

THEMATIC REPORT

GENDER DIMENSIONS OF SMM MONITORING: WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO PEACE AND SECURITY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key findings

While women and men are both exposed to hardships as a result of the ongoing armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, their experiences differ in certain ways, among others:

- Deaths and injuries directly linked to the conflict affect men and women differently both in terms of numbers and socio-economic consequences.*
- Impediments to the freedom of movement of civilians at the contact line have significant implications for women who constitute the majority of those crossing, including, inter alia, to collect pensions.*
- Women make manifold and varied contributions to peace and security, including as part of civil society organizations and grassroots initiatives and through their engagement in peace dialogue efforts.*
- Women in civil society, however, frequently struggle to make themselves heard and listened to in policy debates pertaining to peaceful conflict resolution. Often, their experiences and views remain under-represented in official policy and decision-making, including due to a lack of access to the latter.*
- Safety and security concerns, as well as restrictions at crossing points hamper dialogue and co-operation across the contact line, affecting cross-contact line dialogue and the development of mutual understanding and trust, further exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.*
- Women interviewed underlined the importance of better linkages with policy-makers, expressed the need for safe spaces to promote dialogue and further co-operation among women peacebuilders, supported by donors as part of a longer term peace-building approach.*

The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) gathers information and reports on the security situation in its area of operation. It also monitors and supports respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. This includes monitoring the impact of the conflict in eastern Ukraine on women and men, boys and girls. It also includes establishing contact with civil society and members of the local population, such as women activists and women leaders of civil society organizations (CSOs) and grassroots initiatives, to gather their views regarding peace and security.

As part of the OSCE's overall efforts to contribute towards the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPS),¹ this report aims to highlight the specific experiences of women, call attention to the many contributions they make to reduce tensions and promote peace, and present key reflections they shared on ways to promote peacebuilding. It also follows up on the Mission's December 2018 report on the *Gender Dimensions of SMM Monitoring* and covers the period between 1 November 2018 and 15 June 2021.²

The ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine continues to pose a threat to the safety, security and well-being of all civilians. While acknowledging the shared nature of such threats, this report focuses on women's experiences of the conflict. For instance, the SMM noted that while civilian men are more likely to be killed or injured as a result of the conflict, their death or injury at times may result in additional economic hardship for women. While freedom of movement of all civilians living close to or wishing to cross the contact line has been severely restricted throughout the reporting period, and particularly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, women have been particularly impacted by this. Additionally, women and girls face other security risks and challenges that are important to recognize, such as economic insecurity and conflict-related gender-based violence (GBV).

While impacted by the conflict, women, and women-led organizations, are actively contributing to peace and security, including by leading peacebuilding initiatives. Though still largely outside of the formal negotiations and other official processes, many women are seeking to build peace by bringing together diverse communities through dialogue, media initiatives and civil society partnerships throughout the country, including in conflict-affected areas. Women's contributions to peace and security are rich and varied. And while their agendas for and approaches to peace and security differ at times, many share a focus on human security, including on issues such as the hardship of crossing and limited access to services.

Women have advocated for changes from decision-makers, for instance through direct engagements with them or public gatherings. The Mission's observations, however, suggest that they often struggle to secure space, resources and support for their work, including because of persistent safety and security challenges, particularly for women living in non-government-controlled areas. Furthermore, their views still remain largely unheard in the political sphere. COVID-19 and related mitigating measures have further hindered women's ability to convene and engage with decision-makers.

Findings from the SMM's observations point to a need to support safe spaces in order to promote dialogue among women peacebuilders, and to encourage the inclusion of women's voices in discussions on peacebuilding and the post-conflict future of the country. This would also contribute to a broader implementation of the WPS agenda, beyond focusing on the security sector. Information included in this report further suggests that there is a need to explore mechanisms for better resource allocation for women-led peacebuilding initiatives, with an emphasis on sustainable approaches while simultaneously empowering and promoting local ownership.

¹ Which includes and is founded upon United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, followed by nine consecutive resolutions.

² OSCE SMM, Thematic Report, *Gender Dimensions of SMM Monitoring, 1 January 2017 – 1 November 2018*, (December 2018).

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

In line with its mandate, OSCE commitments and the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security,³ the SMM monitors the impact of the conflict in eastern Ukraine, integrating a gender perspective in its work.⁴ This includes highlighting the experiences and security needs of civilian men and women, boys and girls, as well as reporting about the contributions to and views of women and men on peace and security.

Building on two previous SMM reports on *Gender Dimensions of SMM Monitoring*,⁵ this report covers the period between 1 November 2018 and 15 June 2021 and includes a special focus on issues pertaining to the WPS agenda.⁶ The report highlights civilian women's and girls' experiences of the ongoing armed conflict, with a focus on the experiences of those living in Donetsk and Luhansk regions. It also provides further insights with regard to women's involvement in local dialogue initiatives and other activities by women in support of peace and security.

Chapter 2 of the report focuses on the experiences of conflict and security of civilian women and girls residing on both sides of the contact line. Chapter 3 presents in more detail the role women play within civil society organizations and as part of grassroots initiatives related to peace and security throughout Ukraine, with a focus on eastern Ukraine. It showcases their contributions and the challenges they face while engaging in this work. In chapter 4, the report gathers reflections

shared by these women on ways to promote peace and security in Ukraine, including the need to better support women peacebuilders.⁷

The findings presented in this report do not aim to be exhaustive; rather, they summarize the observations collected by the Mission during the reporting period and as such contribute to the existing knowledge on the gendered impacts of the conflict in eastern Ukraine, the role that women play in building peace and women's reflections on challenges and opportunities in this regard.



SMM community outreach meeting in government-controlled Chermalyk, Donetsk region, on the occasion of International Women's Day, 4 March 2020

Methodology

The report is based on hundreds of interviews conducted by the SMM with civilians during patrols, direct observations made by the Mission, and information gathered through interviews, meetings, and facilitated discussions

³ The OSCE's comprehensive approach to security encompasses the politico-military, the economic and environmental, and the human dimensions. See www.osce.org/whatistheosce.

⁴ In April 2021, the SMM Chief Monitor launched the third SMM Gender Equality Action Plan, providing the Mission with a roadmap for the promotion of gender equality and gender sensitivity for a two-year period (2021 – 2023).

⁵ OSCE SMM, Thematic Report, *Gender Dimensions of SMM Monitoring*, 1 January 2017 – 1 November 2018, (December 2018, previously cited), and OSCE SMM, Thematic report, *Gender Dimensions of SMM's Monitoring: One Year of Progress* (June 2015).

