

Concept Note

The OSCE participating States (pS) have long recognised that gender equality is an essential prerequisite for peace, democracy and sustainable economic and environmental development. In 2004, the Ministerial Council adopted the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality (GAP), setting out a firm commitment to promote gender equality across the Organization and in participating States by mainstreaming gender in all OSCE policies, programmes and actions. This commitment was further developed and reconfirmed in several other Ministerial Council decisions covering all three dimensions of security.¹

Since the adoption of the GAP more than 20 years ago, significant progress has been made across the OSCE to promote gender equality and implement international commitments. In accordance with UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, the OSCE has been actively supporting women's meaningful inclusion and participation in all peace and security efforts as well as conflict prevention and crisis response. Significant advances have been made to include women in all aspects of political, social and economic life and in fighting all forms of gender-based violence.

In 2021, the OSCE pledged to advance gender equality at the Generation Equality Forum in Paris and became a catalytic member of the Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action (WPS-HA). In addition, ODIHR joined the Forum's Action Coalitions on Gender-Based Violence and on Feminist Movements and Leadership.

Moreover, states and international organisations have strongly reaffirmed their commitments to the full, equal and effective participation of women in decision-making at all levels and in all areas of public life. In this spirit, this year the global community will mark the 25th Anniversary of the adoption of UNSCR 1325 as well as the 30th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Despite the significant advances made, gender inequalities persist across the OSCE region. Women continue to be affected by limited access to equal opportunities and pervasive discrimination. Particularly women and girls belonging to national minorities and from marginalized or underrepresented groups – such as women with disabilities, Roma and Sinti women, or migrant and refugee women – face multiple and often intersecting forms of discrimination and exclusion.

¹For example: MC Decision 7/09 on Women's participation in political and public life, MC Decisions 5/15 and 4/18 on Preventing and combating violence against women, MC Decision on Enhancing OSCE efforts to implement the action plan on improving the situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE area, with a particular focus on Roma and Sinti women, youth and children.

Women and girls are also disproportionately affected by conflict and crisis. This includes the consequences of armed conflict, climate change, uneven access to natural resources and energy insecurity. Women and girls are exposed to higher risks of violence, including sexual violence and trafficking in human beings. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as other conflicts and crises in the OSCE region, have demonstrated this disproportionate impact on women and girls.

Despite their key role in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, women remain under-represented, if not marginalised, in all peace and mediation efforts. Global trends of backsliding on women's rights and an increase in all forms of violence against women and girls, including online violence, represent major challenges in achieving meaningful inclusion and gender equality across the OSCE region. This requires decisive action.

Despite the worrying trends, it is important to focus on the agency of women to respond to current challenges. The overarching theme of the Finnish OSCE Chairpersonship is resilience. A resilient society is a society that is democratic and based on rule of law, human rights and gender equality, a society which promotes inclusion and celebrates pluralism.

By organising the Chairpersonship Conference on Gender Equality, Finland calls on OSCE participating States to **respect** the OSCE commitments on gender equality; to **respond** to the challenges faced by women and girls due to the lack of equal opportunities, discrimination, and increase in all forms of violence against women and girls; and to **prepare** to take action together.

The Conference will build on the outcomes of the 2023 Gender Conference hosted by North Macedonia in Tetovo and the 2024 Ministerial level Side Event hosted by Malta.

The purpose of the Conference is to encourage enhanced action by OSCE participating States in advancing gender equality and women's participation. As part of this, the Chairpersonship will launch a **OSCE-wide Roadmap for the effective implementation of Women, Peace and Security commitments**. The Roadmap provides a comprehensive overview of the OSCE's work in implementing the Women, Peace and Security agenda and invites OSCE participating States to reinforce their efforts by pledging to concrete measures.

Objectives of the Conference

This high-level Conference will provide a platform to:

1. Showcase the OSCE's work and key achievements in promoting gender equality and implementing the UNSC resolutions on Women, Peace and Security;
2. Identify persisting challenges and new threats and opportunities in the promotion of gender equality across the OSCE region; and
3. Discuss specific commitments that can be operationalized across all three dimensions of security.

Format

The Conference will offer differing formats to allow for fruitful discussions. The first day will take place in plenary. The second day will be dedicated to four parallel spotlight sessions to allow discussions around key priorities and challenges in the OSCE area across all three dimensions of security. A focus session will be dedicated to women in Ukraine. The Conference will finish with

a closing session where the rapporteur/moderator of each spotlight session delivering key recommendations to a closing panel where conclusions will be presented in the plenary.

In order to allow for comprehensive discussions, global partnerships and intersectional approaches, including youth, will be mainstreamed throughout the spotlight sessions.

Participants

The Conference will bring together high-level officials from the OSCE, the participating States and Partners for Co-operation, as well as representatives of civil society, academia, the private sector and other international organisations.

DRAFT Agenda

Tuesday 6 May

13:00-15:00 **Registration and welcome coffee**

15:00-15:30 **Opening session**

15:30-16:00 **High-Level OSCE panel**

16:00-17:00 **Kick-off session “Building resilience through inclusion and empowerment”**

The Kick-off session will set the tone for the 2025 Conference on Gender Equality with a critical reflection on the current global trends and challenges regarding gender equality. It will discuss how to turn opportunities into lasting, transformative change for the benefit of all.

