



**Gender Component in the Covid-19 Crisis -
emergency responses and long-term consequences**

draft commentary of the CSP WG on women and gender realities in the OSCE region

The Working Group, established 5 years ago, composed of women experts from many countries of OSCE region wishes to present recommendations for urgent actions to the human rights organizations in the Civic Solidarity Platform/CSP and political responsible people, stakeholders, and institutions in the OSCE region - with a major focus on direct communication with the OSCE Gender Unit.

This document has been prepared by the Working Group in result of continuous exchange of expertise and with the aim to provide practical solidarity in managing the current situation and react towards challenges for the most vulnerable people (poor, homeless, elderly, people with disabilities, victims of abuse and/or violence, refugees, prisoners) - with a major focus on the situation of women and girls.

Where we see specific challenges:

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the toxic effects of a system that has for far too long dominated over every aspect of our societies and the life of individuals. Neoliberalism, as an economic ideology of capitalism, has depleted our public services, turned our education and healthcare into profit-driven businesses, hoarded profits at the expense of undervalued and underpaid workers, favored profitability of a militarized world over human security and well-being, and aggravated inequalities between people and countries.
2. If we look to analogies, the pandemic is not explainable by war-rhetoric, but opens new opportunities for sustainable thinking and the development of practical alternatives. Human security - which is the feminist approach to security - requests preventive action to feel protected and a socio-ecological transformation to guarantee the well-being and decent life for human beings and for a sustainable environment.
3. The immediate and unequal impact of a global health crisis to the economy, are strongly connected with the environmental and climate crisis and have dramatic effects on existing vulnerabilities, female poverty, access to (natural) resources.
4. Women due to social norms and traditions (caregiving, disease prevention, food supply, education, specific needs in social and reproductive health/SRH) are exposed to greater health risks. Inequalities, discrimination; shrinking space is not gender-neutral and backlashes against women's and LGBTIQ* rights increase risks.
5. A huge number of women around the world face already now increasing threats to their safety and wellbeing – including mistreatment, SGBV, exploitation, trafficking, social exclusion because of actions taken to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in their homes and in society. A lack of adequate shelters has often dramatic consequences.
6. Across the world, women's independence will be a silent victim of the pandemic. For too long, politicians have assumed that childcare and elderly care can be "soaked up" by private citizens—mostly women—effectively providing a huge subsidy to the paid economy. This pandemic should remind us of the true scale of that distortion. Stress, alcohol consumption, and financial difficulties are all considered triggers for violence in the home; the quarantine measures being imposed around the world will increase all three.
7. Women make up the majority of "system relevant" jobs: in hospitals, in the care sector, in the cleaning services. In emergency situations like the one we are going through at the moment, we can see how care work is existential not just for immediate assistance, but for community life and the functioning of our societies and the planet. Imposed austerity measures and privatization have brought us to a point where necessary assistance in crisis is lacking.
8. Women Peacemakers and Human Rights Defenders in short and long-term projects, in small and bigger peace initiatives focused on dialogue, cross-border meetings, trust building measures are at risk. They are forced to stop their activities because of the imposed isolation, closing of national borders and re-allocation of funds in "security" (not Human Security) and economy to keep business (and neoliberalism) going.

9. Refugees and IDPs between air strikes, hunger, closed borders, neglected international law – between them so many women and children – need courageous lawyers, social service providers and strong international institutions to safeguard democracy and access to law.
10. Ongoing military strikes (already many hospitals destroyed in Syria, Iraq, borders of Armenia) are an enormous risk for the pandemic growth and sanitary disasters.

The expert group has come up with the following recommendations

Appeal to governments, OSCE and ODIHR:

To review previous approaches and develop proactive, innovative information sharing systems, based on strong coordination and inclusive inter-sectoral analysis (irrespective ethnicity, gender, nationality or sexual orientation), based on an existing experience in the field taking into consideration specific needs of every group of the society.

To develop new robust strategies to meet new challenges and empowering transformative social and economic policies, providing new creative energy and power through full participation of at risk populations, particularly women and girls.

Appeal to the OSCE Gender Unit:

To organize online modules for creative exchange of women HR defenders and peace women for emergency measures and systemic changes in the spirit of a cross-dimensional approach and as a support for the implementation of the recent OSCE GAP.

Appeal to donors:

To support more long-term peace building projects, invest in peaceful conflict transformation with local and internationally connected women and women’s organizations and open thus ways to deal adequately with (existential) consequences of crisis and emergencies.

