

A white banner with the OSCE logo in blue and white. The logo consists of the letters 'OSCE' in a stylized font, where the 'O' and 'S' are in blue boxes and the 'C' and 'E' are in white boxes.

OSCE



*Discussion reports on  
“OSCE Laboratory” cycle of seminars*

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## Opening remarks

Andrea Cascone

Permanent Representative of Italy to the OSCE

*If what we are accomplishing today is an important step forward, it is being accomplished in the awareness of the importance of differences in ideological and political, economic and social structures. At the same time, however, we derive encouragement from the awareness of the fact that a common desire to live in peace and to enhance our relations has led us to seek favourable points of agreement.*

*Aldo Moro, Speech at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) 1975, Helsinki.*

This year marks a significant milestone in multilateral diplomacy: the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, originally adopted in 1975 during the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The Helsinki Final Act laid the foundation for East-West dialogue during the Cold War, embodying ten core principles that continue to underpin relations among States. These principles— among which respect for sovereignty, non-interference, inviolability of borders, peaceful settlement of disputes, and respect for human rights—represented a pioneering commitment to dialogue beyond ideological divides, fostering a long-term process of mutual understanding and cooperation.

Throughout these five decades, from a conference mechanism, the CSCE has grown into the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) with 57 participating States across Europe, Central Asia, and beyond, including new partners from the Mediterranean and Asia. Despite the changes in structure and membership, the OSCE, through its multidimensional approach to security, has always been a vital forum for dialogue, fostering cooperation on pressing security issues.

Fifty years later, the Helsinki +50 Conference held in Helsinki on July 31 and August 1, 2025, reaffirmed the enduring relevance of the principles adopted in 1975 amid today's complex geopolitical landscape. The commemorative event highlighted the importance of safeguarding principles like sovereignty, human rights, and peaceful dispute resolution, especially as the rules-based international order faces resurging power politics, regional conflicts, and global challenges. Modern threats—ranging from hybrid warfare and cyberattacks to disinformation, terrorism, and environmental crises—demand innovative, multidimensional responses that recognize the interconnectedness of political, military, economic, environmental, and human factors.

We live in an era marked by rapid changes and interlinked challenges. The proliferation of emerging technologies—artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and digital innovations— are reshaping traditional security paradigms. In this context, the OSCE's multidimensional approach proves more relevant than ever, addressing intertwined security challenges across its three interconnected dimensions: politico-military, economic and environmental, and human. This comprehensive perspective allows the organization to respond flexibly to evolving threats and opportunities, promoting stability, respect for human rights, and environmental sustainability.

Italy has long recognized the significance of this holistic approach. As an active and constructive voice within the OSCE framework, Italy champions dialogue, inclusivity, and outreach, especially to the international youth community. Understanding that the future of peace and security depends on well-informed and engaged generations, Italian diplomacy has prioritized educational initiatives aimed at bridging the gap between academia and practical diplomacy.

One such pioneering effort is the OSCE Laboratory, an educational initiative launched four years ago under the leadership of Ambassador Stefano Baldi, intended to engage university students with the core functions and values of the OSCE. Through seminars and interactive activities, the

initiative aims to enhance students' understanding of how regional multilateral diplomacy operates, preparing them as future policymakers and international professionals.

Now in its fourth edition, the OSCE Laboratory has grown into a cornerstone of Italy's diplomatic outreach. It brings together a wide array of Italian officials working within the OSCE to deliver seminars covering all three organizational dimensions. Participants delve into topics such as arms control, conflict prevention, counter-terrorism, countering human trafficking, energy security, climate change, election observation, human rights, gender equality, and the work of OSCE field missions in conflict zones.

The seminars facilitate an immersive experience by blending technical expertise with practical insights. Students are encouraged to participate actively, engaging with diplomats, practitioners, and experts who share their on-the-ground experiences. The organization of simulated election observation missions and case study discussions provides invaluable exposure to the complexities of international cooperation and crisis management under fluid security environments. The seminars also provided an opportunity to present and discuss the initiatives supported by Italy through both the unified budget and extra-budgetary contributions. These initiatives include projects aimed at combating organized crime and countering human trafficking, in particular through the financial support of a simulation-based training held in Vicenza at the Center of Excellence for Stability Police Units (CoESPU) training center. This program focuses on fighting human trafficking by promoting multi-agency collaboration through national simulation-based exercises. In addition, the seminars highlight Italy's contribution to the WIN project – Women and Men Investing in and Networking for Gender Equality – reaffirming the country's commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women in the security sector.

