



IN BRIEF



PUTTING WOMEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF PEACE AND HUMANITARIAN ACTION

IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

UN Women/ Roland Tasho

What's the Issue?

Conflicts and humanitarian disasters undermine women's security, economic development and rights in parts of Europe and Central Asia. Caught in crisis, which often exacerbates existing gender discrimination, women and girls confront forced displacement, sexual violence, and poor access to food, sanitation, health, education and livelihoods.

Programmes to help, however, often fail to take women's and girls' specific needs and vulnerabilities into account. Too few women sit in peace negotiations or have senior positions in political, peace and security institutions; most peace agreements say little about gender equality shortfalls. Humanitarian action is insufficiently responsive to gender. Financing for projects for women is limited.

Despite obstacles, women have been influential in responding to crisis. After natural disasters, they are among the first to assist communities to find clean water and shelter. In the recent wave of refugees to the European Union, close to one in every five of whom are women, women's groups are providing much needed aid. Where water and land is scarce, as in the Fergana Valley of Central Asia, women mediators prevent low-level conflict from escalating.

Violent extremism poses new threats of sexual and gender-based violence. Security Council resolution 2242 calls for more attention to women's rights, and urges engaging women in countering extremism.

Our Solutions

Growing evidence and global agreement affirms that women's participation is essential to sustainable peace. The UN Security Council's landmark resolutions on women, peace and security now run from resolution 1325 in 2000 to resolution 2242 in 2015. The Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goals make comprehensive commitments to the issue.

UN Women is the lead UN entity championing women's rights and roles in peace and security, cooperating closely with an array of national and international actors. We back the efforts of governments and civil society organizations in Europe and Central Asia to prevent and resolve conflicts by supporting National Action Plans on resolution 1325, encouraging women's participation in peace talks and helping to address the legacies of conflict-related sexual violence. We have begun to advocate for the inclusion of women's concerns and rights in efforts to counter violent extremism.

In humanitarian crises, UN Women supports women playing vital roles on the frontlines of response and recovery. Our programmes help build the disaster-response capacities of state gender machineries and women's organizations, and train first responders on integrating gender in crisis planning and action. We advocate for more attention to women's specific needs and vulnerabilities across diverse policies and programmes.

Women's leadership and involvement contribute unique perspectives before, during and after a crisis strikes. They shape decision-making so that policies and programmes are more sustainable, equitable, inclusive—and effective.

Where We Work



How We Make a Difference In Europe and Central Asia

Advocating National Action Plans on women, peace and security

Across the region, 24 countries have completed National Action Plans (NAPs) on Security Council resolution 1325, often assisted by UN Women. The plans provide an important foundation for women to engage on peace and security in ways that uphold their rights and account for their needs.

In **Georgia**, UN Women helped convene members of the legislative and executive branches of government, civil society, and internally displaced and conflict-affected women to devise a NAP that in turn shaped the Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan of the Ministry of Defence. The Ministry has established focal points responsible for implementing the plan, while the military has modified the minimal physical requirements for recruits. The National Defence Academy introduced a training course on CEDAW and resolution 1325.

In **Kosovo**, UN Women assisted in drawing together representatives from the Government, including the security sector, as well as civil society and the UN system to agree on a 1325 NAP. The process heightened commitment and instilled broad ownership, signaled by the Government agreeing to finance 51 percent of implementation costs.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, now taking forward its second 1325 NAP, has achieved significant advances in women's positions in security and defense forces, and international peacekeeping missions. The plan has improved attention to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, despite significant political obstacles.

As **Ukraine** drafts its 1325 NAP, UN Women is supporting the inclusion of local women's organizations. The process has deepened understanding of the value of women's participation in peace talks and security sector reform among government officials and parliamentarians, as well as civil society groups.

In some countries, UN Women has encouraged use of resolution 1325 commitments even in the absence of formal NAPs. **Albania's** National Plan on Gender Equality and Reduction of Gender-based Violence incorporates specific 1325-related objectives targeting the police, Ministry of Defence and armed forces. It has led, for instance, to a Diversity Plan of Action that requires half of all new cadets in the Police Academy to be women. The police force has adopted an internal policy on sexual harassment.

Increasing participation in peace talks

Across the region, UN Women helps bring women together to identify and advocate common concerns as part of advancing conflict resolution and reconciliation. Women trust us to provide a neutral space guided foremost by international standards and dedicated to gender equality.

Since 2005, through the Regional Women's Lobby for Reconciliation, Peace and Security in the **Western Balkans**, UN Women in **Kosovo** has been central in encouraging women's participation, advocacy and networking, connecting prominent women politicians and civil society representatives from seven countries. The Lobby's statements and positions are frequently reflected in UN Security Council debates, as well as in major local media. Its chairperson is the chief technical negotiator for Kosovo in talks

* Under UN Security Council resolution 1244 in all references.

to normalize relations with Serbia. In 2014, under the aegis of the Lobby, Serbian and Kosovar women parliamentarians signed a joint declaration supporting the 2013 Brussels Agreement, a product of the talks.

Facilitated by UN Women, regular meetings take place among **Abkhaz, Georgian** and **South Ossetian** women's groups. Georgian women's NGOs and women who are internally displaced or otherwise affected by conflict also routinely meet with the official Georgian delegation participating in the Geneva International Discussions and other response mechanisms dealing with the Georgia-Abkhazia-South Ossetia conflict. In 2015, UN Women began to support community meetings among women activists in **Ukrainian** communities affected by conflict, and opened discussions between women from the Russian Federation and Ukraine. These measures aim to bolster confidence-building, foster information exchange on realities in the conflict zone and provide a platform to agree on common issues to raise in official talks.

