Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: The OSCE's response to Russia's Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine.

A THESIS

Presented to the MA Programme

of the OSCE Academy

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences with Specialisation in Human Rights and Sustainability.

OSCE Academy, Bishkek

by

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January 2026

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ABSTRACT

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda marks 25 years since the adoption of its first resolution, UNSCR 1325. During this time, the WPS agenda had been tested in conflicts across the world, which has led to a huge response in the feminist international relations field. One such conflict is the Russia-Ukraine war, soon entering its fifth year. As the gendered impacts of the conflict became increasingly pronounced, WPS scholarship called for greater attention to the situation in Ukraine and for a thorough analysis of the implementation efforts there. This research has primarily focused on the role of the OSCE, in a case study research design, by assessing its alignment with and contributions towards the WPS agenda through the following aims; (1) to understand the priorities, drivers and challenges faced by key OSCE programmes in Ukraine, (2) evaluate the impact of gender equality policies and the WPS agenda on the OSCE programme's design and delivery in Ukraine, (3) to assess how the OSCE reflects and frames peace and security through its Ukrainian programmes, and (4) to consider the OSCE's influence on advancing the WPS agenda in a conflict-affected setting. The research applied feminist institutionalism theory and involved a thematic analysis of data collected through semi-structured interviews with practitioners. The studies main findings indicate that the OSCE is a key actor and advocate for the WPS agenda in Ukraine, utilising its institutional norms on gender mainstreaming and its comprehensive security mandate to deliver impactful projects that provide support and resilience to state authorities and NGOs. The research also revealed nuances in these areas as well as some limitations to localisation based on political will, contextual constraints, and somewhat inconsistent, short-term support to civil society. Overall, the research has made valuable contributions towards addressing current gaps in WPS scholarship through its focus on the post-socialist space and the OSCE specifically, and hopes to inform future activities of the OSCE to ensure the full utilisation of the WPS agenda in Ukraine.

Keywords: Women, Peace and Security Agenda, UNSCR 1325, OSCE, Ukraine, Feminist Institutionalism

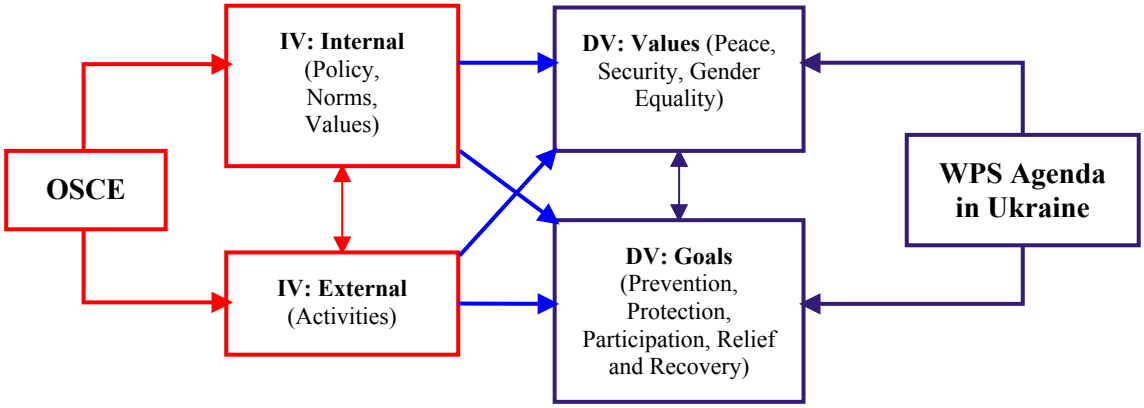
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to give thanks to my supervisor, Dr Felipe Isa Gomez for his guidance, support and encouragement throughout the development and completion of this research paper. Secondly, I would like to thank the OSCE Academy and MAHRS team, with special mention to Dr Anja Mihr, Dr Pal Dunay, Aiym Chotoeva, and Karlygach Nurmanbetova for their incredible hard work to ensure the running of this Master's programme, without which I would not have such a life-changing experience. Finally, I would like to thank my amazing coursemates, friends and family that have supported me throughout the past year and given me great inspiration and motivation to strive for excellence.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CRSV	Conflict-related Sexual Violence
CSCE	Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CTHB	Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings
EU	European Union
ExB SPU	Extra-Budgetary Support Programme for Ukraine
FI	Feminist Institutionalism
GIP	Gender Issues Programme
GBV	Gender-based Violence
IOs	International Organisations
IR	International Relations
NAP	National Action Plan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

pS	participating States
SESU	State Emergency Service of Ukraine
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-based Violence
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UN	United Nations
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WPS	Women, Peace, and Security

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

1.1.1 Russia-Ukraine Conflict

Ukraine gained its most recent independence from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) in 1991, shortly after which came the complete collapse of the USSR. However, since its independence, the Russian government (the Kremlin) and the current Russian President, Vladimir Putin, have been sensitive to western influence in the country and oppose its continued independence (Kuzio 2022), particularly independence of its eastern regions of Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk. Arguably, this is due, in-part, to its trauma from the fall of its imperialism and a desire to restore Russia to a former glory, with its borders of the USSR in 1945 (Kyrydon and Troyan 2022). Tensions have been continuous and have heightened at certain times, including but not limited to: 2003 after Russia attempted to alienate the island of Tuzla, 2004 with the Orange Revolution, 2007 when ties with NATO strengthened with the Charter on Special Partnerships, and most seriously in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea, following the Maidan Revolution (Kyrydon and Troyan 2022). Between 2014 and 2022, fighting continued beyond Crimea, in the Donbas Region, which encompasses the Donetsk and Luhansk oblast, in what has been described as a 'hybrid war' (Kyrydon and Troyan 2022, 162).

In a significant escalation and shift in the conflict, on 24 February 2022, President Vladimir Putin ordered troops to invade Ukraine from the north, east and south, in what is referred to in this paper as 'Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine'. According to Kyrydon and Troyan (2022), the Kremlin's main reasons for this escalation are 'geopolitical, imperial, civilisation, existential, personal and psychological.' (Kyrydon and Troyan 2022, 157). However, the common propaganda line from Vladimir Putin justifies this "special military operation" due to a need to de-nazify and de-militarise Ukraine (Kuzio 2022).

The feminist response to this aggression has been described as a 'truly mass feminist anti-militarist mobilisation' (Zherebkina 2024, 108) but differences within feminist movements on what constituted an appropriate response emerged because Ukrainian feminist activists felt their voices and their right to self-defense were being silenced in favour of western feminist perspectives that condemned the supply of weapons to Ukraine and the highly militarised position taken by NATO (Zherebkina 2024). These disputes draw attention to the dangers of essentialising feminism across contexts and the offense that can occur when a western feminist perspective is taken as a representation of local and national feminist voices (Bunch and Reilly 2019). It also highlights the need to critically evaluate the understanding of phenomena such as nationalism and militarism, and how the condemnation of such ideas is often done so from the perspective of western feminists that understand these ideologies as those which have been used by their societies to oppress others, as opposed to viewing them as tools that have been used by the oppressed for liberation, as often non-western feminists do (Hendl 2022).

Three years into the war and the gendered impacts are being documented and studied. The forced displacement of women taking refuge is in its thousands, leaving women vulnerable to exploitation, violence and a variety of insecurities (Assisi and Kipo-Sunyehzi 2024). In its own reports, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) reported 23 testimonies on conflict-related sexual violence against men and women during the first half of 2025 (ODIHR 2025, 42). These findings align with the wider literature that has studied the impacts of conflict on women extensively and include common patterns of increased risk of domestic violence threats, financial insecurity due to reduced social welfare provisions, and the risk of sexual harassment and assault whilst serving in the armed forces (Asuinura and Sunyehzi 2024).

1.1.2 Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda

The WPS agenda is a key human rights tool that encompasses many women's rights issues present in international human rights law, such as the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (UN General Assembly 1979) and the Geneva Conventions (1949). It comprises the United Nations Security Council

Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and nine subsequent resolutions (1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2242, 2467, 2493) providing a global normative framework outlining the gendered impacts of conflict on women and girls. It provides a critical gendered perspective within the peace and security field, in theory and in practice that applies to pre, during and post-conflict contexts, outlining key commitments for the United Nations (UN) and its member states to reduce and respond to the gendered impacts of conflict, to recognise the role women play throughout the cycle of conflict and encourage their participation and inclusion, whether that be in prevention, peace negotiation, peacebuilding, conflict reconstruction or peacekeeping (Davies and True 2018).