⁶ The OSCE supports the implementation of the WPS agenda. Ministerial level commitments adopted that include a direct reference to one or more WPS resolutions are MC.DEC 4/18, MC.DEC 4/15, MC.DEC 7/14, MC.DEC 3/11, MC.DEC 7/11, MC.DEC 7/09, MC.DEC 14/05 and MC.DEC 14/04).

⁷ The report focuses on the experiences of civilian women and, where possible, girls. The specific needs and experiences of women who participated in the conflict as soldiers, officers and members of the armed formations, and the situation of women in security institutions, are outside of the scope of this report. Other organizations are looking into these aspects. See for example information about The Invisible Battalion project available at: invisiblebattalion.org/en/home-2/

with interlocutors working on peace and security. These exchanges included interviews with over 200 women living on both sides of the contact line in Donetsk and Luhansk regions,⁸ as well as discussions (including two virtual focus group discussions to further explore key findings) with 96 interlocutors (88 women and 8 men) from civil society and academia actively working on peace and security throughout Ukraine, both at community and policy-making levels.⁹ These discussions and interviews were conducted between April and June 2021.

In line with the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security, and in keeping with the WPS agenda, the report adopts a broad notion of "security" that goes beyond the absence of war and armed violence. In particular, and as recommended in the *Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*, it aims to highlight the "needs and concerns of women in specific situations of conflict", as observed by the SMM and as reported by the women interviewed.¹⁰

Constraints

During part of the reporting period, COVID-19 and related internal mitigating measures had a negative impact on the Mission's ability to monitor and conduct face-to-face interviews. Changes in the Mission's operational posture meant many interviews had to be conducted remotely. This particularly affected the ability of the Mission to pursue in-depth follow-up on more sensitive topics, such as cross-contact line peacebuilding initiatives or different forms of conflict-related GBV.

Additionally, as mentioned also in the previous report on *Gender Dimensions of SMM Monitoring*, the scope for freedom of expression in non-government-controlled areas continues to be severely limited. As a result, and in keeping with the "do no harm" principle, the SMM's interactions with members of grassroots peace and security initiatives in these areas also remained limited. In certain cases, interlocutors approached by the SMM in non-government-controlled areas refused to talk to the Mission out of security concerns.

⁸ 117 from government-controlled areas and 91 from non-government-controlled areas.

⁹ 87 from government-controlled areas and 9 from non-government-controlled areas. 11 of these interlocutors (all women from government-controlled areas) participated in the two on-line focus group discussions facilitated by the SMM in June 2021.

¹⁰ Coomaraswamy, R. et al, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Peace. Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*, The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2015, p. 25.

CHAPTER 2: WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY

This chapter presents the Mission's key observations pertaining to the experiences and perceptions of conflict and security of women (and girls) living in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, on both sides of the contact line.

The Mission regularly monitors and reports on the impact of the conflict on all civilians on both sides of the contact line, including on civilian casualties; civilian perceptions of security; damage to civilian infrastructure; the presence of mines, unexploded ordnance (UXO) and other explosive objects; the freedom of movement of civilians; as well as access to social and economic rights; basic services including education and health care; access to justice; to civil documentation; and to social benefits such as pension payments.¹¹ The focus in this report is to highlight the perceptions, experiences, and needs of civilian women living on both sides of the contact line. It is important to remember that this report only deals with a small cross-section of the challenges faced by women and girls.¹²

2.1 Concerns related to the ongoing armed conflict

The armed conflict in eastern Ukraine has had significant adverse implications for the physical safety and security of all civilians, affecting

women and men, boys and girls in different ways.

Statistics

During the reporting period, the SMM corroborated reports of 338 civilians killed or injured: 149 due to shelling, 38 due to small-arms fire and 151 due to mines, UXO and other explosive objects. Women (89) and girls (17) accounted for 31 per cent of all civilian casualties.¹³ Sixty-six of these women were killed or injured due to shelling and small arms fire, 23 were killed and injured as a result of mines, UXO, and other explosive objects. Thirteen girls were injured due to shelling and small arms fire, while one was killed and three injured due to mines, UXO and other explosive objects.¹⁴

Adult women¹⁵ were killed and injured by mines, UXO and other explosives while working in their gardens, on their fields, grazing cattle, or simply collecting mushrooms in order to secure food for the family or income for the household.¹⁶ Women and girls were also killed or injured when civilians (in most cases adult men) mishandled or attempted to dismantle weapons and ammunition. Such cases accounted for around 25 per cent of casualties among women and all of the casualties among girls due to mines, UXO, and

¹¹ Recent SMM thematic reports on these issues include: [The impact of mines, unexploded ordnance and other explosive objects on civilians in the conflict-affected regions of eastern Ukraine, November 2019 - March 2021 \(May 2021\)](#); [Checkpoints along the contact line: challenges civilians face when crossing, 1 November 2019 - 15 November 2020 \(December 2020\)](#); [Civilian casualties in the conflict-affected regions of eastern Ukraine, 1 January 2017 - 15 September 2020 \(November 2020\)](#).

¹² While this report focuses on women (and girls), some data on the security of men (and boys) is added for reference in footnotes where relevant. Overall, the SMM pays attention to the specific experiences, needs and voices of all civilians, to understand gender-based differences and particular challenges faced by women and girls as well as by men and boys. These observations are regularly captured and included in other Mission outputs. See for instance footnote 11.

¹³ Men and boys (204 and 28 respectively) constitute the majority of civilian casualties. The SMM defines a "civilian casualty" as a non-combatant who suffers death or physical injury as a direct result of the armed conflict. This includes deaths and injuries caused by means or methods used during the conflict, including shelling, small-arms and light weapons, mines, UXO, explosive objects and the dismantling or mishandling of explosive objects. Injuries and deaths that arise indirectly as a result of the armed conflict, such as natural deaths at checkpoints while crossing the contact line, deaths due to lack of access to health care, death by suicide or other cases of self-harm with weapons used in the armed conflict, as well as cases of conflict-related gender-based violence, including domestic violence, are outside of the scope of the SMM definition.

¹⁴ Among men, 102 were killed or injured due to shelling and small arms fire, and 102 were killed or injured as a result of mines, UXO, and other explosive objects. Six boys were injured due to shelling and small arms fire, while 22 boys were killed or injured due to mines, UXOs and other explosive objects.

¹⁵ Among adult women, most of them (17 out of the 23) were aged 59 or younger. The same is true for adult men: 81 out of 102 were aged 59 or younger.

