

# REPORT FROM THE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON GENDER-RESPONSIVE AND DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE DISASTER RISK REDUCTION policies and management in the OSCE region and the OSCE partners for co-operation

*1 June 2022*



The OSCE with its comprehensive approach to security plays an important role in strengthening resilience to disasters. It enables the Organization to address disaster risks from different perspectives and at different levels. The High-Level Conference and its in total 159 participants concluded a series of activities aimed at increasing the awareness of gender-responsive and disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction (DRR) among key stakeholders. It served as a forum to discuss challenges and good practices for DRR policies and management and share recommendations with the participants from OSCE Participating States and Partners for Co-operation. Prior to the conference, the OSCE Gender Issues Programme had commissioned a mapping of DRR policies among OSCE participating States and partners for cooperation, as well as organized sub-regional expert roundtables for Central Asia and South East Europe respectively.

## OPENING REMARKS

### SPEAKERS:

→ **HELGA MARIA SCHMID**, OSCE Secretary General

**LILIANA PALIHOVICI**, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Gender

**MAMI MIZUTORI**, Assistant Secretary-General and Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction

**Moderator:** **LARA SCARPITTA**, Senior Adviser on Gender Issues, OSCE Secretariat

**OSCE Senior Adviser on Gender Issues Lara Scarpitta welcomed the participants** and introduced the agenda and the importance of the topic: She made the point that although the Sendai framework, the leading international agreement on how to reduce, prevent and respond to disaster risks, doesn't address the context of armed conflict as such, it is important to also consider the ecological degradations and their longstanding consequences from the ongoing war in Ukraine. She took the top level participation from the OSCE as well as the UN as a sign of recognition of the topic.

**OSCE Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid** stressed that disasters affect everyone, but social inequalities make some groups more vulnerable. Even if natural disasters are gender neutral, their impacts are not. One of the key challenges is a lack of evidence-based policies related to disasters, their impacts and disaster risk management. Women and people with disabilities are underrepresented in disaster risk management systems, policies and plans. Overall, women and people with disabilities constitute fewer than 30 per cent of persons in disaster risk decision-making bodies and systems. Though the situation is improving, strong leadership is still needed to increase the participation of women and people with disabilities in key decision-making mechanisms. Secretary General Schmid applauded the government of Japan for having increased the number of women members of the Central Disaster Management Council from 11 to 33 per cent and the number of women experts in its subsidiary bodies to 56 per cent.



***Even if natural disasters are gender neutral, their impacts are not”.***

**OSCE Special Representative on Gender Liliana Palihovici** underlined social, economic and political barriers to inclusive disaster risk management. Factors such as age, gender, social class and disability multiply related vulnerabilities. There is a need to identify gender-sensitive interventions by considering specific needs of both women and men. Furthermore, it is important to consider how climate change disproportionately affects women as well as a society's most vulnerable groups and people with special needs. Women should be engaged at the frontlines of disaster risk management, including in decision-making. It is important to involve gender experts more widely in policy and practice. At the same time DRR initiatives at all levels should more often capitalize on skills and resources of women. There is a need to mobilize and allocate financial resources to inclusive approaches in DRR.

**UN Assistant Secretary-General Mami Mizutori** presented the key international commitments on gender mainstreaming and disability inclusion and the Women's International Network for DRR established by the UN Office for DRR. She called for continuous engagement in the implementation of the Sendai Framework and inclusive approaches to DRR. She also pointed to the need for sex-age-disability disaggregated data, as only 50 countries reported sex-disaggregated data and only 17 reported disability-disaggregated data.

## SESSION 1

### Gender mainstreaming in DRR practices and DRR management policies

#### SPEAKERS:

→ **SHOKO FUJITA**, Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office of the Government of Japan  
**KARIN WEBER**, DI., University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, Austria  
**BELLA EVIDENTE**, OSCE Consultant

**Moderator: IGLI HASANI**, Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities

**Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities Igli Hasani** opened the session by demonstrating how the OSCE's comprehensive security approach takes account of how environmental factors, such as natural and man-made disasters, threaten peace and security. Following the 2014 Basel OSCE Ministerial Council Decision on Enhancing Disaster Risk Reduction, DRR and gender mainstreaming are increasingly important elements of the mandate of the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA). A new milestone was reached last year when the Stockholm OSCE Ministerial Council adopted the decision on "Strengthening Co-operation to Address the Challenges caused by Climate Change" – again emphasizing the importance of the effective involvement of women in decision-making processes related to climate change prevention, mitigation and adaptation.