1.1.3 OSCE as a regional security organisation

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was officially founded as an organisation in 1993, emerging from the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which began in 1973. It is the largest regional security organisation in the world, with a total of 57 participating states (pS) across the northern hemisphere. The OSCE takes a comprehensive approach to security, based on the Helsinki Final Act 1975, and covers three dimensions: politico-military, economic and environmental, and human. Within these respective areas, they operate field offices in 12 pS in the Balkans and Central Asia, whilst its executive structures comprise experts on a range of thematic issues covering freedom of the media, democratic institutions and human rights, and national minorities (OSCE 2025a).

Furthermore, the OSCE's involvement in Ukraine has been significant since the creation of the formal organisation in 1993. From 1994-1999, the OSCE had a mission to Ukraine, between 1999 - June 2022, they had an OSCE project co-ordinator in Ukraine, and between 2014 until March 2022, the OSCE had a Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (OSCE 2025b). Currently, the OSCE's executive structures such as the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Secretariat conduct monitoring and capacity-building projects in Ukraine. These include an Extra-Budgetary Support Programme for Ukraine (ExB SPU) established on 01 November 2022 and projects under the wider Gender Issues Programme (GIP) that covers the whole OSCE

region but does conduct multiple activities in Ukraine, with a gender focus. These two programmes have been the focus of this research.

In addition, when considering the juncture between the OSCE and the WPS agenda, the OSCE has indicated the inclusion of the WPS agenda within its 2004 policy decision *No. 14/04 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality* (OSCE 2004), subsequently referred to as the '2004 Gender Action Plan'. Within the document, it is made clear that there is a responsibility of the OSCE to support pS in their compliance with international instruments for the promotion of gender equality and women's rights (OSCE 2004, 10), the OSCE's commitment when conducting activities and programmes to mainstream gender and take into account obligations embodied in the UNSCR 1325 (OSCE, 2004:8), and their obligation to 'promote the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on the role of women in the prevention of conflicts and post-conflict reconstruction' (OSCE 2004, 13).

1.2 Research Problem

The gendered impact of the war in Ukraine is pronounced, shaping how Ukrainian women and girls experience the conflict and participate in response efforts (UN Women and Care International 2022). Despite the existence of Ukraine's National Action Plan (NAP) on the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and the involvement of major international organisations with their own WPS commitments, the literature review has indicated scholarly engagement exploring how the WPS agenda is implemented and challenged in this context remains insufficient. It is therefore critical that the WPS scholarship responds to the ongoing situation by examining the practical application of the agenda, evaluating the effectiveness of key stakeholders entrusted with its implementation, and assessing how resources and responsibilities play out in reality.

One influential yet understudied stakeholder is the OSCE. The OSCE has committed to gender mainstreaming and the WPS agenda, as highlighted in its recent publication, *The OSCE WPS Roadmap* (OSCE 2025c) and *From Policy to Practice: How Women's Networks Foster the Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda* (OSCE 2025d), underscoring the significance of integrating gender perspectives across its

programmes, communications, and operations. However, there is a notable absence of empirical research examining how these commitments translate into practice within the Ukrainian context. This gap raises important questions about the OSCE's alignment with the values and goals of the WPS agenda and how its commitments are reflected beyond policy.

More broadly, the literature indicates that a global consensus on gender mainstreaming in international peace and security has still to be achieved (True 2016) and while the OSCE's gender policies suggest a formal commitment, it is unclear whether and how these commitments are understood and realised within their key programmes in Ukraine. Furthermore, although scholarly attention to Ukraine has increased since the full-scale Russian invasion, significant research gaps persist, and academic responses have been relatively slow (Manoilenko 2024).

With this in mind, the research addressed some of these gaps with its following aims; (1) to understand the priorities, drivers and challenges faced by key OSCE programmes in Ukraine, (2) evaluate the impact of gender equality policies and the WPS agenda on the OSCE programme's design and delivery in Ukraine, (3) to assess how the OSCE reflects and frames peace and security through its Ukrainian programmes, and (4) to consider the OSCE's influence on advancing the WPS agenda in a conflict-affected setting. Overall, the research has assessed the alignment of the OSCE programmes in Ukraine with the values and goals of the WPS agenda and has investigated whether there is a disjuncture between rhetoric and reality when it comes to the commitment to the WPS agenda by the OSCE.

1.3 Research Significance

The research presented in this paper addressed gaps in WPS scholarship, offered insights to improve the practices of the OSCE in Ukraine and contributed to expanding the body of work that advocates for the centrality of feminist perspectives and their importance in challenging gender backsliding and the 'ever more influential anti-gender alliances.' (O'Sullivan and Krulišová 2023, 627). The scholarship benefited primarily from an in-depth analysis of Ukraine, thereby enriching the WPS literature through empirical

research in an under-studied context. This addressed an epistemic gap, as post-Soviet spaces have often been neglected and overlooked (Santoire 2023). Furthermore, conducting the research within an ongoing conflict provided valuable insights into the implementation of the WPS agenda, a topic still underexplored in existing literature, by examining how this highly securitised environment influenced the OSCE's delivery of peace, security, and gender equality initiatives. Other significant contributions of this research have included contributing towards developments in the understanding of UNSCR 1325 at the regional level, offering insights into how the OSCE functions as an organisation, and recognising the 'importance of feminist security studies scholars engaging in the study of international security institutions in order to understand how global gender norms are understood and shaped by them' (Wright 2016, 351).

The practical significance of this research lay in its findings on the OSCE's practices and activities in Ukraine. These findings were relevant for the international community supporting Ukraine, providing a clearer understanding of the implementation of the WPS agenda and the contributions made by international organisations (IOs). This was especially important for promoting gender inclusivity within the security sector. Ultimately, the research offered recommendations to guide the OSCE and similar organisations in enhancing gender mainstreaming efforts and improving their compliance with the WPS agenda in conflict-affected contexts.

1.4 Research Questions

1. To what extent does the OSCE reflect the values and goals of the WPS agenda through its work in Ukraine?
    a. How does the OSCE engage 'gender' within its Ukraine programmes?
    b. How does the OSCE delineate peace and security in the context of Ukraine?
2. How has the OSCE contributed to the implementation of the WPS agenda in Ukraine?

1.5 Research Hypothesis

The research hypothesised that the OSCE's security-oriented mandate, made up of its three dimensions, including politico-military, encouraged a substantial militarisation of its implementation efforts of the WPS agenda, aligning with broader critiques in the scholarship of how institutional priorities shape the practical outcomes of global normative frameworks (Wright 2022; Aroussi 2017). Despite this, the hypothesis also argued that the organisation's adoption of gender mainstreaming policies signalled a comparatively strong utilisation of WPS goals and vision regarding gender inclusivity and sensitivity in the security sector, relative to other international actors operating in Ukraine. This is evidenced by previous findings that highlighted the OSCE for its financing of gender equality-focused projects (O'Sullivan 2019). Lastly, this hypothesis stated that the OSCE's somewhat weak political influence and operational capacity will limit its contributions to WPS implementation in Ukraine.

1.6 Structure of the Paper

The following paper begins with a detailed literature review covering key themes and debates relevant for the understanding of this research, including the origins and vision of the WPS agenda for international security and peace; the application of the WPS agenda in the post-socialist space, particularly drawing attention to the role of international organisations in Ukraine; and critiques of the WPS agenda discussed in the literature, with a closer focus on militarisation and localisation. It concludes the review by summarising these trends and identifying gaps within the scholarship which this research has contributed towards. Next, the paper introduces the conceptual and theoretical framing guiding the research and the theoretical approach applied: feminist institutionalism (FI). A short summary of feminism within IR is provided before moving on to justify the use of FI. This is followed by a description of the research design and methodological approach, highlighting the appropriateness of a qualitative design using a thematic analysis for addressing the research questions stated in this introduction. The paper then presents the key findings, which are analysed in a detailed discussion shortly after, including notes on the research's significance and implications for practical

application before outlining its limitations and offering recommendations for further research. Finally, there is a concluding chapter providing a summary of the main findings, a response to the hypothesis, an overview of the value and limitations of the study previously discussed and a reminder of the recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Scholarship on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda is vast. Research on the topic spans across geographical, social, cultural, religious, and political contexts and makes up a significant amount of the literature within the feminist and international relations field. In order to narrow down such vast quantities of literature, this review limits the scope to scholarship focused on the analysis of the WPS agenda within Ukraine and/or with an interest in the post-soviet context, with a broader inclusion of some of the most recognised articles by prominent scholars in this field. There is also particular attention paid to studies assessing the role of international organisations in WPS implementation in Ukraine, primarily North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union (EU); reflecting the trend within the literature.

When critically reviewing the literature, there are some common themes that arise throughout. Firstly, there are understandings of the origins and goals of the WPS agenda that have been debated, reflections made on the WPS agenda in the post-socialist space, specifically, the role of international organisations in Ukraine, and finally, research that has uncovered weaknesses and pitfalls in the practical implementation of the WPS agenda since its adoption. The review will explore debates surrounding such themes, provide a critical overview of the literature and identify the gaps that still exist within this research field.