¹⁶ Men have been killed and injured in instances such as dismantling ammunition and explosive objects, mishandling such objects, working in the fields or performing repairs to civilian infrastructure sites. For more information and further analysis, see OSCE SMM, Thematic Report. [The impact of mines, unexploded ordnance and other explosive objects on civilians in the conflict-affected regions of eastern Ukraine, November 2019 - March 2021 \(May 2021, previously cited\)](#).

other explosive objects. In most cases women and girls were bystanders.¹⁷

Among civilian casualties killed or injured due to shelling and small-arms fire, 40 out of 66 women were aged 60 and older.¹⁸ Most of these casualties occurred in settlements close to the contact line, where the majority of civilian inhabitants are elderly. Also, the majority of the casualties among women and girls were due to shelling and small-arms fire, while in their homes, gardens or yards. The sides need to adhere to the ceasefire and to refrain from placing military and military-type assets in and near residential areas in line with commitments undertaken, including the Protocol and Memorandum of September 2014, the Package of Measures of February 2015 and its Addendum of September 2015, as well as the 22 July 2020 Measures to strengthen the ceasefire, which explicitly ban the deployment of heavy weapons in and around settlements. The placing of military and military-type assets in and near populated areas puts civilian buildings at risk of being targeted or becoming collateral damage.

The longer the conflict lasts, the more casualties there will be, meaning more attention needs to be paid to conducting additional targeted and tailored mine risk awareness programmes and messages to ensure the needs of survivors of incidents and their families are met, including medical and psychosocial care, as well as socio-economic support. The overall impact of these objects, will continue to affect the lives and livelihoods of civilians long after the conflict ends.

Socio-economic impact

While women and girls amount to about a third of the civilian casualties corroborated by the Mission, it should also be noted that the actual impact of death or injury due to shelling, small-arms fire, mines, UXO, and other explosive objects on the population extends far beyond these numbers, and affect, among other, livelihoods, the socio-economic situation, as well as family dynamics.

With respect to the socio-economic situation, the SMM has observed that a man's death or injury may result in increased socio-economic hardship for women. In October 2020, a 41-year-old woman, who was injured with her 12-year-old son (due to the detonation of an explosive object in a field near non-government-controlled Zolote-5/Mykhailivka, Luhansk region), told the SMM that her husband had died in a mine explosion in 2014 and that she was at present the only provider for her family, including her disabled mother. In April 2021, a woman (in her twenties) informed the SMM that her husband (28 years old) worked as a foreman at a plant in Mariupol city and that an explosion occurred while he had been loading scrap metal into the furnaces. She told the SMM that their lives were going to be changed forever, since her husband, who was the sole provider, had lost his leg and had become disabled. Also in July 2021, the wife (in her fifties) of a man (56 years old) killed by shelling on 14 April in non-government-controlled Donetsk city, informed the SMM that she had to transport the body in order for her husband to be buried in a government-controlled area. The woman explained that without her husband's income and due to the transportation

¹⁷ For instance, in March 2020, a woman and a man (in their thirties) were killed due to the explosion of a grenade in their home in non-government-controlled Khrustalnyi, Luhansk region. According to the man's neighbour, the ring from the grenade was still on the man's finger when the bodies were discovered. In February 2020, a woman (in her thirties), in non-government-controlled Perevalsk, Luhansk region, suffered injuries to her legs caused by the detonation of a grenade thrown by a man (age unknown) during an altercation with other men. For more information, see: OSCE SMM, Thematic Report. *The impact of mines, unexploded ordnance and other explosive objects on civilians in the conflict-affected regions of eastern Ukraine*, November 2019 – March 2021 (May 2021, previously cited).

¹⁸ Among men killed or injured by shelling and small arms fire, 25 out of 102 were aged 60 and older. It should also be noted that men were usually killed or injured while working in their orchards, on their land, or while on the street and in their homes.

and funeral costs, her financial situation had deteriorated.

Impact on women-headed households

Additionally, loss of or damage to assets such as houses due to shelling and small-arms fire is likely to place a particular strain on women-headed households as they tend to be the most socio-economically vulnerable.¹⁹ For instance, in January 2019, a woman who used to live with her two daughters in Chyhari, an area on the south-eastern edge of government-controlled Pivdenne (formerly Leninske), Donetsk region, told the SMM that she had sent her daughters out of the area when the security situation had deteriorated in early May 2018. She said that on the night of 25 May, her house had caught fire due to shelling and that, after she had been able to escape, she had spent the night hiding in her garden as she watched her house burn. She added that she had subsequently left Pivdenne and had become an internally displaced person (IDP) in government-controlled areas, and had faced challenges securing accommodation ever since. In May 2021, one woman (in her fifties) living in a non-government-controlled area of Donetsk region told the SMM that after her house had burned down in 2020 she had to move with her daughter (age unknown) into someone else's house. She added that the owners had allowed her to live there to take care of the house while they had moved away, but that, if they came back, she would have nowhere to live with her daughter.

Increase in unpaid care work

Injuries to family members also at times translated into increased care work for women. In February 2020, a woman (in her twenties) in a settlement in a government-controlled area of Donetsk region, told the SMM that after her father had been killed due to shelling in July 2019 she had had to move with her one-year-old child to the settlement to look after her grandfather (age unknown), who had also started abusing alcohol. In November 2020, a 65-year-old woman in non-government-controlled Holubivka (formerly Kirovsk), Luhansk region, informed the SMM that her 85-year-old mother and her 94-year-old partner used to live in non-government-controlled Holubivske, Luhansk region. However, when her mother had been injured in May 2020 as a result of shelling at their house, both her mother and her partner had asked for support from the daughter to relocate to a safer environment. They then moved close to her daughter, who was taking care of them both.

Psychological impact

Interviews with women on both sides of the contact line conducted by the Mission also highlighted the worries and psychological stress linked to the ongoing armed conflict.²⁰ While interlocutors on both sides of the contact line pointed out that the need for psychosocial support remains high in general, between January 2020 and May 2021, four representatives from two non-government organizations (NGOs) based in government-controlled areas of Luhansk region (women, mixed ages) and the head of a youth centre

¹⁹ Findings from a vulnerability analysis conducted in government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions and published by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in February 2021 showed that among the households in need of assistance for house repairs, about 65 per cent are women headed. (Source: UN OCHA, [Humanitarian Needs Overview, Ukraine](#), February 2021). Also, findings from a Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment conducted by REACH in 2020 in government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions showed that women heads of household were more likely to display multi-sectoral needs than men heads of households. (Source: REACH, [Ukraine: Multi-sector Needs Assessment, Government Controlled Areas of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts within 20 km of the Line of Contact, July-August 2020](#), (May 2021).

²⁰ For information on the psychological impact of the conflict on students and school staff see OSCE SMM, Thematic Report, [Impact of the conflict on educational facilities and children's access to education in eastern Ukraine, January 2015-March 2020](#) (July 2020).

