



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE 89th Joint FSC - PC meeting Vienna, 8 November 2023

EU Statement on Mental Health Impacts of War

1. Chairs, we would like to thank you for putting the topic of mental health impacts of war on the agenda as well the invited speakers for their engaging presentations.
2. Against the backdrop of Russia's ongoing illegal and brutal war of aggression against Ukraine and unresolved conflicts in the OSCE area, today's topic could not have been more timely.
3. The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of mental health is a fundamental human right. The Geneva Conventions and a number of other international humanitarian law instruments provide clear guidelines for the protection and care of wounded, sick, and civilians during armed conflicts. The EU and its Member States are committed to upholding these standards and we call on all participating States to do likewise.
4. In Ukraine, continuous Russian attacks give rise to mental health care needs, affecting up to one in four Ukrainians. These include stress, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. According to the Moscow Mechanism report from July 2022, millions of Ukrainians may need psychological support and treatment as a result of war-related trauma and stress caused by Russia's war of aggression, with some possibly needing medication-assisted treatment.
5. The long duration of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and its devastating effects further aggravate the mental health impacts for the millions of Ukrainian refugees throughout Europe and for those internally displaced within Ukraine, which calls for determined and ambitious support. Ukrainian children in particular are currently subject to the trauma of war, often leaving them with profound psychological scars. According to UNICEF, an estimated 1.5 million children are at risk of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues, with potential long-term effects and implications.
6. The EU will, together with Ukraine, establish a specialised e-learning programme for paediatricians and primary care medical staff. Through this initiative, healthcare

professionals will get equipped with the necessary skills to provide trauma care and improve children's mental health conditions. Specialised rehabilitation services will also be offered to distressed children in both Ukraine and the EU. The EU already supports community centres in Ukraine for internally displaced children and their caregivers, and also children in institutions, to help them re-establish some level of normality and routine. We also welcome existing OSCE projects in this area, for example two projects within the Support Programme for Ukraine (SPU) on building capacities for different stakeholders to provide social and psychological support to conflict-affected people.

7. In the military sector, best practices to enhance mental well-being involve promoting a culture that prioritises mental health, fostering open communication, providing mental health services, and incorporating mental health considerations into training and operational planning. This is not only a moral imperative but also serves the interest of maintaining effective and resilient armed forces.
8. The gender dimension of mental health, in particular PTSD, should be further explored to understand how trauma is experienced differently. PTSD can increase gender-based violence and multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. This improved understanding can lead to tailored support and interventions to address the diversity of needs. Gender-based violence and war are undeniably interlinked, with women and girls being exposed to physical, sexual, economic, and psychological violence in times of conflicts or post-conflict settings. War trauma can also be a "trigger" for violent episodes and contribute to increasing the intensity and scale of domestic violence. In this regard, close cooperation with civil society is necessary to design efficient support. The toolkit on Preventing and responding to gender-based violence during the war and in post-war settings prepared by WAVE – Women against Violence Europe network in co-operation with the OSCE is a welcome contribution in this regard.
9. Chairs, the EU and its Member States are committed to cooperating with all relevant stakeholders to address these pressing mental health challenges in armed conflicts. We look forward to contributing to the development of effective strategies and actions.

Thank you.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ALBANIA*, UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA* and BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA*, the Potential Candidate Country GEORGIA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilization and Association Process.