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**Shoko Fujita of the Japanese Gender Equality Bureau** shared lessons learned on gender and disability inclusion, referring to the Great East Japan Earthquake as a turning point. The 2011 earthquake and tsunami caused catastrophic damages and proved that existing stockpiles were not adequate to meet the emergency needs of women and families with small children. The Japanese Government assessed the situation in 2017 and concluded that women did not sufficiently participate in decision-making processes, DRR policies and measures and that many women faced difficulties, especially in relation to the adequacy of shelters during disasters. She stressed that what cannot be done during normal times cannot be done during emergencies. In 2022, the government endorsed a guidance with a shelter check-list and a stockpile check-list. The guidance ensures a gender-responsive approach to DRR, including women in leadership. The Japanese Government formulated a five-year plan identifying disaster management as a priority area, and ensuring that a gender perspective is incorporated, including at the local government level. Each prefecture and municipality have their own gender-responsive disaster management plans. The proportion of female representation in Prefecture Disaster Management Councils was set at a minimum of 30 per cent. The 2017 assessment proved that the higher the number of women in the local Disaster Management Councils, the higher the percentage of female products in stockpiles. A higher number of women also entails a better integration of women's perspectives into planning and practice, as well as the consideration of the gender-based violence factor. In May 2021, at the central Disaster Management Council, the ration of women participating in decision-making had increased from 10 per cent to 30 per cent.



***What cannot be done during normal times cannot be done during emergencies.”***

**Karin Weber of the Vienna University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences** presented findings on gender-responsive and disability-inclusive DRR in Europe from a report by the OSCE Mission to Serbia and the OCEEA. She referred to good practices such as the European We4DRR network, which includes more than 150 women DRR experts, an exhibition organized at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences to increase the visibility of women DRR experts, a handbook supporting people with mental disabilities in emergency and disaster, and innovative tools for risk communication for youth developed in Italy and Austria. She also talked about wildfires in Greece and vulnerabilities of women on the one hand, and gender inequalities among firefighters and rescue teams on the other.

**International DRR Consultant Bella Evidente** presented conclusions of a recent regional study of gender-responsive and disability-inclusive DRR in Europe, Central Asia and the OSCE Partners for cooperation in the Asian and Mediterranean regions. The study was conducted by an expert team of two: Bella Evidente and Anna Palonka. They identified good practices, such as the increased proportion of female members in local Disaster Management Councils in Tajikistan, disaster damage and loss databases in countries such as Albania, Egypt, Jordan, Mongolia and Montenegro, and regional co-operation through platforms such as Center for Emergency Situations and DRR or the European Disability Forum. Examples of building DRR capacity of women and persons with disabilities mentioned included the 'Turning Vulnerability into Partnership' programme in Armenia, the OSCE 'Training of Trainers' on chemical emergency response in Ukraine and women's engagement in manufacturing items for front-line workers ('Fab Labs') and COVID-19 testing and awareness campaigns to reduce health risks in Tunisia.

***At the conclusion of Session 1, the video “[Disaster Protection for All](#)” ,which showcases key takeaways from the [conference paper](#), was presented.***

## SESSION 2

### Gender mainstreaming and disability inclusion: Recommendations

#### SPEAKERS:

→ **ABUL HASNAT MONJURUL KABIR**, Senior Policy and UN Coordination Advisor, UN Women HQ  
**MARIYA YASENOVSKA**, Human Rights Officer, European Disability Forum

**Moderator: JOHN MACGREGOR**, Head of OSCE Centre in Ashgabat

**OSCE Centre in Ashgabat Head John MacGregor** underscored the role of gender-responsive and disability-inclusive DRR and his long-term experience of engaging in gender-related discussions and policymaking. He reflected on the potential consequences of not properly integrating gender perspectives into DRR policies and management, stressing the importance of discussing how to overcome these challenges. He also introduced the UN Women regional guidance for Central Asia and Europe on gender-responsive disaster preparedness, response and recovery.

#### UN Women Senior Policy Adviser Abul Hasnat Monjurul Kabir

highlighted the need to harmonize work among the actors promoting inclusive DRR at the country, regional, and global levels. At the standard setting, inter-governmental level, UN Women has noted significant progress on integrating gender perspectives in national policies and plans, which, however, is often not reflected in practical actions on the ground, as we also know from the challenges of and responses to Covid-19 pandemic. This [lack of actual progress] is clearly visible when it comes to disability inclusive response. Sectoral good practices do exist, for example in the Asia-Pacific and Europe regions, both in operational support, and, in management and leadership. Countries should mainstream both gender and disability across DRR and response policies and practices. They should develop intersectional methodologies to identify the specific needs of people with disabilities, women, men and children in emergencies and humanitarian contexts. To ensure that no one is left behind, robust partnerships should be initiated among gender and feminist movements, and those working with people with disabilities, including intellectual disabilities. Investment in an all of society approach to build overall resilience is needed. Women from rural backgrounds or minorities who also live with disabilities face numerous challenges. It is important to ensure inclusion of organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), including those led by women with disabilities in both policy settings and operational support for a truly inclusive DRR. Dr. Kabir joined the call from the European Forum for DRR to invest in inclusive and accessible approaches, sex-age disaggregated data, increased understanding of disaster impact on women and people with disabilities, institutionalizing multi-stakeholder and multi-sector approaches, building protective safety nets, climate resilience, leveraging transparency and investing in gender-responsive preparedness and early-warning systems.