2.2 Understanding the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda

2.2.1 Origins of the WPS Agenda

The WPS agenda has been described as 'the most significant international normative framework addressing gender-specific impacts of conflict on women and girls' (True 2016, 307). It is a collective set of UN Security Council Resolutions, starting with UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 adopted in October 2000, then expanding to include a further nine resolutions. Otto (2018) categorises these resolutions into two

areas, which helps to reflect the particularly prominent issues that the WPS agenda encompasses. She states 'Four of them (SCR 1325, SCR 1889, SCR 2122 and SCR 2242) focus broadly on issues of concern for women during armed conflict and in its aftermath, emphasising the importance of women's participation and the recognition of women's rights (women's empowerment resolutions). The other four resolutions (SCR 1820, SCR 1888, SCR 1960 and SCR 2106) focus exclusively on the issue of protecting women from sexual violence (sexual violence resolutions).' (Otto 2018, 3). This categorisation alludes to the more well-known categorisation of the WPS agenda into its four pillars: participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery.

The strength of Otto's categorisation is its efforts to specifically tie the agenda to women's rights and emphasises women as empowered agents, as opposed to passive and vulnerable victims, which has been a critique by scholars such as George and Shepherd (2016) regarding other interpretations of the agenda. Otto (2018) describes the origins of the agenda dating back to the Hague Congress of Women held in 1915, which, in the backdrop of the First World War, promoted a feminist idea of peace to end the conflict and create a plan to bring permanent peace. Components of permanent peace identified by this congress clearly mirror the WPS agenda seen today, including advocacy for '(1) Equal participation of women in conflict-related decision-making, (2) Universal disarmament and (3) Measures to prevent adverse effects of war on women.' (Otto 2018, 2). In addition, the origins of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), a network later key in the adoption of UNSCR 1325, were also established as a result of this congress, further indicating the ideological roots of the WPS agenda (Otto 2018) and the importance of transnational feminist advocacy in its creation, also highlighted by George and Shepherd (2016).

In a different approach, Harrington (2016) argues UNSCR 1325 arose from post-Cold War dynamics as the end of the Cold War allowed for transnational networks of women's groups to work in unity on issues relating to women's oppression. It also increased the willingness of the US to more favourably engage with feminist activists than was previously accepted due to a previous suspicion of women's groups as socialists.

Dominant narratives within the soviet bloc linking women's oppression with capitalism, imperialism and racism fuelled this suspicion. More specifically, Harrington (2016) argues that within the political climate of the post-Cold War, framing violence against women as an international security issue was advantageous to US foreign policy as it could justify greater international policing and surveillance in this new world order.

When reflecting on these arguments put forward, the idea of the weaponisation of women's security to fuel political agendas is compelling and is evidenced in history. For example, women's rights were present in US discourse as part justification for their invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 (Terry 2007, 37). However, from a feminist institutionalist perspective, the strength of transnational networks as powerful informal institutions is perhaps more compelling and grants recognition to the women that made the WPS agenda possible, as opposed to a strategic decision-making by male political leaders.

2.3 The WPS Agenda in the Post-Socialist Space

Santoire (2023) identifies an epistemic gap in WPS scholarship when reviewing the WPS literature using bibliometric data. This gap is the lack of literature covering the WPS agenda in the post-soviet space. As of Santoire's (2023) research, only six publications were identified that were exclusively related to the agenda in one or more countries in the post-soviet space and no articles were found on Central Asia, despite Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan all having NAPs. The author argues that this gap is due to the inability of the post-soviet space to fit within the Global North/Global South binary, limiting analysis and a truly global comprehension of the WPS agenda as a whole (Santoire 2023, 822-825). As such, the author advocates for research in this area to be able to move beyond this binary and argues that 'the new phase of Russia's invasion of Ukraine demands urgent reflection from WPS scholars' (ibid, 821). As outlined in this review, some attempts have been made in the scholarship to narrow this gap. However, a gap still remains in the extent to which the WPS agenda is understood in the context of Ukraine after Russia's full-scale invasion.

On a similar note, the article by O'Sullivan and Krulišová (2023) highlights the somewhat western-centric nature of the WPS and how research tends to evaluate the Global North's implementation of the WPS agenda in the Global South, neglecting the Central and Eastern European region. It too contributes towards filling this gap by analysing the WPS agenda through a context which it deems as an example of Russian imperialism. The research is largely centred around the localisation of the WPS agenda but does also draw attention to the gender backsliding taking place in Hungary and Poland, contributing to a continuum of violence that Ukrainian women face as refugees and displaced people in central Europe. Overall, the authors argue that the WPS agenda is failing to address domestic and regional gendered insecurities, including in relation to the Russia-Ukraine War, but they do recognise the potential in the agenda to become an effective tool for gender security policy and argue it is needed more than ever in this anti-gender climate.

Finally, Staas (2025) frames the WPS as an ideological struggle between East and West, arguing that both utilise the WPS to claim their status as 'true protectors of women in Ukraine' (Staas 2025, 1). The research is an assessment of how Ukrainian women are used, framed and represented to create a 'Self' and 'Other' by both NATO and Russia between 2020 – 2024, identifying the use of the WPS as an 'ownership struggle' and the aggression seen in Ukraine as an East-West gender security conflict.

In general, the literature indicates the impact of a narrow north/south focus of the WPS agenda so far, it begins to frame Ukraine within wider geopolitical contexts and highlights the importance of taking a local and regional gendered analysis when reviewing the WPS agenda. Overwhelmingly, the literature calls for an analysis of the WPS agenda in Ukraine to address previous gaps and current social and political contexts.

One particular area of neglect identified in the literature is research on GBV in Ukraine. The prevalence of GBV has substantially increased in Ukraine since 2014 when hostilities intensified, particularly in the eastern regions of Ukraine and at 'entry-exit checkpoints along the contact line that separates government from non-government

controlled areas' (Capasso et al. 2021, 2). In some instances, this GBV has also been identified as conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) (Schved and Nokhrina 2024). It has been an ongoing human rights issue in Ukraine that has received somewhat limited coverage in comparison to other humanitarian contexts that are experiencing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), GBV and CRSV (Capasso et al. 2021); highlighting an additional gap in research within the Eastern European context (Capasso et al. 2022a), mirroring broader trends discussed.

Despite a number of services in place to prevent and respond to SGBV in Ukraine, including mental health and psychosocial teams deployed as early as November 2015 following the beginning of armed conflict and an increase in displaced persons (Capasso et al. 2022a), the literature argues that rehabilitation efforts remain limited and the increase of survivor-centred provisions that are accessible and sensitive is recommended (Morgan et al. 2023).

More recently, Schved and Nokhrina (2024) argue through their research that both state services and CSOs in Ukraine need greater investments in capacity-building measures to improve the knowledge and ability of these bodies to offer psychosocial and legal support to survivors of CRSV, given it is a relatively new challenge for them to face. The researchers go on to use the example of transitional justice efforts in Kosovo to draw attention to the importance of justice and accountability mechanisms for survivors of CRSV and for the de-stigmatisation of the issue. Registered case numbers in Ukraine are low but it is thought that stigma and shame are reasons for the underrepresentation of registered cases (Schved and Nokhrina 2024).

Overall, the literature on SGBV/CRSV in Ukraine is unified in its recommendations that humanitarian support should strengthen the voices of civil society as leaders in response, relief and recovery, pay attention to particular vulnerabilities such as displaced women (Capasso et al. 2022a), support trauma-informed and survivor-centred care, and support families of veterans to prevent types of domestic violence (Capasso et al. 2022b).

2.3.1 The Role and Impact of International Organisations on the WPS Agenda in Ukraine

Looking globally, the literature has been limited in examining the role of international organisations (IOs) in Ukraine, highlighting a large gap in the scholarship. Literature that does exist primarily focuses on NATO and the EU and is still limited in terms of studies that were conducted after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Those studies that do broaden their focus of analysis to IOs such as the OSCE or UN, do so in combination to studying NATO and the EU, resulting in a lack of detailed understanding regarding the activities, mandates and impacts of other organisations in Ukraine, such as the OSCE. This is despite the OSCE's unique position of having both Russia and Ukraine as current pSs.

Katharine Wright is a prominent scholar who examines NATOs engagement with the WPS agenda in multiple publications and has more recently researched the extent of NATO's application of the WPS agenda within their response to the Ukrainian war (Wright 2022). Her findings reveal a clear absence of recognition and implementation of the agenda from NATO and a strong expression of muscular military power in their communications, despite NATO's abilities, expertise and policies on WPS. Most interestingly, Wright's (2025; 2022) recommendations for NATO centre on looking inwards for achieving practical outcomes in relation to the WPS agenda. These include a gender-responsive leadership, greater operational effectiveness and more influence of the special representative on WPS in accountability measures. Therefore, the research highlights the benefits and necessity of evaluating the internal processes, policies and actors within influential IOs when analysing the application of the WPS agenda. Wright also demonstrates the need and importance of researching international organisations because of a potential disjuncture between 'rhetoric', found within policies and mandates, and reality, exposed through a review of communications and reports.

