping the promises: The role of regional organizations in implementing women, peace and security in the face of political turmoil and seizures of power by force”*

### Remarks by OSCE Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid

**15 June 2022**

President, your Excellency Minister Xhacker,  
Secretary General Guterres,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for this opportunity to address today’s opening debate on the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda – a top priority for the OSCE and for me personally.

**We are living through extremely challenging times.**

Russia’s war on Ukraine is having a devastating **impact on innocent civilians and infrastructure** and is in direct contradiction to the core principles that underpin European and Global security order.

**More than 14 million people have fled their homes since Russia's military aggression against Ukraine** – almost seven million left for neighboring countries, while eight million people are displaced inside Ukraine itself - an overwhelming majority are women and children.

Women and girls have been the victims of rape, and are at higher risk of trafficking and violence.

The current conflict in Ukraine is also **threatening food and energy security**. Prices of food and basic goods are increasing with disastrous economic and humanitarian consequences on the poorest households, many of which are headed by women.

Communities in Ukraine are not only exposed to violence and destruction but also **to air and water pollution as well as hazardous waste contamination, including radioactive pollution that do not stop at the border**. Women are often the primary managers of their households and rely on natural resources, however they face persistent barriers to meaningful participation in natural resource governance mechanisms and decision-making processes.

In addition, **we still bear the consequences of the COVID** pandemic that has increased gender inequalities, and the **impact of climate change**, as the UN Secretary General has rightly referred to.

In these challenging times, it is critical to address the disproportionate impact of war on women and girls; and to ensure **women's role in peacebuilding and conflict resolution**.

The OSCE is playing a vital role in this regard.

Our approach is a holistic one.

We support **women's leadership** and their **direct participation in peace processes** and post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation. Together with UN Women Moldova, we provided targeted **capacity building support to women negotiators from** the Republic of Moldova, both sides of Nistru river. The OSCE Mission to Moldova continues to liaise closely with UN on the ground to establish a Women's Advisory Board to the Transdnestrian Settlement Process.

**We support women networking.** I am a strong supporter of women networks and in 2021, I launched the *OSCE Networking Platform for Women Leaders, including Mediators and Peacebuilders*. This platform includes women from Ukraine and Afghanistan, and aims to support women involved in peacebuilding activities and allow them to share experience and practises in a safe space. And let me just say that the **situation of women and girls in Afghanistan** is appalling and I could not agree more with the Secretary General in respect to their right to complete education and pursue a career.

**We amplify women's voices.** Recently I convened a special meeting with women Ukrainian peacebuilders and frontline humanitarian workers. We discussed the impact of the war on their lives, learned about their concrete needs, and heard their recommendations for possible actions for the OSCE and its participating states. The recommendations will not only inform our future work in Ukraine but also support dialogue at the local level.

**We support survivors of gender-based violence.** We do so by strengthening the capacity of service providers, networking women's resource centers, and developing police and justice sector training curricula to deal with domestic violence cases.

**We provide assistance to prevent trafficking of human beings,** including by issuing specific recommendations to States to address the risks of online exploitation.

**We strengthen women's participation and leadership in the security sector,** in particular in conflict prevention, arms control and disarmament. To date, over 320 young women from across the OSCE region have participated in our *Scholarship for Peace and Security Training Programme*, which is a joint initiative with UNODA, to deepen their knowledge on conflict prevention, arms control and disarmament.

In the OSCE, we also strive to lead by example. Over two-thirds of the Participating States have adopted Action Plans to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and over 40% of leadership positions in the Organization are held by women.

These are just a few examples of contributions that regional organizations like the OSCE are making.

As ever, **more needs to be done to achieve full cooperation at international and regional levels.** To keep our promises – to advance gender equality – we need to go even further, working together to ensure that the needs of women in conflict are adequately addressed and that women are part of the decision making processes at all levels. And this includes also the important legislative dimension.

The OSCE is committed to gender equality. We are committed to our co-operation with the UN. And we are committed to working together – across our region and with our partners around the world – to advance peace and security.

Gender equality is critical to this.

Thank you.