



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council No. 1314 Vienna, 20 May 2021

#### **EU in response to the presentation by the Deputy Executive Director of UN Women**

The EU thanks the Swedish Chairpersonship for inviting Mrs. Åsa Regnér, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women to the Permanent Council today. We thank Mrs. Regnér for her presentation and valuable insights. The OSCE and UN Women have been working together on making our region a more inclusive and equal place for all. This cooperation has been fruitful and mutually beneficial. The joint work on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UNSCR1325 with the Secretariat's Gender Section, the co-presidency of ICAT with the OSCE Special Representative and Coordinator on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings or the joint efforts with ODIHR on eliminating violence against women are just a few examples of this valuable cooperation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit everyone, all over the world, but some are affected harder than others. Unfortunately, the evidence showcased in the UN Women report "From Insight to Action. Gender Equality in the Wake of COVID-19" corroborates similar OSCE findings, such as those contained in ODIHR's report on "OSCE Human Dimension Commitments and State Responses to the Covid-19 Pandemic" from July 2020.

As your report rightly points out, while men suffer more from the disease, women and girls are disproportionately affected by the economic and social fallout. Sectors with a high number of female workers, such as hospitality and tourism, are especially hard

hit; for instance, women make up 70% of the frontline health workers and are hence more exposed.

Women's economic empowerment is a prerequisite for economic growth, prosperity and competitiveness and thus for the stability and well-being of our societies. The pandemic has only put an emphasis on this. Legislation ensuring gender equality and full equal and meaningful participation of women in politics and the economy is a first step, a base that allows us to further work towards equality. All OSCE participating States undertook such a commitment in the Decision on promoting equal opportunity for women in the economic sphere, adopted in Vilnius in 2011. After setting out rules to level the playing field for all, follow up is needed through empowering and encouraging both men and women to fight against discrimination and seek to use women's potential fully.

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a surge in domestic violence, especially against women, girls and LGBTIQ persons. The situation has been exacerbated by confined living conditions due to lockdowns and self-isolation regimes, increased financial stress and limited access to support and emergency services. Gender-based violence, both online and off-line, continues to be a serious obstacle to achieving equality, development and peace as well as to full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The OSCE has clear and strong commitments on the elimination of all forms of violence against women. In 2018, in Milan, we collectively recommitted ourselves to address the prevalence of gender-based violence against women and girls that continues to persist, impeding women and girls from reaching their full potentials. The Milan Decision, building on earlier MC Decisions and on Decision No. 14/04 on the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, also recognises the importance of engaging men and boys in addressing the root causes of gender inequality and violence as well as raising awareness about the impact of negative attitudes, behaviours and gender stereotypes.

Fighting domestic violence and gender-based violence continues to be a key priority for the EU. That is why the EU and the UN have launched the Spotlight Initiative, a global, multi-year partnership to eliminate all forms of violence against women and

girls, representing an unprecedented global effort to invest in gender equality and women's empowerment.

Despite the challenges this pandemic is throwing our way, the EU is convinced that only when working together with other international organisations such as UN Women, the OSCE and its participating States, will we achieve gender equality, a core principle to which the EU and its Member States remain committed.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, SERBIA\* and ALBANIA\*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

\* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.