In a similar notion, Ansorg and Haastrup (2018) applied a feminist institutionalist approach in their research that 'sought to understand the opportunities and constraints of gender inclusion into the EU's SSR (Security Sector Reform) programmes.' (Ansorg and

Haastrup 2018, 1137), which included an assessment of the gender mainstreaming processes within programmes in Ukraine and Afghanistan, using an adaptation of True and Parisi's (2013, 39-40) Model on Gender Mainstreaming. The research found a limited gender inclusive approach that did not encourage representation or participation under its WPS obligations, stating that 'the active implementation of the WPS agenda by or through the EU is very limited.' (Ansorg and Haastrup 2018, 1135). Nevertheless, the research was unique in how it investigated gender mainstreaming within institutions and its impact on their ability to align with the commitments and principles of the WPS agenda, providing a useful framework for the research presented in this thesis. In critique, it does seem to neglect the interactions between institutions such as CSOs, and how this influences the EU's alignment with the WPS agenda.

In addition to Ansorg and Haastrup (2018), there has been literature produced that also evaluates how EU SSR missions align with WPS commitments, particularly concerning gender equality, which falls under the prevention pillar. Jayasundara-Smits (2021) analysed the missions in Ukraine and Mali using content analysis of the EU's public communications about such missions. The focus of the research was thus more centred on how visual content can indicate the norms and values of the EU and whether this aligns with gender equality policies. Again, there was a gap between policy and practice identified at both the institutional and ground level in which unequal gender power relations in Ukrainian security institutions, and those present in wider society, are normalised and reproduced (ibid, 96). Although this does offer insights into the EU as an institution and its impact on important aspects of the WPS agenda, such as gender equality, in Ukraine, the methodology chosen relies heavily on interpretations from the researcher without any indication of triangulation. It is not to suggest that public communications cannot reveal important insights regarding the extent of gender mainstreaming in an institution but that this alone may not produce rich, deep results that engagement with practitioners and key informants would. In this regard, the study by Ansorg and Haastrup (2018) is stronger, relying less on the notion of counting women as a way to study if women count. Furthermore, the constructivist theory applied is appropriate when considering constructions of femininity and masculinity through

content but it can be criticised as a very narrow approach in understanding gender equality norms at an institutional level, only encompassing one aspect of how gender power dynamics play out. As such, the appropriateness and strength of adopting a feminist institutionalist framework when studying IOs and their implementation of the WPS agenda is noted.

When considering what is considered a successful implementation of the WPS, a study by Kähkönen (2023) brings some useful insights into the literature. The study analysed Ukraine's two NAPs along with CEDAW's periodic reviews and concluding observations, and several shadow reports by CSOs from 2015 and 2021, to examine the possibilities and limitations of the WPS agenda to offer transformative, material changes for the lives of women during an ongoing conflict. It concluded similar findings to Ansorg and Haastrup (2018) regarding a weak influence of IOs on ensuring women's meaningful participation in decision-making but overall, its findings seemed inconclusive and at times, in contradiction with one another. For example, stating that pressure from international allies created a greater political will but also that international support for human security has led to a deprioritisation by the national government. This would indicate a potential weakness in the study's methodology, which analysed secondary data only. A strength of the study lies in its measurement of the WPS agenda's implementation, defining this as 'material changes for the lives of women' and further solidifying the recognition of the WPS agenda as a women's rights agenda. Although the study is not concerned with IOs specifically, it has highlighted the benefits of taking a more comprehensive approach to understandings of security, with its consideration of human and economic security.

Drawing on literature that has included findings regarding the OSCE, O'Sullivan (2019) did assess the role of a number of IOs during their field research in Ukraine in 2018. O'Sullivan (2019) assessed the implementation of the WPS agenda in Ukraine prior to Russia's full-scale invasion but in a conflict-context whilst fighting was taking place in the Donbas region. The research analysed official documents and used data collected from semi-structured interviews with NATO, OSCE, EU and UN staff members. Her

findings revealed that IOs have been important in encouraging gender-related changes in Ukraine, identifying them as the main driving force in peacebuilding, state-building, humanitarian support, and monitoring conflicts. More specifically, she found that the OSCE was one of the few organisations who financed gender equality-focused projects in Ukraine. However, criticisms of IOs were also identified. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) reported that their reach was limited when it came to structural issues, such as improved infrastructure, and IOs prioritised security sector reforms in favour of addressing socio-economic inequalities. These findings align with those of Aroussi (2017), indicating again a somewhat narrow understanding of peace and security which influences the ways IOs implement the WPS agenda whilst taking the research away from a sole analysis of NAPs into operational activities.

Overall, although the literature is useful in understanding the strengths and weaknesses when it comes to the influence and role of IOs in implementing the WPS agenda in Ukraine, the literature is already somewhat outdated because of the drastic change in geopolitical contexts since the 24 February 2022. Also, when comparing methodological approaches, the limitations of studies that focus mainly on analysing NAPs and other secondary data, highlight the strength of methodologies that engage with key practitioners, like O'Sullivan (2019), and the value similar studies could have on assessing international organisations' more recent activities following the full-scale invasion.

2.4 Critiques of the WPS Agenda

Despite the agenda's status as a global normative framework, the scholarship on the WPS agenda reveals strong critiques of its application and implementation. Some areas of critique have been highlighted previously, including the failings of IOs to fully implement the agenda according to their policies and wider gender inclusion commitments, the common positioning of the agenda within a rigid Global North/Global South relationship that neglects the post-socialist space, arguably due to its western-centric approach, and finally, an indication of its failure to successfully deliver its prevention pillar by combating society-wide gender inequalities and effectively

implement the WPS agenda in line with broaden understandings of peace and security that move beyond militarism (Cockburn 2013). The last critique described here will be explored in greater detail by comparing literature that has assessed the militarisation of the agenda up until now.

2.4.1 Feminist Peace and the Prevention Pillar

There have been more detailed reflections made regarding the agenda's aims and visions, including its framing of peace and security from a feminist perspective. Debates continue to be centred on its (in)ability in combating gendered insecurity and gender inequalities as part of its prevention mandate, particularly in a time of gender backsliding. Scholars like Cockburn (2013) argue it is too heavily focused on women and security, as opposed to women and peace. More specifically, Cockburn (2013) takes a sociological approach and highlights the feminist perspective which directly links security with militarism, patriarchy and nationalism, and argues that the WPS agenda should do more to tackle root causes of insecurity by having a higher focus on the role of men and the masculinity of security.

Meanwhile, Aroussi (2017) gave focus to the WPS agenda as a tool in times of political transition and referred to the UN's goal stated in the resolution itself to give a formal requirement for decision-makers and actors to be 'inclusive, gender-sensitive and transformative for women'. (Aroussi 2017, v). Here, she makes a distinct note regarding the broader aims of UNSCR 1325 that align with the feminist idea of peace and security and move beyond the impacts and insecurities of conflict to also address gender inequalities within wider society, particularly prominent for transitional societies. Here, the role and significance of gender equality in the realisation of the WPS agenda is also described. Aroussi (2017) too finds weakness here, in the extent to which the WPS agenda addresses women's rights, gender inequalities and states commitments under broader human rights law, in a similar vein to Cockburn (2013), but argues that a key factor is not so much masculinity but instead, the state department that is given responsibility for delivering the WPS agenda. If this responsibility falls to foreign affairs

ministries, domestic issues of gender equality under the prevention pillar can be neglected and seen as a separate issue, falling outside of the WPS's realm.

When considering the arguments and findings by Cockburn (2013) and Aroussi (2017) side by side, it is compelling to evaluate how these ideas complement as opposed to contradict one another, and how they can be used in tandem. When evaluating gender equality under the WPS agenda, it is interesting to consider the gendered nature of state departments as a further explanation of Aroussi's findings and how the failure to engage men in the WPS agenda, as Cockburn (2013) mentions, is detrimental to its implementation. Therefore, when considering why the provision of the prevention pillar in WPS NAPs is dependent on state departments, the fact that foreign affairs and defense departments are often male-dominated can give some indication as to why the root causes of women's insecurity and provisions of gender equality are neglected in these spaces, as Aroussi (2017) finds. As such, the literature seems to propose that the role of men and the gender dynamics within institutions matter when setting their priorities.

