

Disclaimer: The Gender Section aimed to reflect the speaker's points as they were made. Inclusion of their points does not present any official endorsement of the OSCE Secretariat or participating States.

Webinar on gender equality and security

COVID-19 Crisis Management - persistent gender inequality?

Summary

The Gender Section organized a webinar, moderated by Senior Adviser on Gender Issues Amarsanaa Darisuren, to discuss opportunities and challenges for applying a gender perspective in COVID-19 crisis responses. The webinar aimed to raise awareness on the linkages between COVID-19 and existing gender inequalities during the implementation of measures taken by governments to stop the spread of the pandemic. The issues addressed during the webinar ranged from a raise in reported cases of domestic violence, the implications of closures of borders and well as economic and social consequences faced by women and men. Another aim of the webinar was forward looking, namely to starting to explore emerging good practices as well as possible recommendations for the OSCE. More than 170 participants took part in the online event, including participants from 25 OSCE delegations, four institutions and 11 field operations.

This document presents a summary of the main points raised by experts during the event and includes their recommendations for further action of OSCE participating States and Executive Structures.

Take away: Persistent gender inequality might worsen due to the impact of the pandemic caused by the Coronavirus if not properly addressed from the beginning.

1. Main points raised by expert speakers

Valentina Falcone, Legal Consultant, Telefono Rosa, Italy

- A number of countries have noted an increase in reported domestic violence cases. The majority of those experiencing domestic violence are women.
- Currently implemented measures (e.g. lockdowns, quarantines) and additional burden placed on health and support service providers make it difficult for women to reach out for help.
- Telefono Rosa, which is one of the main organizations in Italy that provide assistance and support services to women victims of violence, is continuing to provide the same

services that it routinely offers – by telephone, chat, e-mail and other means of distance communication.

- In supermarkets, pharmacies and hospitals the anti-violence toll free number should be displayed to encourage survivors to seek help.

Olena Suslova, Chair of the Board, Women's Information Consultative Center, Ukraine

- Ukraine holds a double-burden, as the country faces an ongoing conflict in addition to the COVID-19 outbreak. The defense and security sector are under additional strain.
- A thorough, data-based assessment of the gender dimension of the situation is difficult as the situation quickly changes and reliable data is not available.
- Gender-sensitive crisis responses should be inspired by relevant examples and practices of the UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace, Security.
- There is a need for a thorough analysis of the dynamics of the situation and the needs of different groups as well as a need to increase women's participation in decision-making processes. Today we do not see women participating in working groups, pandemic response headquarters, or other government agencies in Ukraine.

Sukhjargalmaa Dugersuren, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Gender Equality and Civil Society, Mongolia

- WHO commended Mongolia for thorough prevention and management of COVID-19 pandemic. The National Emergency Management Agency and the Gender Equality Committee came together already shortly after the first outbreak of the pandemic in China. Preventive measures (closure of borders, public institutions, social-isolation, home schooling) were implemented at early stages.
- However, there are a couple of worrying developments. Registered and reported misdemeanors related to domestic violence has increased. The number of cases investigated by police have increased by 62% compared to the previous year.
- A huge impact on the informal and small scale business sectors can be seen, where the majority are women.
- Gender-mainstreaming needs to be taken into account when developing response measures. Early warning, disaster risk management and force major management systems need to be improved to also include a gender perspective.
- OSCE could review and give recommendations to the National Disaster Risk Reduction Council, that focuses on climate change issues and protection aspects of measures taken by governments.

Graziella Pavone, Human Rights Officer, ODIHR

- There are human rights implications of government's responses to the pandemic. The vulnerability spectrum has expanded – many more people find themselves in situations of vulnerability or face an increased degree of vulnerability.

- Restrictions of rights and freedoms affect women differently; analysis needs to factor in age, economic status, minority background, legal status for undocumented migrants, homelessness, previous experiences of victimization, loss of jobs, etc.
- There is a need for the support of the oversight of the security sector to ensure that emergency measures do not infringe upon basic human rights. National human rights institutions can scrutinize how the security sector and the armed forces support the responses to the COVID-19 outbreak and hold them accountable if they fail to comply with human rights standards, including gender-based violence and abuse.
- Need to incorporate a gender perspective into security is urgent as ever (e.g. women's underrepresentation in key services such as the police can have the effect of alienating women from seeking help). Gender blind responses by governments underscore the uneven participation of women in security related decision-making processes.