17:30-20:00 **Reception and launch of the Women, Peace and Security Roadmap**

Wednesday 7 May

09:00-09:45 **Focus session: Amplifying women’s voices from Ukraine**

Women in Ukraine have been at the forefront of promoting gender equality and women’s rights, working to prevent gender-based violence and address structural inequalities. For over three years now, the women and girls of Ukraine have been facing the devastating consequences of Russia’s war of aggression. Despite the horrible realities of war, they continue to demonstrate extraordinary courage, resilience and determination to support their communities. This session will provide the opportunity to hear from Ukrainian women peace leaders and activists about their courageous engagement, supporting their agency and leadership. *Light breakfast will be provided.*

10:00-11:30 **Spotlight sessions (running in parallel)**

Session 1: Rethinking the Women, Peace and Security Agenda to address multiplying and intersecting crises

As the world’s largest regional security organisation, the OSCE plays an important role in the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and its follow-up resolutions in the OSCE participating States. This commitment has been outlined in the OSCE 2004 Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality as well as in other MC decisions (incl. MC.DEC/14/05), in which women’s

participation in conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation is enlisted as a priority area of work.

With 2025 marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of UNSCR 1325, this session will focus on ways to recentre the WPS agenda to address multiple and intersecting crises and promote women's meaningful and effective inclusion in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding across the whole spectrum of policies and actions. The session will also be an opportunity to highlight OSCE's work supporting women-led networks to advance meaningful participation in decision-making and showcase OSCE's work to promote women's leadership and inclusion beyond peace negotiations.

Guiding Questions:

- How can the OSCE effectively support women leaders in peacebuilding, conflict prevention and conflict resolution?
- How can we advance the WPS agenda in times of war and strengthen the resilience of women?
- What are the best practices and tools to fast-track women's leadership in conflict management and peace leadership?
- What role do networks play in advancing women's access to decision-making processes?

Session 2: Preventing violence against women and girls

Preventing and combatting all forms of violence against women and girls is a longstanding commitment of OSCE participating States (OSCE MC Decisions No. 15/05; 7/14 and 4/18). Violence against women and girls is a human rights violation that not only harms the security and safety of its victims, but also hinders women and girls from being full and equal participants in society. The OSCE, through its institutions and field operations, is investing efforts to support participating States in preventing and combating violence against women and girls, enhance data collection, improve protection and services for survivors of violence and increase security for women and girls overall.

This session will aim to look into the OSCE's achievements - in improving legal and policy frameworks, capacity building of professionals, support to survivors, work with perpetrators, addressing violence in conflict and fighting gender-based violence. The session will also provide participants with the opportunity to discuss current challenges, including the rise of technology-facilitated gender-based violence affecting different groups of women, including female journalists, politicians, human rights defenders and peacebuilders.

Guiding Questions:

- How to improve laws and policies and their implementation in the OSCE region to more effectively address gender-based violence? How to ensure comprehensive responses to violence?

- What are the strategies to enhance awareness and capacities of professionals to effectively respond to violence against women and address the needs of survivors?
- How can our systems respond to new and emerging forms of violence, especially online violence, and ensure comprehensive protections?

11:30-12:00 **Coffee break**

12:00-13:30 **Spotlight sessions (running in parallel)**

Session 3: Promoting equal opportunities for women and girls in the digital era

At the heart of the OSCE's work lies the belief that active participation of all members of society in all spheres of life fosters peace and stability. Technology has enabled more participatory and collaborative spaces, giving voice to previously marginalized groups. Digital tools can empower women economically and provide essential income, including in volatile conflict settings. However, the digital sphere also exacerbates existing threats, such as gender-based violence and trafficking in human beings, while introducing new challenges such as misinformation and disinformation, which are particularly amplified during elections.

Organisations like the OSCE are increasingly focusing on developing comprehensive approaches that not only leverage technology's benefits for empowerment and participation, but also address its potential risks. This contains implementing safeguards against online harassment (including of women politicians and journalists), supporting digital literacy initiatives, and ensuring that technological solutions are designed with inclusivity in mind. By acknowledging both the opportunities and challenges of digital engagement, societies can work towards creating more resilient and equitable democratic spaces that truly represent all voices and allow inclusive participation.

Guiding Questions:

- How can we effectively promote access to digital technologies and capacity building for women and girls to ensure they are not left behind?
- What kind of digital initiatives have been taken to support the effective engagement of women in different spheres of life?
- How can we effectively address the specific risks and threats that women face in the digital sphere, such as gender-based violence online? What safeguards are needed?

Session 4: Engaging men and boys for gender equality

The OSCE has long been committed to advancing gender equality, with a particular emphasis on the vital role that men and boys play in achieving this objective. While significant progress has been achieved through policy implementation, capacity-building efforts and the empowerment of women and girls, these advances remain fragile. Changing societal norms, moving away from traditional gender roles and breaking up gender stereotypes requires an inclusive and collaborative approach that actively engages men and boys.

The session will explore strategies to encourage and enable men and boys to support and contribute to gender equality while addressing the systemic barriers and cultural norms that perpetuate gender imbalances. It will also consider how institutional mechanisms can be strengthened to promote sustainable, gender-sensitive approaches.

Guiding Questions:

- What are the most effective strategies to engage men and boys as allies in advancing gender equality?
- How can we better support men in their roles as advocates for gender equality, particularly in traditionally male-dominated sectors or institutions?
- What institutional or structural changes are needed to strengthen gender mainstreaming and support both men and women in promoting sustainable gender equality?

13:30-15:00 Lunch break and Marketplace of OSCE Impact Stories

The “Marketplace of OSCE Impact Stories” will provide a space to present some of the Organization’s work and assistance to participating States in promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment across all dimensions. The Conference participants will be able to learn more about the effective work of the OSCE on the ground and to delve deeper into the topics covered during the sessions through first-hand accounts from partners and beneficiaries. To this end, different “market stands” focusing on projects’ impacts will be set up and participants are invited to visit them while enjoying their lunch.

15:00-16:00 Closing session

Reports from the spotlight sessions

Conclusions and final remarks