The feedback from students participating in the OSCE Laboratory has been overwhelmingly positive. Over the past few years, nearly 270 students from 14 universities have benefited from these seminars, primarily focusing on international relations and human rights studies. The high level of engagement and interaction demonstrates the program's success in fostering awareness and interest in multilateral diplomacy.

Students have expressed particular appreciation for the program's comprehensive coverage of the OSCE's multidimensional approach. They value the opportunity to learn directly from officials involved in election monitoring, conflict prevention, and regional security efforts, which helps demystify the work of international organizations. Many highlight that the experience has deepened their understanding of how international diplomacy functions in real-world scenarios, especially amid the current volatile geopolitical climate.

Furthermore, the seminars have proven to be an effective tool for bridging academia and practice, offering students a clearer vision of potential career paths within multilateral organizations like the OSCE. The inclusion of real-case scenarios, witness testimonies from field operators, and interactive simulations enriches the learning experience, making these seminars not only educational but also highly inspiring for young aspiring diplomats and international relations professionals.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, Italy reaffirms its unwavering support for the principles of dialogue, inclusivity, and multilateralism that underpin the OSCE's work. The success of initiatives like the OSCE Laboratory demonstrates the importance of investing in the next generation—raising awareness, fostering engagement, and building the skills necessary to uphold international peace and stability.

The spirit of Helsinki—that enduring commitment to dialogue and cooperation across divides—remains more relevant than ever. It is our shared responsibility to preserve these values, learn from the past, and invest in the capabilities of future leaders.

## *The role of women in organized crime: an analysis based on OSCE research*

*Giada Abbate*

The involvement of women in organized crime is a multifaceted phenomenon that continues to evolve and diversify. Traditionally seen as a male-dominated domain, organized criminal groups today include women in various roles, from peripheral participants to key figures. While in the past women were mostly perceived as passive accomplices or victims, there is growing recognition of their active engagement in criminal enterprises.

Women's roles in organized crime vary significantly depending on social, cultural, and regional factors. In some contexts, women are involved in logistical support, money laundering, or information management. In others, they may serve as intermediaries in human trafficking networks, recruiters, or even leaders of criminal cells. This variety shows that the gender dynamics within criminal organizations are more complex than previously assumed.

One critical issue is the tendency to underestimate the agency of women within these groups due to persistent gender stereotypes. Law enforcement and judicial systems sometimes overlook or misinterpret women's involvement, either minimizing their role or failing to recognize the specific circumstances that lead them into criminal activity. This misrepresentation can affect investigations, prosecutions, and the development of effective prevention strategies.

In many cases, women are driven into organized crime by factors such as poverty, social exclusion, gender-based violence, or limited access to education and employment. However, it is important not to generalize while some women are coerced or manipulated, others join willingly, seeking financial gain, status, or protection. Recognizing this spectrum of motivations is essential for designing nuanced policies and interventions.

Research and practice increasingly support the integration of gender perspectives in security and crime prevention frameworks. Understanding how criminal organizations exploit traditional gender roles — for instance, by using women to bypass law enforcement due to lower suspicion — is a step toward more effective detection and disruption of criminal networks. Similarly, acknowledging how social and economic inequalities intersect with criminal involvement is key to addressing root causes.

Reflecting on this topic, I believe that our understanding of women's roles in organized crime must go beyond binary thinking. The idea that women are either victims or rare exceptions within criminal structures fails to acknowledge their full range of experiences and choices. This limited perspective can prevent society from tackling the issue with the depth and sensitivity it requires.

One aspect that stands out is how organized crime strategically uses gender-based perceptions to its advantage. Women may be assigned roles that take advantage of assumptions about innocence or passivity, allowing them to act as couriers, messengers, or financial intermediaries with reduced risk of detection. This tactical use of stereotypes not only strengthens criminal networks but also challenges law enforcement to rethink how gender influences crime patterns.

