

Annual progress report on OSCE gender action plan: UK response, July 2022

Thank you, Secretary General, for presenting the Annual Progress Report today. As you mention, gender equality and fighting all forms of violence against women and girls are crucial to the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security and stability and I express with horror the detrimental impact that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has had on women and girls, as was highlighted in last week's [Moscow Mechanism findings](#).

Today, I will focus on three areas in your Report – the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender equality; the importance of fully implementing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda – including in conflict mediation, and peace and negotiations processes – and the devastating and disproportionate impact that Russia's illegal war against Ukraine is having on the safety, security and well-being of Ukrainian women and girls.

Firstly, as highlighted in the foreword of your report, the continued backsliding we've seen on gender equality during the COVID-19 pandemic remains a cause for great concern. We have seen an exacerbation of pre-existing gender inequalities; women experiencing greater economic setbacks and disproportionately shouldering caregiving responsibilities; and an appalling rise in domestic violence across the region. In particular, we've observed a shocking deterioration in the safety and human rights situation for women and girls in Afghanistan, amplified by the pandemic.

It is the responsibility of us all to address this, and to build back better and more inclusively from the pandemic. The UK commends the continuation of the important work of the OSCE in expanding the capacity of shelters for victims of violence and supporting them in maintaining their fundamental services in the longer term.

Secondly – the OSCE has a key role to play in implementing the Women, Peace and Security agenda. We appreciate the ongoing work of the Executive Structures to support participating States in its implementation.

We appreciate the work to ensure that a gender perspective is included in all aspects of peace processes and conflict resolution, including in mediation. We emphasise the full, equal and meaningful participation, leadership and representation of women in all aspects of peace processes and at all levels of decision-making, and will continue to champion this through the development of our new [National Action Plan on WPS](#) to commence in early 2023. We commend the newly launched [OSCE Networking Platform for Women Leaders](#), which includes Peacebuilders and Mediators. I'd also like to draw attention to the OSCE's toolkit for "[Inclusion of Women and Effective Peace Processes](#)". This is a valuable resource for conflict mediation in all OSCE conflicts, and we continue to encourage full use of this tool.

Thirdly – the Secretary General’s foreword highlighted the horrifying impact that Russia’s war against Ukraine has had on women and girls in Ukraine. This includes an increased risk of trafficking, abuse and sexual violence, as was documented in last week’s Moscow Mechanism report. I commend the huge bravery of Ukrainian women responding to the needs of their communities, documenting war crimes, advocating for women’s needs and working to build a sustainable future. Again, we call on the Russian Federation to end this unprovoked and illegal war.

I’d like to thank all those who have contributed to advancing gender equality and the Women, Peace and Security agenda at the OSCE. We also thank Poland for their focus as Chair on gender equality this year, as well as Sweden for their efforts in 2021. It is essential that gender is fully integrated into the organisation’s work and any mediation process.

Thank you, Mr Chair.