

**ADDRESS BY**

**DR. HEDY FRY**

**SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE ON GENDER ISSUES  
TO THE OSCE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY**

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**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

## INTRODUCTION

I was appointed as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) Special Representative on Gender Issues in 2010. Since then, the OSCE and its participating States have made important advancements in the fight for gender equality. Nonetheless, women continue to face many challenges, especially in times of crisis.

My goal – this year, as in the past – has been to raise awareness of a variety of important gender-related topics in the OSCE region. The purpose of my address today is to share some initial ideas for the 2023 gender report. But before I do so, I would like to update you on some developments relevant to my mandate.

## OVERVIEW OF RECENT ACTIVITIES

At the 2022 OSCE PA Annual Session in Birmingham, I established an Informal Gender Network with the goal of bringing together OSCE PA members committed to gender equality, and to enable discussions relating to gender issues in the OSCE region. The first meetings of the Informal Gender Network – held online on 27 October 2022 and 25 January 2023 – were a success, thanks to your active contributions. I hope that the network can serve as a forum not only for open discussions, but also for developing ideas for supplementary items, amendments to resolutions, side events, and other tangible activities and proposals related to our work as OSCE PA members.

In the past year, with the 2022 Gender Report, I have turned my attention to the important topic of *Ensuring a Gender-Inclusive Economic Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic*.<sup>1</sup> Last year's gender report focused on two themes:

- The impacts of the pandemic on women's economic security; and
- How economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic can – and must – be inclusive.

My report concludes that more than two years after the pandemic began, economic recovery remains fragile and is not being felt equally across the workforce. It also includes examples of best practices for a gender-inclusive economic recovery, which I invite you to review.

As well, as in previous years, I have had the privilege of being able to incorporate a gender perspective into public discussions on numerous important policy challenges. For instance, I value my ongoing collaboration with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

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<sup>1</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), [The 2022 Annual Report of the OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues : Ensuring a Gender-Inclusive Economic Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2022.](#)

## DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE

In the past year, there have been numerous developments related to gender equality in the OSCE and its operations.

Some of these developments have been carried out as part of ODIHR's continued support for gender equality and women's rights. I applaud initiatives such as:

- the OSCE PA–ODIHR guide on *Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament*, and its accompanying step-by-step guidance document on *Participatory Gender Audits of Parliaments*;<sup>2</sup> and
- the ODIHR toolkit on *Addressing Violence against Women in Politics in the OSCE Region*, which aims to raise awareness and strengthen knowledge and capacities in OSCE participating States to help prevent this type of violence.<sup>3</sup>

ODIHR and the OSCE have done important work on reporting on violations of human rights, war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Ukraine. I would specifically like to commend the inclusion of a gender perspective in the reports of the missions of experts established under the Moscow Mechanism.<sup>4</sup>

I believe that the work of women in leadership positions at the OSCE should also be highlighted. For example, in the past year, OSCE Secretary General, Helga Maria Schmid, launched the first OSCE Women's Peace Leadership Programme to support women's leadership in peace and mediation, peace-building and conflict resolution.<sup>5</sup> As well, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Teresa Ribeiro, continued her important work on the safety of women journalists online.<sup>6</sup>

I would also like to welcome North Macedonia as this year's OSCE Chair. I was pleased to see that the North Macedonian Chairpersonship intends to focus on gender issues, notably the strengthening of the OSCE women, peace and security agenda; promoting women's effective participation in public and political life; and combatting violence against women.<sup>7</sup>

### 2023 GENDER REPORT

I will now turn to the subject of my report for this year. Given the gravity of the situation, the 2023 gender report will focus on "Addressing gender consequences of the war in Ukraine."

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<sup>2</sup> OSCE, [Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament: A Guide for Parliaments in the OSCE Region](#), 6 December 2021; and OSCE, [Participatory Gender Audits of Parliaments: A Step-by-Step Guidance Document](#), 16 August 2022.

<sup>3</sup> OSCE, [Addressing Violence against Women in Politics In the OSCE Region: Toolkit](#), 27 November 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Wolfgang Benedek, Veronika Bílková and Marco Sassóli, [Report on Violations of International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity Committed in Ukraine since 24 February 2022](#), OSCE, 12 April 2022; and OSCE, [Report on Violations of International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity Committed in Ukraine \(1 April – 25 June 2022\)](#), 14 July 2022.

<sup>5</sup> OSCE, [OSCE Secretary General launches the first OSCE Women's Peace Leadership Programme](#), News release, 17 October 2022.

<sup>6</sup> OSCE, [Safety of Female Journalists Online](#).

<sup>7</sup> OSCE, [Programme of the 2023 OSCE Chairpersonship of North Macedonia](#), pp. 7 and 11.

