

Online Dialogue on Preventing and Addressing Harassment, Violence and Abuse within Armed Forces in the OSCE Region

Time: Between 7th and 18th September 2020

To Register: <https://forms.gle/UWVFSVVQhrL2of88A>

Background

In Budapest in 1994, the OSCE participating States committed to ensure that military personnel “will be able to enjoy and exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms as reflected in CSCE documents and international law”, while highlighting individual accountability of personnel.¹ One field where these two principles are closely interconnected is that of harassment, abuse and violence within internal military structures, often impacting men and women within armed forces differently.

Some armed forces have implemented a complex set of measures to tackle violence, abuse and harassment. The ODIHR [baseline survey on women in the armed forces in the OSCE region](#) captured several good practices aimed at addressing (sexual) harassment, violence and abuse, including anonymous satisfaction surveys, collection of sex disaggregated data, and establishing functioning complaints mechanisms and systems for independent oversight. However, not all States have such measures in place, and overall, participating States that responded to the survey reported that women more often than men mentioned organizational culture/lack of respect by seniors or colleagues/feelings of not fitting in as their reasons for leaving the armed forces.

While disaggregated statistics collected by some participating States indicate that women are disproportionately targeted, particularly by sexual abuse, men have also been victims. Yet, reporting and monitoring structures may not be as well geared to identify male victims of sexual violence and harassment, and the military culture overall may not incentivise reporting. Addressing these issues is important, as any unwanted behaviour within the military will have negative impacts on the individual service members as well as the military unit as a whole. Furthermore, a culture where bullying, harassment and other forms of violence are able to thrive may also increase risk factors for torture and other ill-treatment, which constitute grave violations of the human rights of service personnel.

Objective of the online dialogues

Different practices are emerging across the OSCE region to tackle the different forms of harassment, violence and abuse within the military, but so far there has not been any consolidated document that brings these practices together in a comparative manner. To address this gap, ODIHR plans to conduct a series of online dialogues to build upon the existing tools, including the upcoming Compendium on Human Rights of Armed Forces Personnel, and facilitate a broader OSCE-wide information exchange on human rights compliant and gender sensitive working environments. The first of the dialogues is planned to take place over a two-week period between 7th and 18th September 2020, and will be specifically focused on addressing violence, harassment and abuse within armed forces, especially sexual violence, harassment and abuse. The dialogues are envisaged to feed into a guidance tool on preventing and addressing sexual harassment, violence and abuse within the armed forces.

Modalities

¹ OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security.

The discussions, which will take place through an access-restricted online forum (discourse), will be asynchronous, meaning that they will not require full time participation, nor availability at a specific hour. Time commitment expected from each participant is approximately one hour per day over the two-week period and will accommodate the interest and ability of each participant to engage in the discussions. Participants are encouraged to share good practices as well as to exchange views about the suitability of, or obstacles to, such practices in different country contexts. Discussion groups will be run in two languages, English and Russian.

Capitalizing on the role of the OSCE as “a community of responsibility”, and the commitment of the participating States to assist each other in solving specific challenges, the two-week online discussions will bring together members of the armed forces of the various OSCE participating States to share experiences and good practices on policies, procedures and accountability mechanisms relating to preventing and addressing harassment, violence and abuse within armed forces, with particular focus on sexual harassment, violence and abuse. Stakeholders encouraged to participate in the dialogue are, among others, personnel from conduct and discipline units, military gender advisers, medical and legal personnel providing victim counselling and support, and any other personnel having a key function in preventing and addressing harassment, violence and abuse within the armed forces. In addition, ODIHR will invite the participation of general inspectors or ombuds institutions for the armed forces, NHRIs working to support human rights compliance within the armed forces, representatives of international organizations and other key stakeholders working on human rights within armed forces.

The two-week dialogue will be moderated by ODIHR and the discussions will be focused on different aspects of prevention, safeguards and accountability, featuring following topics: training, policies and codes of conduct; reporting and monitoring mechanisms; survivor and witness protection; institutional mechanisms in support of duty of care and systems for sanctions and perpetrator accountability.

The annotated agenda and logistical details will be shared with the registered participants closer to the event.