Specific recommendations:

short term:

- Start from a global ceasefire to divestment and disarmament¹ and UNSG Guterres² “call for global ceasefire and true fight for our lives” and support the #global ceasefire campaign. Stop immediately all military interventions, arms transfers to conflict regions; promote a very restrictive law to buy (small) arms by private persons
- Stop immediately arms’ production (Italian example) as “non existential” production - especially in order to protect workers.
- Provide immediate protection for refugees and IDPs and invest in safeguarding international law and asylum law. Release prisoners with special needs, the elderly over 60 years old, women, people with disabilities and minors to prevent mortality in closed institutions of the country. “Leave no one behind!”
- Take serious the appeal from High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet³ that, especially in the crisis, democracies and rights should be protected and developed, to create trust and avoid fear; there is a need for transparency, oppositional forces and participation of Civil Society; shrinking space is counter-productive to protect human rights and puts international law and freedoms long term at risk.
- Consider disparate effects of quarantine or social distancing, pay special attention to Sexual and Gender based Violence/SGBV and Sexual and Reproductive Rights/SRR and provide substantial awareness raising and protection mechanisms. Create adequate and sufficient shelters and protection for women and girls with specific attention to the needs of refugees and IDP women and girls.
- Pay specific attention to imprisoned and vulnerable people, among them women and children;
- Collaborate with local women’s rights and domestic violence prevention/response centers to extend support to women, girls, and gender-non-conforming people who are quarantined with abusive partners, family members and parents/guardians.

¹ <https://www.wilpf.org/from-ceasefire-to-divestment-and-disarmament/>

² <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1059972>,

³ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25668>

long term:

- Invest political creativity and diplomatic energy to counter national(istic) stereotyping as an answer to the crisis. Open virtually closed borders to keep people connected and dialogue alive and broaden cross-border initiatives.
- Support all movements against militarism and committed to non-violent conflict solutions, trust building, mutual understanding, respect of diversity, struggles to overcome discriminatory inequalities. OSCE missions should prioritize their non-military activities, recruit more civilian personnel in decision-making positions, including women as requested by the OSCE Gender Action Plan/GAP. Governments should consider OSCE missions and activities as a benefit in a multilateral system and give it more political importance.
- Re-think and structurally strengthen peace building with a major focus on local women peace-builders and HR defenders who need more physical and economical protection - especially in a climate of growing discrimination, de-gendering, racism and hate..
- Strengthen systematically cross-dimensional approaches, to connect environmental and economic sustainability, (Human) Security and Human Rights, profitable for all citizens.
- Develop political conditions for sustainable economic transformation in the sense of Sustainable Development Goals/SDGs, using the momentum of the Generation Equality Forum⁴ and a “Green New Deal”
- Introduce basic income to overcome hunger and distress especially in a crisis (single mothers, low income a.o.) and in a long term perspective to enable women to get involved in all phases of negotiations and democracy building, to empower and support women peacebuilders and HR defenders
- Devote more resources to caretakers, pay adequately employees in the care and health/social sector, provide and safeguard public structures of social and health services, as well as for shelters.
- OSCE/ODIHR need the concept of equality (of leadership) in times of disaster with the participation of women peacekeepers and human rights defenders. This is included in the Human Dimension "third basket" mandate to prevent discrimination and large-scale human rights violations in times of disaster:
 - a) equal participation and representation in policymaking at both the country and international levels for an inclusive approach to addressing short- and long-term challenges, including the development of inclusive strategies for the future to prevent and strengthen national institutions to respond quickly to different challenges. Women's participation should be bottom-up, from local government to the global level.
 - b) preparation of new methods and forms of educating citizens about the different types of disasters so that risks in countries do not become disasters.
 - c) application of new technologies and the use of social media so that economic players in both countries and trans-national ones become transparent, providing citizens with access to information and resources to reduce poverty and corruption
- OSCE field offices should have a full Human Dimension mandate, be open and flexible for rapid response and real assistance.

Agreed 05.04.2020 after several online consultations by the WG on women and gender realities in the OSCE region:

Heidi Meinzolt, Victoria Scheyer + Annalisa Milani / WILPF, Germany and Italy

Luisa del Turco, Civilian Defence Research centre, Italy

Gulnara Shahinian/Democracy today, Armenia

Tolekan Ismailova / Birduino, Kirgistan

Annemarie Sançar /Wide+, 1000 Peacewomen around the Globe, Switzerland

Julia Kharashvili /Consent, IDP women's organisation , Georgia, Mariam Jajanidze

Oksana Potapova, Mariya Yasenovska/Public Alternative, Olena Uvarova , Ukraine

Dunja Khalil/ Zara + Madita Standke-Erdmann/WILPF, Austria

Edlira Shima Women, Peace and Security's network Albania

Anki Wetterhall / OSCE network Sweden

<https://www.civicsolidarity.org/member/1451/working-group-women-and-gender-realities-osce-region>

⁴ <https://forum.generationequality.org/>