In **Central Asia**, a partnership with the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy has helped bring women activists into regional debates on security and stability. They have flagged urgent concerns, such as the lack of a gender-sensitive early warning system in the Fergana Valley, gaps in access of women to justice and a lack of adequate action on gender-based violence.

Protecting rights in places prone to conflict

Accountability for the widespread use of sexual violence as a weapon of war in the Western Balkans in the 1990s has only recently emerged. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, UN Women is working with a team of UN organizations on a comprehensive support programme that stresses that all survivors have equal rights to justice for crimes committed. Advocacy is urging state and entity governments to provide reparations, including through preferential employment and other opportunities for economic empowerment.

In **Kosovo**, UN Women supports the National Council on Survivors of Sexual Violence, which coordinates local and international efforts to provide psychosocial and health care, access to justice, legal recognition and economic empowerment. We have trained judges, prosecutors and investigators on war crimes with elements of sexual violence, and are aiding the establishment of the Commission for Verification of the Status of Survivors. Other assistance has helped the Ministry of Justice develop an Action Plan for survivors to access justice. High-impact public awareness campaigns have included hanging thousands of dresses on clotheslines in the football stadium in the city



Above: Kosovo-born artist Alketa Xhafa-Mripa hung thousands of dresses in the football stadium in the city of Pristina as tribute to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. Photo: Jetmir Idrizi

Below: In Kyrgyzstan, UN Women is bringing together thousands of young people to learn the basics of protecting human rights as fundamental to safe and peaceful schools and communities. Photo: UN Women/Gerald Gunther

of Pristina, some of which women wore through the horror of being raped. This sent an unforgettable message that survivors are not alone, and the crimes against them are not forgotten.

Since equitable access to judicial services is fundamental to upholding women's rights. UN Women has partnered with **Georgia's** Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories and Accommodation to provide free legal aid to IDP women and their families. From 2010-2015, some 40,000 internally displaced men and women (15 percent of the country's displaced population) sought assistance on legal issues at these clinics.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, UN Women has encouraged greater respect for the rule of law and women's rights as part of healing social divisions, especially among youth. Programmes bring together young men and women from different ethnicities to learn livelihood skills and practice respect for

diversity. Around 8,000 students in 100 secondary schools have learned the basics of protecting human rights. Another 3,000 9th graders have acquired skills for the responsible, equitable and efficient use of land and water, both scarce resources that stir interethnic conflict. UN Women also cooperates closely with local civil society organizations and authorities so they are prepared to uphold and monitor the protection of rights, towards reducing conflict in families and communities.

Engendering humanitarian and crisis response

To be fully effective and aligned with human rights principles, humanitarian responses need to account for the distinct needs and experiences of women and men. In 2014 in **Ukraine**, UN Women helped ensure that the Ukraine Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment incorporated gender issues and women's concerns. We facilitated inputs from women's activists to the humanitarian needs overview that informed 2016 response planning.

A rapid gender assessment of vulnerabilities, needs and priorities after flooding in 2014 in **Tajikistan** shaped development of a new post-2015 national disaster risk management strategy, in line with the recent internationally agreed Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. UN Women also worked with 20 members of local rapid response teams to acquire new knowledge and tools to provide gender-responsive psychosocial assistance. Most were deployed to assist when flooding struck again in 2015.

After flooding in 2014 in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and **Serbia**, UN Women helped pinpoint different impacts of post-disaster recovery and responses on women and men; estimate monetary damages for women; and define gender-responsive recovery and reconstruction priorities. A similar approach was followed in **Albania** after flooding in early 2015. In eight municipalities in **Serbia**, UN Women has aided local authorities and gender equality advocates in integrating gender equality provisions across disaster risk response plans and actions.

With over 850,000 **refugees** transiting through Turkey and the Western Balkans to reach the European Union in 2015, UN Women is advocating for greater international and local responsiveness to women and girls. An assessment in the **former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** and **Serbia** confirmed that their specific needs and vulnerabilities rarely feature in humanitarian response planning and action. It called for building local capacities to put gender equality issues at the forefront. In partnership with Oxfam,

UN Women is providing direct assistance to women and girls in registration centres.

Ongoing advocacy for women's rights, needs and leadership is taking place throughout consultations for the 2016 **World Humanitarian Summit** in Istanbul.

Peace, Security and Humanitarian Action supporters:

Government of Austria, Government of Canada, European Union, Government of Finland, Government of Norway, Government of Sweden, Government of the United Kingdom, UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, UN Peacebuilding Fund

BOX 1

Key Results at a Glance

- Georgia's 1325 National Action Plan resulted in new physical requirements for military recruits that are more women-friendly.
- Strong national ownership of Kosovo's 1325 NAP led the Government to finance just over half of it.
- Half of police cadets in Albania must now be women, and the police force has a policy on sexual harassment.
- Encouraged by the Regional Women's Lobby for Reconciliation, Peace and Security in the Western Balkans, women have taken leading roles in talks to normalize relations between Kosovo and Serbia.
- Bosnia and Herzegovina has a comprehensive support programme for survivors of sexual violence that stresses access to justice and economic empowerment.
- 8,000 secondary school students in Kyrgyzstan have learned about protecting human rights and respecting ethnic diversity.
- The Ukraine Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment has taken on board gender issues and women's concerns.
- 20 members of local rapid response teams in Tajikistan provide gender-responsive psychosocial assistance.
- After floods struck in 2014, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia estimated monetary damages for women, and defined gender-responsive recovery and reconstruction priorities.