From my point of view, addressing this phenomenon effectively requires a dual approach: prevention and reintegration. On the preventive side, creating more opportunities for education, employment, and social mobility — particularly for women in vulnerable communities — can reduce the appeal or necessity of joining criminal groups. On the other hand, when women are already involved in such activities, rehabilitation programs that consider their specific needs and experiences can help them exit these environments and build a new path.

Another essential step is ensuring gender diversity in law enforcement and justice systems. A more balanced representation can help challenge institutional biases and encourage more inclusive policies. When women are part of the teams investigating and prosecuting organized crime, they can bring valuable perspectives that improve understanding and intervention.

In conclusion, women's participation in organized crime is not a marginal or secondary issue — it is a crucial component of how these networks operate and endure. Recognizing this complexity, avoiding stereotypes, and adopting gender-sensitive approaches are necessary steps toward both dismantling criminal structures and fostering social justice. Only through inclusive, informed, and compassionate strategies can real progress be made in this area<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/4/560049.pdf> ; <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/7/447094.pdf> ; <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/0/544396.pdf> ; [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/b/420563\\_1.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/b/420563_1.pdf).

## *OSCE conflict management tools and procedures expanded*

*Mark Goltsev*

The Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) serves as an important actor in maintaining peace and security across its 57 participating States. OSCE through its comprehensive approach to security, integrates 3 main security dimensions: politico-military, economic-environmental, and human dimension, which present us three main pillars of peace and prosperity, ensuring engagement of the organization with contemporary threats.

Among the most significant areas of its politico-military domain are disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control, which serve not only as technical instruments but also as confidence and security building measures (CSBMs) crucial for trust among states.

The conflict cycle, presented on these sessions by Senior Operational Adviser in Conflict Prevention Centre D. Pancheri, is one of the most significant efforts of the OSCE on conflicts prevention and resolution. Starting by Early Warning → Early Prevention → Crisis Management → Peaceful Resolution → Post-Conflict Rehabilitation. Every point presents its own measures and procedures. Early warning is a measure which provide a collection and analysing information by taking early action in case of a crisis, and possible crisis scenarios. Crucial point here, which was also strongly emphasized, that OSCE can't resolve ongoing conflicts, but it proposes tools, through the conflict cycle to get on with any conflict that emerged, with the help of a field operations, which nevertheless is a really responsible and important measures to keep on with the questions of war and peace. Hence, Early prevention as a measure in a conflict cycle provides a dialogue and diplomatic possibilities of resolving a conflict. OSCE serves as a Platform for Dialogue, with the institutions, such as Permanent Council, Forum for Security and Co-operation and so forth. Crisis management is a measure to create a peaceful resolution, and it has its own examples, such as the Trilateral Contact Group, which was established in and around Ukraine (but unfortunately it has been discontinued). Peacefull resolution was presented by The Minsk Process, The Transdnistriean settlement process and The Geneva International Discussions and so forth. Lastly, Post-Conflict Rehabilitation as a future peace building measure is a structural prevention through programmatic and project activities and it facilitates exchanges among local stakeholders.

The questions that were proposed on the dedicated sessions were commonly related to implementation of CSBM's and Conflict Cycle towards the war in Ukraine. But this is not an only problem, when OSCE is needed. I was really interested in grasping and implementation of CFE treaty, and its interpretation on drones and so-called «ghost weapons». Provisionary, there are a lot of work to do, due to the modern warfare reality. Drones, FPV and non-pilot nowadays are imminent part of a warfare. Ahead with a light weapon which is created by 3D printer, «ghost weapons» became a big problem, especially in developing countries. These two kinds of new challenges bring internal menace to modern society and humankind. Thus, OSCE should take forward a question towards limitation and non-proliferation of war-drones and strengthen its monitoring instruments on producing ghost-weapons.

To conclude, the OSCE's efforts in arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation presumably presents a cornerstone of its strategy for sustainable peace and security. Although the mechanisms are challenged by recent geopolitical agenda, it remains a robust platform for dialogue in order to create a trust-building measure to somehow prevent conflicts. In an era of the new threats, the OSCE commits to transparency, cooperation and security building measures, in order to provide a necessary bulwark against instability not only on the area of participating states, but to the whole world.