(woman, age unknown) located in a government-controlled area of Donetsk region, said that women were more likely to ask for psychological help than men.

2.2 Challenges when crossing the contact line

In the reporting period, women and men, boys and girls continued to face challenges and impediments to their freedom of movement when crossing the contact line, thus affecting their lives and livelihoods.

Freedom of movement restrictions and data on crossings

Since the closure in March 2020 of the crossing points along the contact line at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and their partial re-opening as of June 2020 – albeit with multiple restrictions – the number of civilian crossings recorded by the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine (SBGS) has decreased by around 95 per cent compared with the same period in 2019 (March to December). In absolute numbers, crossings during this period dropped from 11.9 million in 2019 to 0.9 million in 2020. This trend continued during the first six months of 2021, with a total of 290,000 civilian crossings registered by the SBGS – down from 6.5 million during the same period in 2019.²¹

While monitoring the crossing points, the Mission regularly observed more women than men crossing the contact line.²² The Mission's observations, and data published by the UN

High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the NGO Right to Protection, also suggest that women represented the majority of elderly civilians who regularly cross the contact line from non-government-controlled to government-controlled areas, and in the opposite direction, including to collect their pensions in government-controlled areas.^{23,24}



Two Monitoring Officers (one man and one woman) speak with a civilian woman at the checkpoint of the armed formations near Olenivka, September 2020

In its 2020 report on *Checkpoints along the Contact Line: challenges civilians face when crossing*, the Mission cited numerous examples of women trying to reunite with their families, including to provide care to elderly or sick relatives, as well as cases of women unable to access necessary services, including pensions and medical care – even maternal healthcare – due to the restrictions at crossing points. Between April and November 2020, the SMM received 1,284 requests from civilians who needed support to cross the contact line; 709 were submitted by women. Thirty-two per cent of women asked for assistance to return to their place of residence, 31 per

²¹ The Mission continued to observe that the five operational entry-exit checkpoints (EECPs) in Donetsk and Luhansk regions were open and that the corresponding checkpoints of the armed formations were closed, with the exception of the ones south of Stanytsia Luhanska bridge (operational daily) and near Olenivka (operational only twice a week on Mondays and Fridays). The SMM also continued to observe that the EECPs near Zolote and Shchastia were open but that the corresponding checkpoints of the armed formations south of the disengagement area near Zolote and 3km south-east of the bridge in Shchastia were closed. For a detailed explanation of the restrictions imposed by the sides when the crossing partially re-opened, see: OSCE SMM Thematic Report, *Checkpoints along the contact line: challenges civilians face when crossing, 1 November 2019 - 15 November 2020 (December 2020)*.

²² See UNHCR and Right to Protection, *Crossing the contact line. Annual report for 2019 (June 2020)*.

²³ See UNHCR, *Eastern Ukraine Checkpoint monitoring 2021*, (last accessed on 15 July 2021); UNHCR and Right to Protection, *Crossing the Contact line. February 2020 Snapshot*, (February 2020).

²⁴ As reported in OSCE SMM, Thematic Report, *Checkpoints along the contact line: reasons why civilians cross and the challenges they face, January 2018 - October 2019*, (November 2019), p. 11: "In order for people living in non-government-controlled areas to continue accessing social benefits, including pensions, they are required to register as IDPs in government-controlled areas. To avoid the suspension of social benefits, people must undertake the journey to cross the contact line every 60 days". While this regulation was suspended in March 2020, pensioners living in non-government-controlled areas still need to cross the contact line to withdraw their pension.

cent for family reunification, 13 per cent to access medical services, and 11.5 per cent to deal with the death or serious illness of a close relative.²⁵

Access to sanitary facilities

Limited, inadequate, and at times poorly maintained sanitary facilities at EECPs and corresponding checkpoints of the armed formations were observed. The Mission noted that this particularly affected both the safety and dignity of women and girls. For instance, in August 2020, the SMM saw that the available toilets at the EECP near government-controlled Novotroitske, Donetsk region, were either locked or had broken doors as well as holes in the floor and lacked toilet paper and soap. On that occasion, cleaning staff at the EECP said that the women's toilets were used to store cleaning products and equipment. In July 2019, near the checkpoint of the armed formations south of the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge, the Mission observed that toilet facilities were temporarily closed; on that same day, the SMM saw some women (ages unknown) leave the road and walk into an area marked with mine hazard signs to relieve themselves. However, the Mission noted certain positive developments at the EECPs. For instance, an administrative service centre was opened at the EECP near Novotroitske on 16 December 2020 providing various services to civilians, including, among others, banking, administrative and medical services, a parent and baby room as well as modern

toilets, including one for persons with disabilities. Another such centre near government-controlled Shchastia, Luhansk region, opened on 10 November 2020, even though civilians are still not able to cross the contact line near Shchastia (as of the end of the reporting period).

Crossing with children

Moreover, as reported by the Mission in 2019, parents traveling alone with their children (in most cases women) often faced difficulties when crossing the contact line.^{26, 27} During the reporting period, the Mission heard that women refrained from crossing the contact line as they lacked the notarized authorization from the father of their children, because the father was working abroad, or due to lack of funds to pay for the notary's services. The Mission also received accounts of women who were denied permission to cross for this reason. For example, in May 2019 and January 2020, members of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine (SESU) informed the SMM that two women (in their thirties) traveling with their sons (ten and seven years old) spent several nights in their tent located at the EECP near Maiorsk, Donetsk region, due to lack of the mandatory notarized permission.²⁸ In both cases, the women were denied permission to cross the contact line and were instead referred to support services for assistance.

²⁵ Men submitted in total 462 requests. Among them, 23 per cent asked for assistance to return to their place of residence, 40 per cent for family reunification, 9.5 per cent to access medical services, and 9 per cent to deal with the death or serious illness of a close relative.

²⁶ See OSCE SMM, Thematic Report. [Checkpoints along the contact line: reasons why civilians cross and the challenges they face. January 2018 - October 2019](#) (November 2019, previously cited).

²⁷ In accordance with the provisions of Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine №815 of 2019 "On entry of persons, movement of goods to and from the temporarily occupied territories in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts" and the Article 4 of "State Border Crossing Regulations for citizens of Ukraine" adopted by the Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers № 57, issued on 27 January 1995 (and amended on 25 August 2010), single parents traveling from government-controlled to non-government-controlled areas need to show a notarized parental permission from the other parent or a valid death certificate or the decision of the court recognizing that a person is missing.