Similarly, Renzulli (2017) also places human rights and gender equality front and centre in the WPS agenda, arguing that the 'peace' component of the WPS, along with its prevention pillar, are often ignored. Renzulli argues the agenda is thus reactive to conflict, as opposed to proactively addressing the gender inequalities and human rights situations that lead to insecurities in a society and exacerbated impacts for women and girls when conflicts arise. They argue that the role of prevention should be elaborated and developed but recognises the challenge of measuring and implementing such a gender responsiveness in practice.

Overall, the literature indicates the ways the visions and understandings of gender equality as peace and security in the WPS agenda are not being fully recognised or implemented. Therefore, it is of interest to consider how institutions like the OSCE, that are supporting states in times of conflict, address wider gender equality issues because although the study by Aroussi (2017) is important is assessing the WPS agenda, it does so from the perspective of the state and its primary focus was on the role of National Action

Plans (NAPs) in supporting state's implementation, as opposed to the activities and programmes of the international organisations (IOs) themselves.

2.4.2 Militarisation

One of the most prominent articles detailing this misinterpretation of the WPS agenda is Shepherd's (2016) article, 'Making war safe for women?' in which she states 'the agenda should support the demilitarisation of society and facilitate the development of anti-militarist politics of peace.' (ibid, 324). Her research, a discourse analysis of NAPs from a range of states, assessed how such NAPs produced gendered logics of peace and security. Shepherd (2016) found that often the discourse within NAPs did not challenge militarism at the national or international level. Instead, NAPs of 'minority world' states such as Australia, the UK and the US were outward-facing and concerned with how their 'security experts' could make war safe for women in majority-world states, such as Afghanistan, dismissing the ideas of gendered insecurity that exists domestically.

As such, the main argument developed from this research argued that:

> 'the discursive dynamics evident in the Plans (re)produce particular ways of thinking about peace and security that do nothing to progress disarmament or demilitarisation…the ways in which these Plans constitute 'the business' of peace and security and the subjectivities of 'experts' engaging in this business operates comfortably within the parameters of militarism.' (Shepherd 2016, 333).

Furthermore, there is a strong sub-section of the literature focused on the militarisation of the WPS agenda, and it does feature as a central debate in scholarship on the operation of the WPS in Ukraine specifically. For example, literature by O'Sullivan (2019) and Kähkönen (2023) have documented the high militarisation of the WPS agenda in Ukraine both before and since the Russian invasion in 2022, arguing the WPS agenda is leading to militarisation, not peace. O'Sullivan (2019) highlights the value in assessing the WPS Agenda in times of conflict, examining the WPS agenda and the context of Ukraine post-2014 and pre-2022. Her research centres on the nationalistic discourse, already very prominent post-2014, how this shaped the 2016-2020 Ukrainian National Action Plan (NAP), leading to a 'militarisation' of the agenda, with a focus on the defense and security sector and a dismissal of other broader insecurities, in contestation with the

WPS' feminist principles (O'Sullivan 2019, 747). Unique to this research, O'Sullivan (2019) found three key factors leading to this militarisation; the influence of local feminist nationalism, the ongoing state of conflict, and the involvement of IOs as drivers of Ukraine's WPS agenda.

Meanwhile, as part of Kähkönen's (2023) research, there was an assessment of the extent to which WPS NAPs had been co-opted by military structures. However, she found that this focus on the security sector by IOs described above, was welcomed by local women's organisations in some regions of Ukraine, aligning with O'Sullivan's (2019) previous findings regarding the presence of a local, feminist nationalism. In this regard, a strength of the research was its ability to draw links between women's historical political participation in times of conflict, such as the Maidan Revolution, and their current involvement in NAP implementation. It can be argued that the research was somewhat vague in its analysis of the role of IOs beyond monitoring and reporting activities but does highlight the need and value in assessing the WPS Agenda during times of conflict.

2.4.3 Localisation

Despite foundational ideas of the WPS agenda as a civil society project with women's organisations and women's experiences at the heart of efforts towards peace and security. (Shepherd 2016, 325), effective localisation has been a point of criticism for the agenda. It does not feature heavily within the literature on Ukraine but when ignored, poor localisation can result in a lack of attention given to Ukrainian women' s voices or engagement with civil society on WPS-related matters (Wright 2022) and a WPS that fails to address 'the multitude of domestic and regional gendered insecurities' (O'Sullivan and Krulišová 2023, 626).

For example, Dudko and Langenhuizen (2022) researched the adoption of Ukrainian's NAP following the Maidan revolution, specifically assessing the localisation through regional and local action plan development. The research indicated the importance of 'gender champions' operating at the local level and how the localisation is largely dependent on the capacity and expertise of civil society and women's groups in the area,

whilst also being dependent on external funding. Thus, although there may be the political will at the local level, there can be a hindrance to the feeling of ownership at the regional and local level.

Furthermore, O'Sullivan and Krulišová (2023) conducted research that combined feminist decolonialism and feminist institutionalism theory. The studies findings revealed the importance of effective and inclusive localisation in overcoming the colonial legacy within the WPS agenda. They analysed the WPS agenda in Ukraine by illustrating the impact of Russian imperialism. Their study identified a shallow domestic institutionalisation that lacked local innovations (ibid, 627), largely because the NAP replicated Western NAPs, which typically adopt an outward-facing approach.

Overall, the literature reveals significant challenges in the effective localisation of the WPS agenda in Ukraine, despite its foundational emphasis on centring women's experiences and civil society participation (Shepherd 2016). Poor localisation risks marginalising Ukrainian women's voices and neglects the recognition of diverse, gendered insecurities at both domestic and regional levels (O'Sullivan and Krulišová 2023; Wright 2022). Studies such as Dudko and Langenhuizen's (2022) demonstrate that successful localisation depends heavily on local civil society capacity, the presence of gender champions, and external funding, which can affect the sense of ownership at regional and local levels. Additionally, O'Sullivan and Krulišová's (2023) research highlights how the replication of Western NAPs and the legacy of colonial and imperial influences have limited innovation and deepened institutionalisation within Ukraine's WPS framework.

When tying this together with previous debates in the literature, it draws attention to the value in assessing how IOs, such as the OSCE, engage with local women's groups and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) during their operations in Ukraine, and how this impacts the extent of militarisation and understandings of security.

2.5 Conclusion

To summarise, the WPS scholarship is an extensive body of literature that explores the origins of the WPS agenda, differences between early visions and goals of the agenda with current realities of its interpretation and implementation, the role of key actors and their policies at the local, national and international level, and overall weaknesses of the agenda that have become apparent. Literature on the WPS agenda in Ukraine reflects broader trends in the field, focusing on a key feminist debate about whether the agenda has become overly militarised and perpetuates highly securitised environments that are harmful and dangerous to women (Shepherd 2016; Cockburn 2013). It also examines the roles and priorities of influential international organisations operating in Ukraine. However, gaps within the research and scholarship remain. These include: (1) a general lack of research and literature examining contexts where there is an ongoing conflict (O'Sullivan 2019), (2) a lack of research on the post-soviet space (Santoire 2023), and (3) a lack of research studying the WPS agenda within the context of Ukraine since Russia's full scale invasion in February 2022 (Santoire 2023). Scholarship that has focused on this context has not paid close attention to IOs outside of NATO and the EU, and has seemed to neglect the role of regional actors, such as the OSCE. As such, this research has contributed to the scholarship in these areas. It has paid particular attention to representations and narratives on peace and prevention, the extent of its (de)militarisation of the agenda, and its efforts in addressing continuous gender inequalities.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMING

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The following theoretical framework (figure 1) indicates the main concepts and the relationship between key variables that were under review. Informed by a feminist institutionalist (FI) theory, independent variables included internal actors, norms and values present within the OSCE as an institution that shaped its approach to gender inclusion. These included staff members, policies, and overall perceptions and ideas concerning gender equality, gender inclusion, and peace and security. Additionally, external outputs from institutions were also considered because the outward-facing practices of the institution had a substantial influence on the social and political outcome under review: the WPS agenda in Ukraine.

Similarly, the dependent variable was also split into two similar categories: values and goals. Values included the perspective and principles that the WPS agenda holds regarding peace, security and gender equality whilst the goals were based on the four core pillars of the WPS agenda: prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery (George and Shepherd 2016, 298). As indicated by the flow of arrows, the theoretical framework recognised the interconnectedness between these concepts, with the blue arrows showing the direction of inquiry between the variables.