Sanna Kaskeala, Human Rights & Gender Adviser, European Union Integrated Border Assistance Mission in Libya (in personal capacity)

- There are gendered implications of the COVID-19 crisis related to border closure and restrictions to freedom of movement.
- When it comes to border closures, the first impact is the socio-economic impact on border communities and daily cross-border trade. An impact on migrant and refugee communities can also be seen. Best practice: Portugal grants temporary citizenship for all these groups in order to ensure access to healthcare.
- COVID-19 has also a big impact on organized crime and the security sector. As law enforcement focuses on implementing pandemic related measures, small arms and light weapons (SALW) could pass borders undetected. SALW have a disproportionately high impact on women, children and civilians especially in conflict contexts. Also, trafficking in human beings may rise, while the demand for services of victims (labor, forced prostitution) is likely to drop because of social-distancing measures. The risk is even higher for victims in conflict-affected settings. Women and girls amount for 71% of victims of human trafficking globally.
- Police and military are becoming the public face of the government in the streets – in countries where law enforcement are predominantly male and not representative of the society this has an impact on women but also on minority groups. They fear to leave their houses even for essential services out of fear of sexual exploitation and abuse by law enforcement agents – especially in conflict-affected contexts.

In addition to the five speakers, there were two additional interventions:

- Charlotte Isaksson, EU EEAS Senior Gender Adviser, provided an overview of EU measures, including how the new EU strategy for the promotion of gender equality can help to ensure responses are gender-responsive
- Zorana Antonijević, National Programme Officer, informed that the OSCE Mission to Serbia is supporting a group of national gender experts to conduct a gender analysis

of the national response plans and measures on COVID-19 and provide

The COVID-19 crisis has severe repercussions in all three dimensions of security, with a disproportionate impact on women and on disadvantaged groups.

recommendations for future crisis management plans.

2. Recommendations by the speakers

- Ensure a **gender analysis** feeds the COVID-19 response. All measures and actions taken in response to the crisis should be **gender-responsive**.
- Enhance efforts to deliver **gender-sensitive** security and ensure the protection of human rights.
- Increase the awareness of risks faced by **vulnerable and disadvantaged groups** and provide specific and targeted support where needed.
- Ensure **collaboration** between **authorities** implementing the **rule of law** and **protection service providers**.
- Secure **increased funding** for local **organizations providing support** to victims of gender-based violence.
- **Highlight** the **role played by women**, be it in civil society or healthcare and informal care-taking sector.
- Increase **participation of women** in disaster risk reduction and governing bodies, increase collaboration between national emergency agencies and national agencies for gender equality.
- OSCE to undertake a multi country study on gender dimensions of COVID-19.
- **Develop a broader strategy** to tackle COVID-19, tactical measures are not sufficient. Strategies need to support women in being more resilient, independent and should aim at empowering women.
- Include and support civil society organizations in planning and implementing crisis measures.
- A **regional gender action plan** should be developed focusing on extraordinary situations/threats/ risks.
- Strong emphasis should be on dismantling the negative stereotypes of gender roles in society and avoid re-enforcement of such stereotypes them during crisis situations.
- More attention is needed for the **empowerment of women** particularly in **sectors** traditionally considered as **male dominated** (security) and include

women in planning, implementation and monitoring of measures implemented by these sectors.

- **Parliaments** should **hold the executive to account** on the management of the emergency also from the perspective of gender-based violence.
- It is **paramount** for the international community and the OSCE to match the increased security measures of the emergency with **support for the democratic oversight**.

3. Useful resources collected during webinar

Resource	URL
Un Women brief: COVID-19 and ending violence against women and girls	https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/issue-brief-covid-19-and-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls#view
OECD Report on Women at the Core of the Fight against COVID-19 Crisis	https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=127_127000-awfnqj80me&title=Women-at-the-core-of-the-fight-against-COVID-19-crisis
Article: Women peace and security in the time of Corona	https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/wps/2020/03/25/women-peace-and-security-in-the-time-of-corona/
EU Gender Equality Strategy Gender Action Plan III EU Strategic Approach to WPS and its Action Plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0152&from=EN 2. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/12/10/women-peace-and-security-council-adopts-conclusions/ 3. http://europeanmemoranda.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/files/2019/07/st11031.en19.pdf
UN DRR, Sendai Framework 2015-2030	The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 includes "pandemics" as part of disasters; recognizes the strong role of women in risk reduction efforts. https://www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030
Petition #SaveRomafromCorona : Protect Romani Communities from a Catastrophe	https://www.change.org/p/the-european-commission-and-its-president-ms-ursula-von-der-leyen-protect-romani-people-from-a-severe-corona-catastrophe