²⁸ From mid-July until mid-September 2020, the Mission observed that on average ten to 20 people (including minors and elderly people of both sexes) were staying every night in a tent of the SESU at the EECP near Novotroitske, waiting for the armed formations to put them on the list for crossing. Men and women civilians had to stay together in tents, and some of them spent between seven and 30 days there. Since tents were located inside the EECP, people had to vacate them in the early morning and could only return to spend the night there after the EECP's closure. Civilians have often had to wait in difficult conditions.

2.3 Economic security

Economic challenges were among key concerns shared with the SMM by women on both sides of the contact line. Among other issues, they noted a lack of economic opportunities, low salaries (and delays in receiving them), and meagre pensions, issues whose hardship is exacerbated in the context of the ongoing conflict.

Economic hardship

Several women told the SMM that they struggled to meet their families' day-to-day needs. For instance, in March 2020, a woman (in her forties) in government-controlled Verkhnotoretske, Donetsk region, informed the SMM that she had owned a café in non-government-controlled Betmanove before the conflict started. In 2014, members of the armed formations had seized her property and occupied her house, forcing her to move to Verkhnotoretske where she had opened a new shop with a café. However, since there were not many people left in the village, business was very bad. In December 2020, one woman (age unknown) from government-controlled Krasnohorivka, Donetsk region, explained that since the beginning of the conflict and due to the displacement of the local population, three out of four kindergartens in the area had been without children, and the staff of these three facilities (mostly women) who did not qualify for retirement were either kept on a reduced salary or dismissed. In May 2021, a woman (in her forties) working as a shop attendant in a village in a non-government-controlled area of Donetsk region, said that, as a single mother of five, her monthly income was not sufficient to cover her family expenditures in light of rising prices. Also, between April

and May 2021, eight women (mixed ages) on both sides of the contact line told the Mission that they were not able to afford essential medicines.

The situation of women pensioners

The SMM notes the particular vulnerability of women pensioners, including those living in non-government-controlled areas. As women's pensions were on average 30 per cent lower than those of men, the costs involved in crossing the contact line to collect pension payments had a higher negative impact on them.²⁹ For instance, in March 2019, a woman from non-government-controlled Donetsk city told the SMM that she collected her pension from government-controlled Zaporizhzhia region, completing a trip of over 48 hours and about 460km. She said that for each trip, she spent a total of 660 UAH (approximately 21 EUR) on travel, accommodation and food, almost 25 per cent of her 2,800 UAH pension (approximately 87 EUR). Also in March 2019, several women pensioners (mixed ages) told the SMM that from their places of residence in non-government-controlled areas, each trip to cross the contact line through the crossing point near Stanytsia Luhanska costed approximately 900 UAH (approximately 28 EUR), which represented a significant portion of their total pension payment. Throughout the reporting period, several women pensioners living in non-government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions told the SMM that they had stopped collecting their pensions from the Ukrainian Government due to the costs and hardship of crossing. The measures imposed by the sides since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, in addition to dras-

²⁹ OpenDatabot, *Середня пенсія в українських жінок на 30% менша, ніж у чоловіків* [On average, the pensions of the Ukrainian women are 30 per cent lower than those the retired men get], (17 May 2021).

tically reducing the number of civilians crossing the contact line, further complicated crossings for those who attempted to do so, and added additional costs. For instance, a woman (in her sixties) from a non-government-controlled area of Luhansk region, told the SMM that, although she could borrow her granddaughter's smartphone to download the mandatory COVID-19 self-isolation application "Act at Home", the financial burden of crossing was still high due to the requirements to undergo a COVID-19 test, as well as pay for accommodation to self-isolate and for transportation.

Vulnerability to exploitation

Economic challenges might increase the risk of becoming the targets of sexual exploitation and trafficking, particularly among the population affected by the conflict.³⁰ Between December 2019 and May 2021, episodes of transactional sex as a survival tactic were shared with the Mission indirectly through representatives of NGOs, including three representatives of NGOs located in government-controlled areas of Donetsk region and one representative of an NGO located in a government-controlled area of Luhansk region.³¹ With respect to trafficking, information shared with the Mission by local authorities in government-controlled Mariupol, Donetsk region, and Sievierodonetsk, Luhansk region, in 2019 and 2020 respectively, indicated that in eastern Ukraine, women (particularly young

women) were at risk of sexual exploitation, while information shared by local authorities in government-controlled Kramatorsk, Donetsk region, in 2020 and by an NGOs based in the same city in 2019 also indicated a risk to labour exploitation. Information available to the SMM only referred to government-controlled areas of Ukraine, but in May and June 2021, in non-government-controlled Luhansk city, the Mission observed the presence of several advertisements aiming at recruiting "virgin" and underage women to work as masseuses abroad.

2.4 Conflict-related gender-based violence (GBV)

Women and girls living in Donetsk and Luhansk regions on both sides of the contact line are also at risk of other forms of GBV, at times linked to conflict-related factors.³² As noted in the Mission's 2018 report on *Gender Dimensions of SMM Monitoring*, conflicts usually worsen and exacerbate GBV. The full scope of these impacts and challenges is difficult to determine, also because, according to several interlocutors,³³ instances of GBV were often under-reported to authorities.³⁴

Possible linkages between conflict and GBV were pointed out by representatives of two organizations working with survivors of GBV.³⁵ While data on this issue was not systematically collected by the authorities,³⁶ a representative of a shelter from Zaporizhzhia region shared that, about half of the domestic

³⁰ In their 2020 Rapid gender assessment, UN Women noted that "[t]he vulnerability of the population to poverty, discrimination, human trafficking, sexual violence and abuse against women is increasing in conflict-affected areas." (UN Women, [Rapid gender assessment of the situation and needs of women in the context of COVID-19 in Ukraine](#), May 2020, p. 23). Similarly, UN OCHA 2021 Humanitarian Needs Overview stated that "The economic impact of COVID-19 may disproportionately affect the livelihoods of internally displaced women and girls, which may in turn further heighten their risk of falling victim to trafficking, including involving sexual violence" (UN OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Ukraine, February 2021, p. 77, previously cited).

³¹ In one case, IDP women, and in another, girls were specifically mentioned as resorting to transactional sex by relevant interlocutors in government-controlled areas of Donetsk region. In two cases, interlocutors based in government-controlled areas of Donetsk region linked this phenomenon to military presence. All these allegations could not be verified by the Mission.

³² Several interlocutors throughout the reporting period told the SMM that domestic violence was often linked to alcohol abuse and unemployment. For an explanation of the link between alcohol abuse and the ongoing conflict see OSCE SMM, Thematic Report, Gender Dimensions of SMM Monitoring, (December 2021) p. 14, previously cited. For an explanation of the link between increased unemployment and the ongoing conflict see UN OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Ukraine (February 2021), p. 14, previously cited.