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**Human Rights Officer Mariya Yassenovska** of the European Disability Forum reported from the first-ever complex [review of disaster risk reduction policies and practices across Europe and Central Asia](#), which resulted in a list of recommendations that follows the Sendai Framework and the Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities. She mentioned the importance of understanding risk through sex- and age-disaggregated data; strengthening the DRR capacity of governments; designing capacity building for persons with disabilities, and ensuring that DRR and climate change adaptation policies are inclusive of women and girls with disabilities, including mental disabilities. Moreover, the rights and protection of women and girls with disabilities in humanitarian crisis according to Article 11 of the Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities must be ensured. Investing in inclusive DRR is needed, including budgeting for accessibility and participation for the whole of society. She also emphasized the importance of including women with disabilities in building leadership and capacity, contingency planning and early warning, which should be inclusive and available in both local languages and sign language. It should be ensured that all facilities and critical infrastructure are accessible.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

### SPEAKERS:

→ **TOBIAS LORENTZSON**, Deputy Permanent Representative of Sweden to the OSCE  
**PETRI PUHAKKA**, Ambassador for Disability and Inclusion, Finland

**Moderator:** **LARA SCARPITTA**, Senior Gender Adviser, OSCE Secretariat

**Swedish Ambassador Tobias Lorentzson** spoke about the Swedish feminist foreign policy agenda for change and efforts to include women in all practical aspects of disaster risk management. Sweden contributes to the OSCE Gender Issues Programme's project "WIN – Women and Men Networking for Gender Equality". Sweden is currently the Chair of the OSCE Asian Partnership for Co-operation Contact Group. A thematic meeting on DRR was held in Thailand this year, with a focus on gender-responsive approaches. The key conclusions included recognition of the need to make climate change and conflict prevention gender-sensitive, to work towards inclusive disaster risk management and to ensure the provision of sex- and disability-disaggregated data. A reference to the current aggression in Ukraine was provided as an example of a human-induced disaster that has negative effects on civilian infrastructure, water security, and environmental considerations also elsewhere in the OSCE region. The feminist approach in Swedish foreign policy is an agenda for change: gender equality should be integrated in all aspects of policymaking. Women should be included in all peace processes. Sweden sees a clear link between gender equality, peace and security, and climate change. They should be addressed jointly through mitigation and preparedness.



***The feminist approach in Swedish foreign policy is an agenda for change: gender equality should be integrated in all aspects of policymaking.***

**Finnish Ambassador for Disability and Inclusion Petri Puhakka** stressed the need for inclusive DRR and sex- and disability-disaggregated data, including data on the needs of people with special needs. The Sustainable Development Goals can be achieved only by the most vulnerable exercising their rights. Rights of people with disabilities are a priority for Finland. At least 15 per cent of the global population live with disabilities. They are the most impacted by disasters and at the same time are excluded from emergency preparedness-related processes. Persons with disabilities, especially women, should be included in all such processes and activities as those most affected. The basis for the inclusive approaches is access to information: understanding the needs of people with disabilities and overcoming the barriers. Puhakka also advocated for disability-inclusive capacity building and training for staff and partners engaged in disaster risk management. He underlined the need for inclusive risk information management, disaggregated data, consistency of data collected, training and tools.



***The Sustainable Development Goals can be achieved only by the most vulnerable exercising their rights.”***

**OSCE Senior Gender Advisor Lara Scarpitta** thanked all the speakers, organizers and participants and summarized the key recommendations presented at the event: firstly, more extensive data collection for a better understanding of vulnerabilities at the community level, identification of at-risk groups such as pregnant women and the elderly, and more effective preparedness and recovery from disasters. Secondly, enhanced gender-responsive early warning systems that take into account pre-existing social and economic vulnerabilities. Finally, strengthening the competence and expertise of personnel in gender-mainstreaming and disability-inclusive DRR management.



***Key recommendations:  
Enhance women’s leadership.  
Collect sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data. Develop and enhance early-warning protocols.  
strengthening competences and expertise of personnel in gender-mainstreaming and disability-inclusive DRR management.”***

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This publication is part of the OSCE Secretariat WIN Project (Women and Men Innovating and Networking for Gender Equality).  
The WIN project is implemented with support from the following donors:



From  
the People of Japan



Norwegian Ministry  
of Foreign Affairs



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the  
Netherlands



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha  
Department of Foreign Affairs



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