Among other issues, this year's report will look at how the war has affected women's economic livelihoods, health and education outcomes, care responsibilities and personal security. It will also address the displacement of women across the country and region, as well as issues surrounding sexual and gender-based violence. I also intend to highlight the need for a gender-sensitive response to the war, including psychosocial assistance, support for reproductive health services, and safe spaces for refugees.

I look forward to sharing with you the conclusions of my report at the Annual Session in Vancouver in July 2023.

## **THE GENDERED CONSEQUENCES OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE**

The humanitarian consequences of the war in Ukraine have been devastating, but they have also been felt differently by various groups of the population.

For instance, we now know that women are significantly overrepresented among Ukrainian refugees and internally displaced persons. Women and children – who make up 90% of people fleeing the crisis – are at greater risk of gender-based violence, and sexual exploitation and abuse.<sup>8</sup> Sadly, history has shown all too often that population displacement correlates with increased threats to the personal safety of women and girls. We also know that conflict – including the war in Ukraine – has a detrimental impact on living conditions, which in turn leaves women and girls more vulnerable to sexual exploitation.<sup>9</sup>

The economic consequences of the war are also gendered. Ukrainian women perform a disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work within households. The war is solidifying binary gender roles, which increases risks of setbacks to gender equality. Women in Ukraine are also more vulnerable to the impacts of war because of their unequal access to finance, resources and services. For instance, there is a 22% gender pay gap in Ukraine.<sup>10</sup>

## **SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT CONTEXTS**

OSCE commitments, as well as OSCE PA declarations, have repeatedly focused on the high risk of gender-based sexual violence in conflict situations.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately, since the war began a year ago, we have witnessed an increasing number of reports of rape and sexual violence by members of the Russian armed forces, especially in the newly occupied territories. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has been documenting these cases, some of which could amount to war crimes. However, the scale of this problem is still unknown, as many incidents of rape and sexual violence are not reported.<sup>12</sup> The OHCHR has

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<sup>8</sup> CARE, [Rapid Gender Analysis in Ukraine](#), 2022.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations (UN) Women, [Global Gendered Impacts of the Ukraine Crisis on Energy Access and Food Security and Nutrition](#), 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development, [Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Ukraine](#), 31 December 2021.

<sup>11</sup> For example, see OSCE, Ministerial Council, [Decision No. 15/05 Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women](#), 6 December 2005; OSCE, Ministerial Council, [Decision No. 4/18 Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women](#), 7 December 2018; and OSCE PA, "[Resolution on Preventing and Combating Gender Based Violence](#)" *Berlin Declaration*, 2018, pp. 24–26.

<sup>12</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), [Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 1 February – 31 July 2022](#), 27 September 2022, p. 15; and United Nations, [War Leaving Invisible Scars for Ukrainians, Under-Secretary-General Tells Security Council, Noting One Fourth of Population Will Develop Mental-Health Condition](#), Security Council 9243<sup>rd</sup> Meeting, Meeting coverage, 13 January 2023.

stressed the need for all victims of sexual violence to have access to adequate medical and psychological services, including sexual and reproductive health care.<sup>13</sup> I believe that this recommendation should be implemented in all OSCE participating States welcoming Ukrainian refugees.

## **GENDER SENSITIVE RESPONSES TO THE WAR IN UKRAINE**

In my upcoming report, I intend to also examine best practices and measures taken by participating States regarding the inclusion of a gender perspective in responding to the war in Ukraine.

For example, recognizing the differentiated impacts of the war on women, my report will examine best practices in ensuring gender-inclusive mental health care. Indeed, as noted by the World Health Organization, nearly a quarter of the Ukrainian population is reportedly at risk of developing a mental-health condition.<sup>14</sup>

Adopting gender-sensitive measures to support refugees and internally displaced persons is essential. This includes, for example, ensuring that Ukrainian women – abroad, but also in their country – receive adequate sexual and reproductive health services.

I would like to add that there is little evidence that the inclusion of women as leaders and participants in peace processes is being prioritized.<sup>15</sup> To guide the adoption and implementation of gender-sensitive responses to the war and its impacts, more women in leadership position will be needed. The implementation of the women, peace and security agenda in the OSCE region is all the more important in times of crisis.

## **CONCLUSION**

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security explicitly recognizes that there is an increased need to protect women and girls in times of armed conflicts. As the OSCE region faces important challenges, I am confident that we will renew and increase our focus on gender issues in the year ahead. We must not allow these difficult times to distract us from ensuring that human rights and women's rights are respected.

Thank you.

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<sup>13</sup> OHCHR, [Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 1 February – 31 July 2022](#), 27 September 2022, p. 38.

<sup>14</sup> World Health Organization, [Scaling-up mental health and psychosocial services in war-affected regions: best practices from Ukraine](#), News release, 16 December 2022.

<sup>15</sup> NGO Working Group on Women on Peace and Security, [Gender Analysis of the Situation in Ukraine](#), April 2022.