## *Human Trafficking and the OSCE's response*

*Elisa Pizzetti*

Human trafficking is a serious human rights, human security and development issue that affects millions of people worldwide, also in the OSCE area and in OSCE participating States. Some of the victims are men, women and children exposed to forced labor and sexual exploitation among other abuses. To address this, and in recognition of the transnational and multilateral aspects of this crime, the OSCE has crafted an organized response through the establishment of the Office of the Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in 2003 (OSR/CTHB). The international definition of trafficking in persons, which is provided in the UN Palermo Protocol, includes three elements: the act (recruitment, transportation, transfer, etc.), the means (coercion, fraud, abuse of power, etc.), and the purpose (always an exploitation). It is essential to note that trafficking does not necessarily involve transferring victims across national boundaries and the victim's consent is irrelevant if violence, coercion or fraudulent means have been used.

It's also important to differentiate between human trafficking and migrant smuggling, categories that are sometimes blurred. Human trafficking is the exploitation of people through force or deception for purposes such as forced labor or sex exploitation. Smuggling, by contrast, is a transaction in which the person being smuggled voluntarily, although often ignorantly, participates for the purposes of crossing one or more borders without authorization. Smuggling is a short-term endeavour that ends once the person reaches their destination whereas trafficking involves a long-term process of exploitation and domination.

There are numerous myths about human trafficking that continue to hold back efforts to combat it. For instance, there is much misconception over the issue—trafficking doesn't just happen outside of the European Union, it is happening within its own territory on a large scale. Another myth is that it only afflicts women, although men and boys are also common victims. It is also a mistake to think that the only people hit are adults, or that all victims are foreign; many are EU nationals. And although the men are the most visible perpetrators, a lot of them are in turn controlled by women: even former victims can become traffickers.

The OSCE/OSR/CTHB addresses trafficking as a crime through the interrelated strategy of prevention, protection and prosecution. Preventive measures involve awareness campaigns, training initiatives, and research endeavours. Protection Protecting victims and giving survivors the opportunity to influence the development of policies and services. On the prosecution side, the OSCE provides support for legal reforms and capacity-building of law enforcement and judicial authorities.

The OSCE has focused on several key trends in recent years in combating trafficking. As technology is increasingly and insidiously leveraged by traffickers for recruitment and exploitation, it is also becoming an invaluable tool for counter-trafficking efforts. There is an increasing need for financial investigations to trace the ill-gotten gains made by the trafficking networks. ORG v Corporate Accountability Lab also want to ensure exploitation in the labor supply chain is tackled, thereby driving corporate responsibility and enhanced government regulation.

A particularly innovative aspect of the OSCE's work is its use of simulation-based training. These training sessions are built around realistic scenarios inspired by actual cases. Participants are provided with detailed legal and social profiles, and the role-play format helps create an emotional connection and deepen their understanding. This method has been used to train more than 800 professionals in 55 OSCE countries, proving to be an effective tool in building both empathy and operational competence.

### Personal Reflections from the Seminar

A defining takeaway from the seminar was the explanation pertaining to the difference between human trafficking and migrant smuggling. The concept of consent especially stood out. It makes

sense that people who are in precarious situations and who at first seem to accept a journey may be exploited and if they are later subjected to manipulation, they could still be considered as victims of trafficking. Understanding this is critical for discerning victims and providing them the necessary protection.

Technology was also a significant theme, and its twofold function was most noteworthy. It is a danger, in the first place, because traffickers are increasingly resorting to digital platforms to recruit and exploit victims. At the same time, it is an asset in the fight against trafficking, as it facilitates improved financial investigations, digital tracing, and preventive efforts. But any technology intervention must be weighed and balanced carefully so that it would not infringe on human rights, and must be done within a protective framework that upholds fundamental freedoms.

One of the fundamental beliefs that resonated with me is the victim-centered approach. Working with the victims should also move from immediate assistance to long-term psychological therapy and social reintegration. Moreover, the survivors must be held accountable to drive policies and training programs. This not only restores the respect of the victims but makes the anti-trafficking movement efficient and humane as well.

Finally, I was impressed most with the simulation-based training model. By immersing individuals in realistic, emotionally engaging role-play, it enables professionals to comprehend the complexity of trafficking cases and generate concrete skills. It is crucial, however, not to reinforce stereotypes during these exercises and to ensure that less obvious types of trafficking, including domestic servitude or farm-type exploitation, are covered.