³³ Four women and a man (mixed ages) on both sides of the contact line, including representatives of CSOs, medical employees, and a member of the police in a government-controlled areas.

³⁴ It is worth noting, however, that authorities and CSOs in government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions consistently reported that they were receiving a higher number of calls related to domestic violence in 2020 than in 2019 (while sex and age disaggregated data was not reported to the SMM, NGO Right to Protection indicates that about 80 per cent of appeals in Luhansk region and 90 per cent of calls in Donetsk region were filed by women). Most of the interlocutors assessed this increase as linked to COVID-19. The SMM was not able to obtain statistics on domestic violence from interlocutors in non-government-controlled areas.

³⁵ This is in line with findings reported by the OSCE in 2019, in the [OSCE-led Survey on Violence Against Women: Ukraine - Results Report](#), (November 2019), p.43.

³⁶ For instance, in December 2020, two representatives of the Prosecutor's Office in Kropyvnytskyi, Kirovohrad region, (man and woman, ages unknown) told the SMM that their Office had no tracking tool to determine if perpetrators of GBV were veterans.

violence cases they encountered during the first four months of 2021 had allegedly been perpetrated by either a veteran or a serving member of the armed forces. The Mission also received at least five allegations regarding incidents of sexual violence or harassment against civilian women and girls by military or military-type personnel in eastern Ukraine; none of these incidents were able to be confirmed by the Mission.

As of June 2021, there were six shelters for survivors of GBV operating in government-

controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.³⁷ The Mission is unaware of any shelters located in non-government-controlled areas. In 2020 and 2021, in four instances, specialized services in government-controlled areas reported having received requests for help from women located in non-government-controlled areas; however, as previously reported by the Mission,³⁸ restrictions in crossing hindered survivors' access to specialized support services and shelters in government-controlled areas.

CHAPTER 3: WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO PEACE AND SECURITY

While affected by the conflict, women also play an essential role, in their communities as well as at regional and national levels, in addressing conflict-related issues, providing support to conflict-affected populations and promoting peace by fostering dialogue and social cohesion. Throughout the reporting period, and in line with its mandate, the SMM continued to regularly meet with women activists, representatives of civil society organizations, and women leading or engaged in grassroots initiatives relevant to peace and security on both sides of the contact line. The Mission also regularly met with women from academia. This chapter details the contributions that women and women-led initiatives make, as well as the main challenges they face.

3.1 Examples of women's contributions to peace and security as part of civil society

The SMM observed that women actively contribute to alleviating the impact of the conflict, building peace and enhancing mutual understanding and trust in a variety of ways.³⁹ For example, women contributed to the provision of humanitarian aid and psycho-social support, worked on access to health, or promoted the rights of IDPs and veterans. These activities took place throughout Ukraine, including in communities located along the contact line.

The Mission also observed that women were well represented in dialogue activities in civil society.⁴⁰ The SMM met with various women engaged in such initiatives, which ranged from smaller efforts focused on the promotion of dialogue and social change through art and theatre, to larger scale and longer-term initiatives involving women from both government-

³⁷ Three in Donetsk region and three in Luhansk region.

³⁸ See OSCE SMM, Thematic Report, *Checkpoints along the contact line: challenges civilians face when crossing, 1 November 2019 - 15 November 2020*, (December 2020, previously cited).

³⁹ In the SMM's last report on Gender Dimensions of SMM Monitoring (December 2018) the Mission already noted that women played key roles in communities in providing solutions to conflict-related problems and issues.

⁴⁰ This was also the finding of a 2018 *survey-based study* conducted by the Mediation and Dialogue Research Center, Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, with support from Peaceful Change Initiative (PCI). The study found that women constituted 66 per cent of participants and 65.2 per cent of dialogue facilitators in track-three dialogues.

and non-government-controlled areas. Participants to these efforts included women from a wide variety of backgrounds. Many of these women engaged in these efforts as volunteers. A good example of such a dialogue project is the *Women's Initiatives for Peace in Donbas(s)* – see text box.

Women who participate in dialogue initiatives often have first-hand experience of the reality and consequences of armed conflict. Many of the women involved became active and started creative, multi-disciplinary initiatives and projects to alleviate the suffering of the affected people and to rebuild communities. This also meant that many women engaged in dialogue initiatives approached topics from

a rather pragmatic perspective, hinting to the scarcity of services, for example at EECs and corresponding checkpoints of the armed formations, and proposing small but concrete steps to improve the situation.

In the reporting period, the Mission saw how various women activists and women CSO representatives joined forces and engaged in advocacy targeting decision-makers to strengthen women's voices and increase their participation in relation to responses to the ongoing conflict. While some engaged in activities behind the scenes, others opted for more public events. For example, in October 2019, the Mission observed four representatives of

Women's Initiatives for Peace in Donbas(s)

"The Women's Initiatives for Peace in Donbas(s) (WIPD) brings together women from different parts of Ukraine including non-government-controlled areas, the Russian Federation and other European countries in order to reflect on common paths to peace in eastern Ukraine.

Women who participate in this standing platform for dialogue and cooperation have been affected by the conflict and have declared themselves to be willing to contribute to its peaceful transformation. They represent diverse groups within society: some work for think tanks or NGOs, others are journalists or grassroots activists trusted and respected within their communities and familiar with the local situation.

In regular dialogue sessions, participants share perceptions, jointly analyse the situation, and reflect on their roles and possibilities to transform the conflict. This process of dialogue is enhanced by "diapraxis" – making change happen by taking joint action in participants' local communities. More than 50 joint peacebuilding initiatives have been undertaken since 2016, many of them by small groups of women who cooperated across conflict lines.

In addition to enabling transformation at a personal level, participants also gather their reflections and share these with targeted stakeholders. Recently, WIPD published an [article](#) about societal perceptions. Women involved, convinced of the value of dialogue processes in their own right, have also established similar dialogue sessions in their own communities."

~ Interview with Dana Jirous, Project Coordinator at OWEN e.V. / Coordinator of the WIPD project, in June 2021

the group ‘Women’s Dialogue Without Borders Initiative’ (two from government-controlled areas and two from non-government-controlled areas) meeting north of the repaired span of the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge, just two days before its official opening, to mark International Day of Non-Violence. They gave a joint interview during which they embraced and issued a statement promoting “security, connection and humanity”.⁴¹ Their demands, including for improvements of conditions at crossing points, were subsequently compiled in a letter and handed over to the SMM and the then Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Gender.