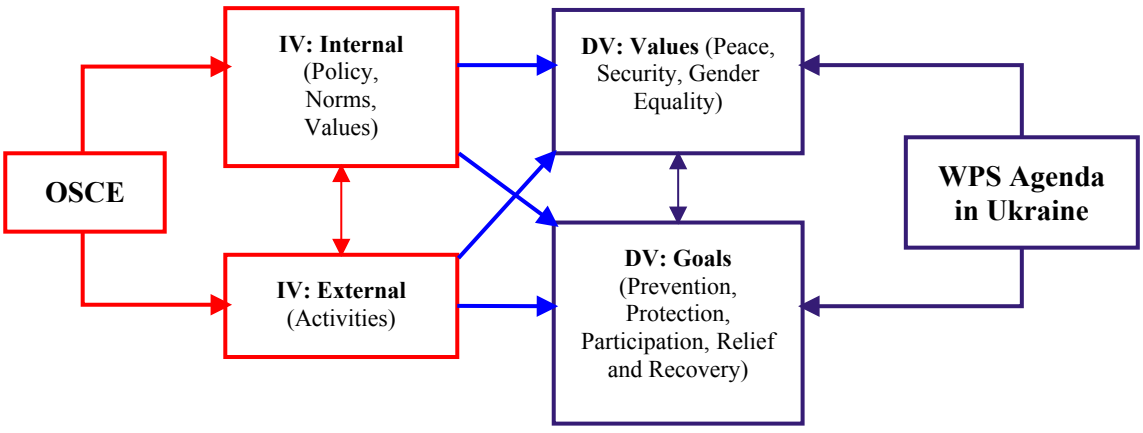


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

3.1.1 Defining Concepts

This research took the approach of Blumer (1986) when it came to clearly defining concepts and instead used 'sensitising' concepts, which are concepts do not have to be definitive, as in quantitative research, but instead can provide a 'general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances' (Blumer 1986, 7); giving a sense of what to look for (Bryman 2008). As such, the following concepts can be understood as loose definitions to help inform the research and its findings whilst still recognising that these are contested definitions in the social sciences field.

Firstly, gender was defined as, 'a relational and dynamic construct that operates through and in other power relations' (Shepherd 2017, 21), which is 'embedded in social institutions and practices that reproduce identities, roles and relations' (Steans 2006, 8). This definition established gender as a construct whilst recognising the importance of institutions in its reproduction. It was derived from the Feminist IR scholarship, aligning with the wider theoretical approach.

Secondly, the definition of gender equality was taken from UN Women (2025) and refers to:

> 'Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognising the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development.' (UN Women 2025)

Thirdly, the definition of security used in the research was taken from the early works by Tickner (1992, 66) who wrote, 'women have defined security as the absence of violence whether that be military, economic, or sexual…', which was added to Steans' (2006, 63) understanding of security to also include '...[or] in terms of the political, social or personal circumstances of individuals', 'recognising that 'gender relations of power are implicated in the social construction of violence and war.' (Confortini 2012, 7).

As such, the definition of peace is developed from this understanding of security to be defined by the researcher as 'the absence of structural and physical violence both inward and outward facing through the achievement of gender equality and dismantling of unequal power relations in a society with economic and political stability.' Although broad, it rejects the idea of negative peace as peace (Galtung 1969) and aligns with the perspective taken by feminist peace scholars, which recognises the multiple forms of violence and insecurities women face as a result of gender inequality, resulting in the prevention of women's liberation and thus, a barrier for achieving sustainable and durable peace (Björkdahl and Selimovic 2019, 10).

3.2 Theoretical Approach for Analysis: Feminist Institutionalism

3.2.1 Feminism in International Relations

Feminism within International Relations (IR) took shape in the 1980s and 1990s with core texts including Elshtain's *Women and War* (1987), Enloe's *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases* (1989), and Tickner's *Gender in International Relations* (1992) (Sylvester 2002, 15). These publications marked the beginning of a new phenomenon that moved between placing feminism within already established frameworks in IR, such as institutionalism, and raising IR questions in feminism, such as linking sexual harassment with militarism, as Enloe did in *'Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women's Lives'* (1983); thus requiring feminists to respond to 'IR topics' (Sylvester 2002, 32).

The main strands of feminist theory include those derived from 'traditional' approaches already established in IR theory, such as liberal, poststructural, and institutional feminism, alongside others rooted more directly in feminist thought from related fields, including Marxist, radical, standpoint, critical, and postcolonial feminism. Simply put, the feminist perspective adopted in this research involved critically analysing institutions through a gendered lens that acknowledged the pervasive influence of the patriarchal system. Despite their differences, a broad generalisation can be made that all these strands recognise women's experiences, concerns, and opinions have been marginalised, and they highlight the importance of placing gender at the centre of discussion, debate,

and analysis (Steans and Pettiford 2001). It was extremely valuable and appropriate for this research because of its recognition of gender as a central category of analysis, its understanding that gender was embedded in international order, and its study of the significance of gender in the functioning of international institutions (Steans and Pettiford 2001, 155).

Critics of feminism within IR argue that the 'feminist take' on traditional IR has confined feminism to male-centric theories that do not, and have never, adequately considered the experiences of women because they have always been seen on the margins of war, peace, and security, and it was only until early scholars like Enloe (1989) and Elshtain (1987) re-evaluated what was considered under IR that new feminist theories could be developed. However, I argue there is a value in highlighting where gender has been missed in these traditional theories and including gender, without needing to fully reject what traditional IR offers in terms of topics and phenomena covered, or fully accept the arguments of these theories. For example, there is still value for feminism in assessing the gendered nature of political and military institutions, despite their contributions to a patriarchal system (Cockburn 2013). As such, this paper adopted a FI approach because it recognised the value and benefit in providing a gendered analysis of current institutions that do have significant power and influence on the everyday lives of women. It did this whilst also being able to challenge such systems and provide a feminist alternative. It also recognised that 'IR' is a feminist topic in itself and should not be sidelined as a 'non-feminist' field.

Generally, this is something that has arguably shifted in the last 40 years because of the rise of women in positions of political decision-making. Nevertheless, it has further highlighted the need for gendered analysis and critical thinking against systems and institutions of oppression despite some inclusion of women. In response, literature in the field has noted that counting women does not automatically mean women's rights, voices, experience, and authority are counted as significant and credible (Paffenholz 2016). In this respect, the WPS agenda has solidified peace and security as a feminist issue, aligning IR into feminism, whilst also ensuring IR could no longer ignore gender in its analysis of international politics, statehood, conflict, and related sub-fields. The

defining and understanding of peace and security has been well-developed within feminist theory and has re-defined what the IR field considers significant.

When exploring feminist theory in greater detail, feminist theory is focused on centring gender in understandings of war and peace, arguing 'gender is a system of meaning that can be manipulated to encourage both men and women in their support for war' (Steans 2006, 49) and draws attention to how constructions of masculinity and femininity are weaponised to uphold militarism and justify state violence (Cockburn 2013). Having said this, feminist theorists are also cautious not to spread ideas that women are naturally more peaceful than men, or that pacifism is inherently feminine because this narrative can encourage arguments for biological determinism, perpetuate the notion of militarism as masculine, militarism as the accepted norm, and peace as a women's issue. Furthermore, as Tickner (1992, 59) points out 'The association of femininity with peace lends support to an idealized masculinity that depends on constructing women as passive victims in need of protection.' This is not to ignore the significant role that women do play in achieving peace or the relevance of the campaigns to include more women in formal peacebuilding processes but to make clear that this should not be explained as natural and inherent to women. Instead, it can be explained because of women's constant proximity to violence (True 2020), the devastating impacts that conflict poses for women's security as a whole, and militarism's reliance on harmful gender roles, norms, and inequalities to persist (Cockburn 2013; Steans 2006).

3.2.2 Feminist Institutionalism

Feminist institutionalism (FI) is a relatively new theoretical approach that took greater shape in the 2009 publication 'Feminist Institutionalism' in the journal *Politics & Gender* (Bogaards 2022, 419). The approach brought a gendered lens to institutionalism, 'which highlights the gendered aspects of the norms, rules and practices at work within institutions and the concomitant effect these have on political outcomes' (Mackay et al. 2010, 573). In this research, the political outcome of focus was the implementation and relevance of the WPS agenda, including the attention paid to gender inclusion and equality as crucial factors in peace and security. The theory has emerged as a way to

challenge the lack of a gendered approach in existing scholarship on political institutions (Mackay et al. 2010). As such, I argue it was a fitting theory because both FI and this research were concerned with the inclusion of gender at the institutional level, paying special attention to the benefits that a gendered analysis and perspective can bring to the scholarship and to the field.

Whilst some have argued that FI's primary application is to identify how gender inequalities are produced and maintained within institutions, FI has also been used to assess the impact of the introduction of gender equality initiatives on institution's output (Holmes 2020). In a similar approach to previous studies that have applied FI to international and regional security institutions (Ansorg and Haastrup 2018; George 2016), this study has also analysed how effectively the OSCE, as a regional security organisation, has contributed to the implementation of the UNSCR 1325 by examining the extent of its gender inclusion within its values, norms and activities. This is in addition to drawing conclusions regarding the organisation's understanding of what peace and security means within the current Ukrainian context.

