



Peace and Conflict Narratives: Feminist Perspectives and Recommendations for Helsinki+50

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As a network of women spanning the OSCE region, since 2016 we have been steadfastly committed to the principles of common and comprehensive security outlined in the Helsinki Final Act. These principles remain fundamental to the safety and rights of individuals, the future of humanity as a whole, and, in particular, the dignity, security, and self-determination of women.

Through a feminist conflict analysis, we develop perspectives to advance peace and justice in the OSCE region. In close collaboration with civil society networks (such as the Civic Solidarity Platform) and OSCE institutions such as the ODIHR and the Gender Unit, we advocate for a comprehensive, cross-dimensional approach – one that systematically integrates security, human rights, economic, and ecological considerations.

Key Recommendations

1. Strengthening gender equality and inclusive security

Gender equality must be embedded in a comprehensive human security framework that ensures women's active participation in peacebuilding mechanisms within the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) framework. To achieve this, the OSCE must open its political structures to greater civil society participation, integrating intersectional feminist perspectives into decision-making.

Observing the dangerous global political changes, new threats and a multitude of conflicts, we urge to stop shrinking space for civil society and count on civil society's and women movement's expertise to define alternatives to the massive militarisation of conflicts. We struggle for a greater and quicker political recognition of early warning signals, an extensive support of confidence building measures, and a better visibility of caring initiatives and inclusivity.

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2. Feminist expertise in peace and security

We emphasize that peace, human security, and global disarmament are essential for social well-being, environmental sustainability, and the protection of future generations. The increasing militarisation of conflicts, alongside shrinking space for civil society, undermines peace processes. We urge OSCE participating States to leverage feminist expertise in sustainable peacebuilding, recognising the need to establish a stronger cross-dimensional approach, acknowledging that:

- Security has a strong economic dimension – women, as primary caregivers, play a crucial role in peacebuilding.
- Early warning signals from local communities and women's networks must be prioritised in conflict prevention.
- Context-specific confidence-building measures should be expanded, with greater recognition of care initiatives as integral to peace efforts.
- Climate challenges are underestimated, disproportionately affecting women's lives and freedoms. Climate crisis and the accelerating loss of biodiversity are among the most pressing human security challenges of our time. Global solidarity, systemic transformation, and immediate, coordinated action to safeguard life on Earth is crucial.

3. Enhancing OSCE's commitment to peace and human security

The OSCE must fully utilise its diplomatic capacity, embracing transparent and inclusive public diplomacy that meaningfully integrates women's voices, organisations, and networks. We call for:

- A renewed Agenda for Peace, mainstreaming conflict prevention and human security throughout the conflict cycle. This should be informed by a critical study of the social, ecological, and economic impacts of military spending and activity. The focus of efforts by States should be on investments in social justice, health, education, and care.
- A new Gender Action Plan (GAP), rooted in the practical experiences of WPS initiatives on the ground. Women's organisations must be actively engaged in shaping this plan to ensure its effectiveness in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. A Women's Conference, similar to the 1990 Berlin Conference, could serve as a milestone event in this process.
- Increased investment in training programs, workshops, and informal dialogue spaces that empower local women as key actors in early warning and crisis management and bolster their management capacity.
- Specific humanitarian efforts, including care and assistance for the most vulnerable and displaced people, with a specific focus on the situation of women.

4. OSCE participating States: Commitments and responsibilities

Participating States must take greater responsibility for integrating gender-sensitive, emancipatory policies into peace and security efforts, including:

- Strengthening investments in social infrastructure – healthcare, education, and care services – to enhance human security.
- Advancing arms control, disarmament, demobilisation, and rehabilitation efforts, with a strong focus on curbing the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.
- Ensuring accountability for human rights violations by tackling patriarchal dominance and militarised masculinities, implementing anti-discrimination measures, and prosecuting human rights violations at local, regional, and multilateral levels.
- Guaranteeing women’s equal participation in conflict prevention and peace processes, ensuring OSCE’s conflict prevention tools are fully implemented in all agreements.

A Call for Action: A Women’s Conference for Helsinki+50

Our Working Group is committed to advancing feminist peace and conflict narratives. Research consistently shows that peace agreements, diplomacy, and negotiations are more effective when women and grassroots organisations are meaningfully included.

We strongly advocate for holding a Women’s Conference – held before, parallel to, or as a follow-up to the Helsinki+50 conference – inspired by the 1990 Berlin Women’s Conference. This event should:

- Prioritise a cross-dimensional approach to security, human rights, and peacebuilding.
- Elevate the role of women-led civil society in shaping peace processes.
- Provide a democratic space for inclusive and participatory dialogue, ensuring gender-sensitive peacebuilding at all levels:
 - Community level: strengthening solidarity, reconciliation, and anti-discrimination initiatives.
 - Regional level: supporting cross-border cooperation, education, and women’s leadership in peacebuilding efforts.
 - Multilateral level: creating meaningful spaces for civil society participation in OSCE’s first dimension, ensuring that women’s voices are at the core of security dialogues.

Conclusion

The OSCE stands at a critical juncture. The Helsinki+50 process must not only reaffirm its foundational principles but also modernise them to meet contemporary security challenges. A feminist, intersectional, and human-centred approach is essential for building sustainable peace, human security, and gender equality.

Our network and its partners are ready to contribute expertise, analysis, and strategic recommendations to ensure that Helsinki+50 delivers meaningful progress toward a more inclusive and just security framework for all.