Women also engaged in advocacy activities around other peace and security related topics, such as protection and prevention. In June 2021, the Mission observed that relatives and friends of missing persons (about 25 people, mostly women of mixed ages) gathered in government-controlled Pokrovsk, Donetsk region, holding banners and signs with messages in support of those who were missing family members as a consequence of the conflict. A similar gathering in Pavlohrad, Dnipropetrovsk region, in May 2021 reportedly helped persuade local authorities to co-sign a petition to the Cabinet of Ministers asking for the inclusion of the voices of these families in the Commission on Missing Persons.

Women engaged in peace and security related activities told the SMM that their motivation to get involved included a desire to bring about societal changes, assist their communities and ensure social cohesion in light of the conflict. For instance, in June 2021, the representative of an NGO based in government-controlled areas of Donetsk region (woman,



People standing in line at the Stanytsia Luhanska EECP, Luhansk region, January 2020

age unknown), told the SMM that she deemed it her civic duty to help her community. Others wanted to create a better future for their grandchildren. Several were motivated by their own experiences: for instance, many women working within CSOs assisting IDPs were IDPs themselves and, in several cases, CSOs working on prevention and combatting GBV were led by women who were themselves survivors of these types of violence. Others expressed their desire to contribute to peace, and showcase that people could find common solutions even when supporting contradictory perspectives.

Women also engaged in introducing and providing training on methods of conflict resolution, mediation, dialogue and peacebuilding, as well as worked towards the development of plans and strategies for the inclusion of former combatants, veterans and IDPs.

⁴¹ The video of the interview is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9jaOmSQkN0>. The video captures the moment when four women activists met at the Stanytsia Luhanska Bridge and then shared with the journalists their experiences and views on how the peace process should be organized. Also, the video captures the discussion between the women on the compiled list of demands to the OSCE and Ukrainian authorities on the further inclusion of grassroots initiatives in the negotiation processes. More on the contents of the letter can be found in Chapter 4.

“Who needs art when guns are firing?” Anna Voloshyna asked herself in 2014, when the conflict in Donbas started. The answer soon became clear – everyone does. The cultural centre she leads in Novomykhailivka, kept its doors open, bringing new life to the village of almost 1,500 which lies close to the contact line, some 28 kilometres from Donetsk city. A native of Donetsk, Anna moved to Novomykhailivka in 2014. The village’s cultural centre, the Aesthetic Education Centre, was damaged by shelling in 2014, but continued to function nevertheless. Then in 2018 state funds were mobilized: the building was repaired and a youth centre, Step to the Dream, was set up. Today, a steady stream of passionate youth volunteers organizes dancing lessons, table tennis tournaments, and movie nights. “Everyone is welcome here, but we have to build trust among each other. It is truly a give and take,” Anna says. To further support the community, the centre joined forces with aid organizations and organized mine awareness training and psychological support sessions. For many, the facility is a second home, a place where they can be more themselves – “it is freedom,” says Anna.

For Anna’s full story, and other such stories, please check www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/9/462957.pdf



Meeting between the OSCE Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid and women experts engaged in peace and security related research and initiatives (from left to right: Vladyslava Kanevska, Tetiana Kyselova, Diana Protsenko, Olena Suslova), May 2021

3.2 Challenges faced by women working on peace and security

Women actively working on WPS agenda-related issues across Ukraine as part of civil society shared with the SMM a variety of challenges and obstacles they face. These ranged from limited opportunities for convening and co-operating due to safety and security concerns or closures of crossing points to a limited interest by decision-makers in women’s reflections and unsustainable support for women-led activities related to peace and security.

Limited space for dialogue and discussion

Several interlocutors, including many of the participants at the virtual discussions organized by the SMM in June 2021, noted that there was limited space for dialogue and public discussion on issues related to peace and conflict, also due to safety and security concerns and societal resistance. For instance, interlocutors from both sides of the contact line told the Mission that women residing in non-government-controlled areas who were engaging in peace dialogue initiatives feared for their and their relatives’ safety, and often felt unsafe talking publicly about their work. In other areas of Ukraine, interlocutors noted

distrust towards those engaged in peace-building efforts, as well as reputational harm for those involved. The promotion of gender equality remained a challenge at times too. Representatives of NGOs based in government-controlled areas of Donetsk region and in Kyiv mentioned that topics such as the Istanbul Convention,⁴² or conflict-related sexual violence remained sensitive subjects among the general public. The Mission also received allegations of attacks and threats against equality activists.

Troubles convening

Some interlocutors also told the Mission that restrictions at the contact line following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic limited opportunities for dialogue across the contact line. In May 2021, an NGO representative (woman, in her thirties) from a government-controlled area of Donetsk region told the SMM they had had to suspend their dialogue project as the team could not meet. Some interlocutors added that dialogue initiatives had been convened online, but those had not been as effective as in-person meetings, mostly due to difficulties in developing trust among participants.

Building trust was mentioned by a few interlocutors as a crucial aspect and a key challenge given the restrictions imposed at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, one woman engaged in cross-organizational peace dialogue initiatives highlighted that only after issues of common concern and areas of common interests were identified and trust was slowly built, more controversial issues could be discussed.

Lack of access to decision-making

Various women from civil society with whom the SMM spoke also mentioned what they described as the lack of women in official peace talks and other decision-making processes. Some felt disconnected from decision-making and remarked they lacked the capacities to properly influence relevant processes. Others noted that, on both sides of the contact line, women-led initiatives were seen as “toys for women” and detached from the high-level, formal political processes. In November 2020, one interlocutor from a government-controlled area of Donetsk region told the SMM that the initiatives of her organization were not supported by local administrations and communities, and that they were often viewed as speaking about things of no importance. Women interlocutors further expressed disappointment about some donors not showing real interest in the results of women’s peace work, nor actively seeking reflections from civil society on the context to determine their course of action.

Local ownership and long-term funding approaches

In several cases, women interlocutors stated that they had difficulties securing longer-term financial support for their activities from donors. In June 2021, some of the participants of a virtual discussion organized by the SMM said that donors often expected women-led organizations and initiatives to reach unrealistic targets through short-term projects. Peacebuilding, however, required a long-term approach. Others mentioned that it was hard to secure funding for administrative costs or capacity-building activities, even though

⁴² The Istanbul Convention is a Council of Europe convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Ukraine signed the Convention in 2011, but has not yet ratified it.

these were essential in the long-term for the successful implementation of projects.

A number of women pointed to the need to ensure local ownership of peacebuilding initiatives. They wished for more open-minded, critical, and constructive interactions with the donor community, and for the interests of the communities represented by the various local organizations to be heard. Some interlocutors also stressed the fact that women often had little time to engage in work on peace and security (regardless of whether paid or not) as they were still expected to undertake unpaid care work, including taking caring of children and elderly relatives. This situation had only worsened following the onset of COVID-19.⁴³

Different visions of building peace

The SMM noted among the women interlocutors a range of different ideas and suggestions on how to promote peace and security in Ukraine.⁴⁴ While some women were actively focused on securing women's participation in the security sector, others had a broader view on how to implement UNSCR 1325 and the WPS agenda, and tended to move away from a focus on hard security issues towards conflict transformation or other, new approaches to peacebuilding. This might be one factor explaining the observed lack of a unified women's agenda for peace and security, including a comprehensive set of requests and proposals.

