



**Joint Statement by the Nordic and Baltic Countries  
on the Annual Progress Report on the Implementation  
of the OSCE 2004 Action Plan on the Promotion of Gender Equality  
As delivered by Ambassador of Iceland, Kristín A. Árnadóttir,  
at the 1432 OSCE Permanent Council, Vienna, 13 July 2023**

*Thank you, Mr. Chair,*

I would like to make the following statement on behalf of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, as well as my own country, Iceland.

We thank Secretary General Helga M. Schmid, for presenting the Annual Progress Report on the Implementation of the 2004 OSCE Action Plan on the Promotion of Gender Equality. We highly value the OSCE's tireless efforts to advancing gender equality, women's empowerment, and their full, equal, and meaningful participation in peace processes both within and beyond the OSCE.

The Annual Report shows that OSCE's work on gender equality has significant impact in all the three dimensions of comprehensive security. From amplifying the voices of women peacebuilders, to fighting sexual and gender-based violence, the OSCE continues to contribute to the promotion of gender equality across the OSCE region.

Last year's achievements were possible despite the unravelling horrors of Russia's unjustified and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. This war, with its devastating humanitarian consequences, violates all fundamental commitments of this organisation, including those relating to gender equality.

Russia's war is a brutal reminder of the tragic and disproportionate impact of war on women and girls. Women and girls make up the majority of refugees and IDP's, and

they are subject to a heightened risk of falling victim to sexual and gender-based violence as well as human trafficking.

We honour women of Ukraine who are courageously defending their country on every front. They fight shoulder to shoulder with their male compatriots, deliver humanitarian aid, lead civil society movements, monitor human rights violations, document war crimes, and advocate for their country. They are demonstrating leadership, initiative, and resilience as they fight for democracy, freedom, human rights, and gender equality.

Women of Ukraine have clearly shown the pivotal role that women play in the fight for peace, security, and stability.

*Madam Secretary General,*

The Annual Progress Report details significant results achieved within the OSCE and across the region this past year.

The scope of OSCE's programmatic achievements is commendable. Your report is yet another proof of the meaningful impact the organisation has for gender equality. We compliment the increase of fully gender mainstreamed OSCE projects and the fact that all projects were at least partially gender mainstreamed.

Yet, there is still more to strive for.

We are extremely concerned that women are too often excluded from political and peace processes, as you rightly mention in the report. This is despite the ample evidence that gender equality and meaningful participation of women is a prerequisite for longer-lasting results in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

In this regard, the Networking Platform for Women Leaders, including Peacebuilders and Mediators, launched in December 2021, is of crucial importance. Strengthening the agency of women from conflict-affected regions, the platform contributes to sustainable and positive peace both in short- and long-term.

*Madame Secretary General,*

Your efforts to place the WPS agenda at the heart of the OSCE's work and to speed up its full implementation has our unwavering support. These are very topical tasks, as unfortunately Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine is not the only challenge for realizing gender equality in our region.

The current backlash against women's and girls' human rights is a stark reminder that progress should not be taken for granted. The hard-fought gains of gender equality, including women's and girls' bodily autonomy, sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as human rights of LGBTQ+ persons, are seriously challenged.

All OSCE participating States have committed to making gender equality an integral part of their policies. We have committed to proactively implementing the Gender Action Plan and endorsed gender mainstreaming as an important tool.

However, more needs to be done. For instance, the Annual Progress Report noted a decline in the secondments of women candidates to senior staff fixed posts. We call on every participating State to reverse this trend, and to nominate more women candidates to leadership positions.

*Madame Secretary General,*

You and your staff continue to have the full support of the Nordic and Baltic countries and we thank you for your tireless efforts.

The gender gap can only be bridged by applying a gender transformative, intersectional and human rights-based approach in all policy- and decision-making. We must do our utmost to ensure the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women and girls in all their diversity. Neither can we ignore existing discriminatory structures, harmful social norms, or gender stereotypes.

Gender equality must remain a top priority for the OSCE and its participating States, so that we may work together towards comprehensive security and create a socially just, peaceful, and better world.

*I thank you.*