Additionally, to understand FI, it was necessary to reflect on the theoretical strand of new institutionalism, in which it originates. New institutionalism provides a useful framework for understanding how institutions shape social and political outcomes (Hall and Taylor 1996). In the context of this research, it provided a useful insight for establishing how the OSCE as an institution impacts the strength of the WPS agenda as an international commitment. Overall, it was an appropriate and useful framework given the unit of analysis, the relationship the study explored, and the research questions posed.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

The research adopted a qualitative approach because qualitative research provides rich, deep data, which was useful for understanding context and assessing processes (Bryman 2008). The qualitative approach was selected due to its capacity to answer research questions meaningfully, by identifying meanings and processes, and offering explanations (Spencer et al. 2014 274).

In addition, the research studied a single case study. A case study is typically detailed and extensive, embedded within a specific context (Yin 2009), and can be concentrated on an individual organisation (Lewis and Nicholls 2014, 66). In this project, I focused on a single organisation and geographical context: the OSCE's work in Ukraine. For this purpose, I identified two operational programmes that provided a comprehensive overview of the case and reflected the case extensively. These programmes were chosen deliberately to offer a detailed understanding of the case study, since a single programme alone could neither provide a full explanation nor a representative perspective (Lewis and Nicholls 2014, 67).

Regarding the timeframe, timeframes within research are often shaped by significant events that alter social and political climates (Lewis and Nicholls 2014, 61). Consequently, I used Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, beginning on 24 February 2022, as a temporal boundary to narrow the research focus and scope, given the drastic shift in the political context and its impact on the OSCE's presence and activities in Ukraine.

Furthermore, I adopted a feminist approach because it aligned closely with the feminist institutionalist theoretical framework applied. This approach ensured that gendered perspectives were recognised (Bryman 2008) and echoed the overarching aim and conviction that research should contribute to the alleviation of women's oppression (Skeggs 2001). Such a stance was particularly beneficial given the research's focus on the

landmark resolution placing women at the centre of a sector that frequently marginalises them.

In terms of data collection, I gathered generated data through semi-structured interviews, while naturally-occurring data was sourced from OSCE reports and public statements. In total, my data consisted of; public communications published by the OSCE including statements and newsletters related to the programmes, policy reports concerning the implementation of the OSCE's 2004 Gender Action Plan from 2022 onwards, 4 interviews with OSCE staff members across the programmes, 1 interview with a member of a CSO partner, and 1 interview with a staff member of a prominent state partner/institution. The data sampling combined purposive and convenience methods, whilst thematic analysis was employed for all data analyses. Ethical considerations included the sensitivity of the context covered, gaining informed consent and managing data ethically.

Although the research does not achieve strong generalisation, reliability and external validity in the conventional sense, I argue that the research design has resulted in the achievement of strong analytical generalisation and internal validity; valued in case study and qualitative research (Yin 2018; Leung 2015). The careful selection of the case study that would be typical of the area under study, the transparency of the coding process, which has been firmly grounded in the data through numerous stages of familiarisation and coding, and the triangulation of data, which strengthens the evidence of the relationship between variables, have all contributed to this strong internal validity, when it is understood 'to ensure the researcher can construct a plausible causal argument that is rigorous enough to support the research results.' (Quintão et al. 2021, 269). Additionally, Yin (2018) argues that case study designs do not need to be generalisable in the same way as other quantitative studies but instead can 'shed empirical light on some theoretical concepts or principles' (Yin 2018, 38). I argue this research does offer analytical generalisation through its assessment of institutional norms, values and goals in a deductive manner that contribute towards feminist institutionalist theory and feminist principles.

4.2 Sampling

4.2.1 Programmes

Two programmes were selected and studied as part of this research. These included the Extra-Budgetary Support Programme for Ukraine (ExB SPU) and the Gender Issues Programme (GIP). After an initial online search of the OSCE website, which was aimed at understanding the full extent of its work in Ukraine and the research population, these programmes were selected using critical sampling because including them was critical and necessary to understanding (Ritchie et al. 2014, 114). Without these programmes, the research questions could not have been answered fully or in a comprehensive manner, covering both Ukraine-specific and gender-specific programmes. For example, the ExB SPU has a specific mandate for working in Ukraine and was introduced as a response to events occurring after the full-scale invasion. Also, the GIP had a specific focus on gender equality advancement within the OSCE, including in Ukraine, so to have ignored this programme, even without its sole focus on Ukraine, would have meant neglecting very relevant data. The analysis of the GIP was narrowed to include activities, projects, and events taking place in relation to Ukraine from 24 February 2022 only. One challenge was the sampling of this data and selection of interviewees given that this programme did not have a mandate to support Ukraine only. However, this challenge was overcome by careful selection of the interviewee and ensuring only relevant data that fit the scope of the research was included in the final data set.

4.2.2 Sources of Data

The sample frame for the practitioner interviews was identified as all OSCE staff employed under the programmes in an operational capacity, excluding common services employees such as human resources or procurement staff. I was able to compile this sample frame by searching the titles of the programmes in a digital staff list of the OSCE to which I had access to, whilst working as an intern at ODIHR. As the list came from an internal database, I had to seek permission to use the data in this way and comply with the relevant data protection legislation. This included storing the information on a

password-protected file and deleting it once the participants had been selected and the data was no longer needed. For the GIP sample frame, using this method was less reliable for identifying people working on Ukraine-focused projects specifically, so the sample was created using information gathered from email correspondence with employees, adhering to data protection laws and asking for consent in sharing personal data. In total, there were 20 people in the sample frame.

To select participants from the sample frame, I applied a combination of convenience and purposive sampling strategies. Convenience sampling is understood as 'choosing individuals that are conveniently available and willing to participate in the study' (Onwuegbuzie and Collins 2007, 286), while purposive sampling is 'based on several characteristics such as subject matter expertise or the ability and desire to engage in the study' (Thomas 2022, 3), making both appropriate and viable choices that resulted in the collection of relevant and in-depth data necessary to answer the research questions. The sample size for the practitioner interviews was four participants in total, making up roughly 20% of the sample frame interviewed. The interviewees worked directly on Ukraine, some with a focus on gender issues, some not. Given the case study design applied and the small sample frame, extending beyond this was not necessary for saturation to be reached (Guest et al. 2006). Furthermore, qualitative research generally does not require large sample sizes because the data collected is rich, providing many 'bites of information from each unit of data collection. In order to do justice in analysis, sample size needs to be kept to a reasonably small scale' (Ritchie et al. 2014, 117). In this research, this was particularly true given the fairly homogenous population, accounting for the differences between the programmes only. Otherwise, the selection criteria was quite limited and there was no nesting of criteria, so the sample size remained small (Ritchie et al. 2014, 118).

The sample frame for data collection from national partners included six NGOs and seven state authorities identified as partners of one or more of the programmes under examination. This information was gathered through a thorough review of OSCE publications and a review of the interviews already conducted with OSCE practitioners as part of this research. Out of the six NGOs, an interview was conducted with one director

of a key NGO and with one staff member of a key state institute. This was sampled using convenience sampling and was based on who responded to interview requests. The NGO represented has worked with GIP, primarily and on numerous occasions whilst the key state institution has largely worked with the ExB SPU programme.

The sample frame for the naturally-occurring data was identified as all official websites and documents published by the OSCE regarding the programmes. It was compiled using Google searches and by navigating through links on relevant OSCE web pages related to the programmes. Further sampling was then completed from this sample frame by applying a purposive sampling method (Thomas 2022). The main criteria applied was that the data had to be rich in information that helped answer the research question, such as including information regarding the aims, mandates, priorities, operational delivery, outputs, and/or impact of one of the two programmes. For the case of the GIP, it also had to be published from 24 February 2022 and relate to specific projects and activities in Ukraine.

Once the data in the sample frame had been sampled, data that met this criteria included: the ExB SPU and GIP web pages; two statements announcing the ExB SPU; one blog post mentioning work in Ukraine under the GIP; and four larger reports, including the annual reports on the 'OSCE 2004 Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality' (OSCE 2004). During the sampling stage, no detailed reports were found specifically regarding these programmes, so this data was collected using semi-structured interviews.

4.3 Data Collection

The research drew on two types of data: naturally-occurring data and generated data. The naturally-occurring data included reports and statements found on the internet, while the generated data came from interviews with key informants. The research used generated data to give participants the 'direct and explicit' opportunity to inform and indicate the meaning and interpretations of the researcher's understanding of the naturally-occurring data (Lewis and Nicholls 2014, 54-55). Although the generated data was still interpreted and analysed by the researcher, the combination of the two sets of data gave the participants a more active role in shaping this meaning (ibid.). This was important

because an FI approach values the perspective of those within an institution and aims to understand the organisational context as an area of study in itself (Holmes 2020).