⁴³ UN OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Ukraine (February 2021, previously cited).

⁴⁴ The SMM conducted interviews throughout the area of responsibility and looked at information gathered through other engagements with women civil society representatives active in the field of peace and security in the reporting period too, i.e. meetings with senior representatives at the SMM. It complemented these with two virtual focus group discussions in early June 2021 to further explore key findings.

CHAPTER 4: WOMEN'S REFLECTIONS ON PROMOTING PEACE AND SECURITY



The former Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office on Gender, Ambassador Melanne Verwee (on the right) and the SMM's Deputy Chief Monitor Antje Grawe (second from the right) receive a letter from two representatives of the Women's Dialogue Without Borders Initiative, Nina Potarska (left) and Oksana Potapova (second left), containing their compiled demands. The meeting took place during Ambassador Verwee's visit to Ukraine in October 2019

While women representatives of CSOs and leaders of local initiatives had different approaches and ideas as to how to promote peace and security, many agreed that more emphasis should be paid to aspects of security that lay beyond a narrow focus on state security, for example strengthening the focus on the human dimension of security. Issues such as family separations, missing family members, hardship of crossings, and limited access to social assistance for IDPs were mentioned as pressing issues. For example, the demands voiced by women activists who met at Stanytsia Luhanska bridge in October 2019 (see above) included the need to increase the number of crossing points, equip them with safe waiting areas, and access to hygiene facilities, as well as to ensure a full ceasefire and peaceful conflict resolution by means of negotiations. They also called for CSOs, peace and human rights organizations, and women's organizations to be represented in negotiations on all levels, and for security to be ensured for all participants in dialogue processes.

"In terms of promoting peace, I can definitely say that we need to talk. The war will bring us nothing. It has already lasted seven years and so far nothing has changed."

(A representative of an organization based in non-government-controlled areas of Donetsk region, interviewed by the SMM in May 2021)

Interlocutors also felt that including more women in peace talks might broaden the agenda, bringing attention to issues such as education and healthcare which have been traditionally seen as "women's issues". In this respect, in May 2021, an NGO representative in a government-controlled area of Donetsk region told the SMM that women have the potential to play a crucial role in peacebuilding processes in Ukraine, thanks to their relationship with and contribution to the well-being of local communities. Some of the participants in the virtual discussions drew attention to the fact that the selection of women representatives to peace and security processes needs to be further discussed, as women actors often were engaged on a voluntary basis and many lacked the necessary financial resources to engage on an unpaid basis.

Furthermore, several interlocutors expressed a need for better financial and political support from donors, as well as greater appreciation for women's efforts, for example in promoting dialogue. The need for longer-term peacebuilding projects was also mentioned as there could be no quick fixes or substantial results expected in short timeframes. Some interlocutors also pointed out a need for locally-owned solutions, involving local authorities, and for connections to be established between peacebuilding efforts at different levels or tracks.

CONCLUSION

The conflict in eastern Ukraine continues to strongly affect the lives of civilians in a variety of ways, impacting not only their physical security but also their financial situation, family dynamics and psychosocial well-being. While the depth and breadth of the many challenges faced by women and girls extend beyond the topics dealt with in this report, the information collected by the Mission shows how the impact of the conflict is varied and gendered. Women and girls, for instance, have been killed or injured as bystanders when civilians (in most cases adult men) mishandled or attempted to dismantle weapons and ammunition. The findings relating to civilian casualties underline the need for mine-risk awareness and education programmes to be designed based on an understanding of the variety of ways civilians encounter mines, UXO and other explosive objects. More attention should also be paid to differences between women and men, girls and boys, in relation to the impact of sustained injuries and access to services.

Women's freedom of movement have also been strongly affected by the restrictions imposed on crossings at the contact line since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, as demonstrated by the high number of requests for assistance submitted by women to the SMM during 2020. Of particular concern are also the impact of the ongoing armed conflict, lingering and sustained socio-economic insecurity, and the persistence of different forms of conflict-related GBV, all ultimately hindering women and girls' full development and participation in society. While not exhaustive, the report highlights the need and the importance of including a gender perspective in the analysis of and the response to the conflict in eastern Ukraine, for those responsible to be able to recognize, acknowledge, and better

respond to the specific needs of women and girls.

The report also highlights the resilience showcased by women and some of the many ways in which they contribute to peace and security, for instance by engaging in dialogue initiatives or by providing assistance to the conflict-affected population. Also in light of their different background and experiences, the Mission observed that women should not be characterized as a homogeneous group, as they have different agendas and approaches to peace and security.

Regardless of how they engage in the field of peace and security, women acting as "agents of change" faced a variety of challenges, including access to funding, lack of support, threats to their security and limited space for dialogue and discussion. Since the onset of COVID-19 and the restrictions imposed at crossing points, the scarcity of opportunities for women to meet in person has placed an additional burden on their work. The findings of this report point to a need for a continued and increased support for safe spaces to promote dialogue among women peacebuilders, in order to facilitate further synergies and cooperation in spite of current challenges.

The SMM's observations show a wide range of women's contributions in the field of peace and security, making a further case – in addition to the argument that women make up over half the population – for promoting the inclusion of women's voices and reflections in ongoing peacebuilding efforts, as well as in other policy and decision-making spheres when discussing the post-conflict future of the country.

Women in turn would benefit from engaging in further networking and to enhance interdependencies and interconnectedness to break the cycle of marginalization in political participation and decision-making. That said, women should not only be brought “into the room” but they should also see their concerns heard and ideas taken on board. Greater attention should be paid by decision-makers to the work and views of women (and others) contributing to peace as part of civil society. Establishing more and improved linkages between women operating at the grassroots level and decision-makers should be explored in particular. Women in civil society noted not

only the under-representation of women in official negotiations, but their difficulties providing inputs into those processes. Women’s presence, however, should not be equated with gender-sensitivity.

Lastly, women’s accounts reported in this report point to the need to explore a variety of mechanisms to technically and financially support women-led peacebuilding initiatives through a long-term approach, rooted in the view of local actors, to live up to the commitments included in UNSCR 1325, the WPS agenda, as well as in OSCE decisions.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ MC.DEC/14/04

ANNEX – MAP

Locations in Donetsk and Luhansk regions mentioned in the report