## Conclusion

Human trafficking is a deeply entrenched and adaptive crime that necessitates an interrelated response. The OSCE model, which integrates prevention, victim protection, enforcement of the law, and simulation-based training, is an excellent model for addressing the issue. The use of simulation-based training, in particular, is both forceful and captivating. Still, finally to stop trafficking, there has to be systemic and cultural change. Continuing education, the incorporation of meaning for survivors, and a firm commitment to human rights must be the foundations upon which any effort to eradicate this crime is constructed.

## *Discussion Report on Gender Issues*

*Paulína Rauschová*

The OSCE is a key regional actor in advancing peace, democracy, and human rights across its 57 participating States. Its mandate is grounded in the principle of comprehensive security, which recognises lasting peace as inseparable from respect for human rights, economic development, and environmental cooperation. Over time, the OSCE has expanded this framework to incorporate gender equality as a central dimension of human security. In post-conflict regions, women and girls face disproportionate hardships, including heightened exposure to violence, political marginalisation, and restricted access to justice, education, and healthcare. Such gendered violations are not only infringements on fundamental rights but also undermine the sustainability of peacebuilding efforts.

This discussion report explores how the OSCE promotes gender equality in post-conflict societies, drawing on insights from a recent seminar on Gender Issues organised within the seminar cycle by the Italian Representation.

### OSCE Field Mission to post-conflict regions case study

The OSCE's commitment to gender equality can be directly and effectively observed in its field missions, which utilise tailored strategies to specific needs. In the Western Balkans, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the OSCE has pushed for gender equality through security sector reform. The 2020 report, Security sector governance and reform (SSG/R), shows the organisation's agenda in improving institutional responsiveness to GBV and increasing women's representation in law enforcement and oversight mechanisms (OSCE Mission to BiH, 2020). The report further reveals the efforts in support of gender-sensitive internal policies development within the police and defence institutions. Such are standard operating procedures for handling domestic violence cases and the appointment of gender advisors in security agencies.

One of the key initiatives was the provision of platforms for community dialogue on various safety concerns, while women and their experiences benefited from targeted attention. Since policy structures are traditionally male-dominated, the organisation facilitated gender training that emphasised the prevention of sexual harassment, the use of gender-disaggregated data, and victim-sensitive interviewing techniques. The aforementioned reforms were supported by both legislative advocacy and practical hands-on workshops in order to meet international gender standards.

Such field-level projects actively demonstrate the OSCE's practical commitment to ensuring not mere protection of women in post-conflict environments, but also their true involvement in shaping lasting peace. This is a working principle reinforced in the OSCE study on National Action Plans on the Implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, emphasising that inclusive processes lead to more enduring and broadly supported peace settlements (Ormhaug, 2014).

### Further challenges

Despite the OSCE's commitment, there are significant challenges that hinder the real implementation of its initiatives, often due to a lack of political will or institutional capacity in its member states. It happens that governments may formally endorse OSCE gender initiatives, but fail to allocate adequate resources or enforce relevant policies at the local level. Further, cultural resistance can also play a rather substantial role. What is seen as traditional gender norms within certain societies can greatly limit women's participation in public life, and it also gives way to auto-censorship. Limited or often superficial engagement of male political actors can also hinder any initiatives for gender equality. According to the Sarajevo Tool for Engaging Male Politicians in Achieving Gender Equality in Politics, political institutions remain largely shaped by patriarchal norms (OSCE ODIHR, 2025). Many men continue to perceive gender equality as either a threat to

their privileges or as an irrelevant issue. These perceptions are reinforced by traditional masculinity norms, peer pressure, and political environments that discourage self-reflection or visible support for equality initiatives. Often, gender initiatives are treated as peripheral rather than core to post-conflict stabilisation, leading to fragmented outcomes with little impact.

### Conclusion

The OSCE has contributed to peace and security in its member states by continuously strengthening gender equality frameworks and supporting women as agents of change. The OSCE's committed efforts encounter persistent challenges such as political and cultural resistance or resource and budget constraints. This reality highlights the need for long-term initiatives and deeper institutional integration of gender perspectives. To finish, perceiving gender equality in post-conflict contexts as crucial is a necessity for building durable peace and fair societies<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/0/125727.pdf>;  
<https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/4/468510.pdf>;  
<https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/6/586014.pdf>.