In this instance, the collection of two types of data provided detailed information on the implementation efforts thus far, helped verify and inform the interviews and their findings, and helped fill in gaps where interviewees were not able to answer; strengthening the credibility of the data (Bowen 2009). Similarly, 'key informants are selected due to their ability to help the researcher understand patterns, often providing background information that is inaccessible, implicit, or inefficient to identify through document reviews' (Pahwa et al. 2023, 1252). As such, using the two methods allowed for data triangulation (Greene 2007)

When considering the generated primary data, this was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with practitioners working on the selected programmes under review (see Appendix A), the CSO partner (see Appendix B), and the state partner (see Appendix C), while the supplementary naturally-occurring primary data was collected using internet searches from relevant OSCE websites (Bryman 2008). This naturally-occurring data included four reports and three press releases and from the sampled naturally-occurring data, data was collected using ctrl+F 'Ukraine' to extract the relevant data.

I argue that these methods of data collection were a feasible and appropriate approach for answering the research questions proposed because interviews are good for understanding complex phenomena and can be used to supplement other data (Kumar 2018), as in this case. Also, using a methodology that collected in-depth information allowed respondents greater freedom with their answers, provided them with the opportunity to ask for clarification (Lunenburg and Irby 2008), and offered the flexibility for the research to explore different avenues of understanding through follow-up questions.

In addition, semi-structured interviews were chosen for a number of reasons. First, because interviews helped explore issues in detail, and given the case study design, I wanted to ensure data was collected that was not accessible in other forms. Second, interviews were useful for understanding complex processes such as motivations,

impacts, and outcomes. Third, the study population was geographically dispersed, so interviews allowed for an online form of communication that was feasible given the limited resources available (Lewis and Nicholls 2014, 59) and the safety risk posed by choosing a methodology that required in-person data collection and thus, travel to a state in a current conflict.

4.4 Data Analysis

Once the data had been collected, I used the reflexive thematic analysis approach set out by Braun and Clarke (2009, 86-93). This included familiarisation, generating initial codes, searching for, reviewing and defining and naming themes, and producing a report of findings. This was appropriate because it accounted for subjectivity within the researcher's interpretation of meaning and categorisation of themes (Braun and Clarke 2019), which was particularly appropriate when applying a feminist theoretical framework and because of the centrality of meaning within my research questions and their focus on values, goals and framing. Deductive codes were developed during the familiarisation stage, in which general topics present in the data were noted, then these topics were revised into over 55 codes. These codes were then applied to the data in a cross-sectional analysis (Ritchie et al. 2014, 273), which was appropriate as the semi-structured style interviews and nature of public communications meant codes did not occur in an orderly way in the interview data, so the cross-sectional approach helped with creating comparison and connections through the data (ibid.). When extracts of data were identified under each code, these were placed in an Excel spreadsheet, ordered by code, and then reviewed, before the construction and refinement of the final themes. In total, 4 nuanced themes and 11 sub-themes were created from the data, providing a useful framework to address the research questions that was developed using a methodology that ensured the themes were firmly grounded in the data.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Due to the nature of the methodology, it was necessary to gain informed consent from the interviewees. Within this process, it was clearly stated how the data collected would be

used and where this would be published, in case the interviewees were worried about the published analysis jeopardising their professional lives or career. They were key informants and so remained 'in the field' post-interview, meaning if they did not feel confident that their data would be protected, it might have led to dishonest responses that were generally more positive than they truly felt (Pahwa et al. 2023). As such, the interview questions were framed in such a way that did not aim to evaluate the competencies of the staff members but focused solely on the research questions (see Appendices).

Furthermore, when evaluating the research against Yardley's (2000) criteria, a sensitivity to context needed to be addressed. The research was conducted in a politically sensitive and fragile context due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, in which any supposed or potential critique of attitudes, activities and responses at the political level may have been viewed with more scrutiny. As such, approaching the research without bias was integral for integrity and validity but so too was recognising the position of the interviewees and their potential bias (Bryman 2008), particularly in the case with the state partner.

Similarly, considerations also needed to be made regarding researcher wellbeing. It was found that researcher wellbeing could rely somewhat substantially on the institutional environment and its ability to give space to researcher wellbeing, as well as the provision of resources and support (Leiby et al. 2025). As such, the researcher utilised the support provided and online resources available. Mitigation also included acknowledging the signs of distress such as anger, frustration, sleep disruptions, heightened awareness of surroundings and loneliness (ibid.) and involved designing the research to minimise exposure to graphic narratives of violence by working primarily with reports and practitioners.

Finally, the storage of data was an important ethical consideration for the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. I used secured data storage software, held these files in a password-protected space and deleted them once they had been used for the purposes set out by the researcher, such as for the writing of the thesis and subsequent research publications, to ensure this privacy and confidentiality.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The research aimed to explore the OSCE's alignment with, and role in, the implementation of the WPS agenda in Ukraine since Russia's full-scale invasion. It was particularly concerned with how the values and goals of the OSCE were either in contradiction to or reflective of those of the WPS agenda and its aims, how the activities and engagement with gender impacted the extent of WPS implementation in Ukraine, and what notions of peace and security were presented by the OSCE by asking (1) To what extent does the OSCE reflect the values and goals of the WPS agenda through its work in Ukraine? (1(a)) How does the OSCE engage 'gender' within its Ukraine programmes?, (1(b)) How does the OSCE delineate peace and security in the context of Ukraine?, and (2) How has the OSCE contributed to the implementation of the WPS agenda in Ukraine?

These research questions were presented in response to a lack of empirical research into the OSCE's activities in Ukraine, particularly in concern with the WPS agenda and a wider gap in the scholarship regarding research in the present conflict-settings and in the post-socialist space.

The research identified four overarching themes that position the OSCE as a key actor and advocate for the WPS in Ukraine, utilising its institutional norms on gender mainstreaming and comprehensive security mandate to deliver impactful projects that provide support and resilience to state authorities and NGOs. Sub-themes reveal nuances in these areas as well as some limitations to localisation based on political will, operating in a conflict context, and somewhat inconsistent, short-term support to civil society. The degree to which WPS implementation includes civil society and women-led organisations varies; most prominently seen in the Gender Issues Programme where localisation is explicitly discussed in its values and goals.

The themes will be presented in the following order: (1) Centrality of Gender through Mainstreaming, (2) Supporting Resilience, (3) Security through Gendered, Human and

Transnational Lenses, and (4) Barriers to Implementation and its impact on Localisation. The chapter will end with a brief conclusion before moving onto the discussion chapter.

5.2 Centrality of Gender through Mainstreaming

The centrality of gender through mainstreaming provides a crucial summary and exploration of the multiple ways the OSCE refers to the advancement of gender equality and encouragements of gender sensitivity and inclusion as an institutional norm, solidified through its policy commitments. The research finds that the 2004 Gender Action Plan is clear in its requirements of OSCE programmes and there is strong evidence of its role as an influential driver of the implementation of the WPS agenda and gender mainstreaming in practice.

Recent policy reports have expressed commitments towards gender mainstreaming and the statements suggest that the OSCE considers gender as early as in the planning stages and to a broad scope. This was identified in the data under the wider sub-theme 'values and commitments' and can be shown in extracts such as:

> 'In the face of the current crisis in Europe, the Organisation's pivot to the situation in Ukraine and other participating States has ensured gender mainstreaming throughout its multi-level response.' (Policy Report 2022)

> 'Secretariat projects are developed with a Gender Marker 2 which guarantees that a gender perspective is effectively taken into account in the planning and implementation of projects.' (Policy Report 2024)

> 'highlighted prominently in the 2004 Action Plan is the OSCE's role in supporting the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325, by supporting its participating States with the development of National Action Plans, enabling women to become more integrated into the security sector, and strengthening their role in conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict reconstruction.' (Policy Report 2024)

> "The OSCE Action Plan explicitly emphasizes women empowerment as an essential factor for comprehensive security and calls on all OSCE executive structures to develop activities to support it." (Policy Report 2024)

Despite the wider claim that 'the OSCE's role in supporting the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325, [includes] supporting its participating States with the development of National Action Plans,' (Policy Report 2024) and the comment "the results of our work now is being part of the discussion in the draft national action plan because this methodology was supported by us." (Interview 4), the research finds discrepancy and a lack of clarity regarding the extent of contribution of the OSCE to the review of Ukraine's WPS NAP, as one CSO partner claims, "I coordinate a national process to adopt a new NAP this year but it is without the support of OSCE" (Interview 5). The OSCE practitioner also stated "the WIN Project was not involved in the NAP review. We didn't support WICC and ICAN Network on this matter." (Interview 4). Whether other OSCE activities in Ukraine outside of the programmes studied had involvement in the review of Ukraine's latest NAP could not be determined during this research but the research finds the involvement of the OSCE to be minor and is further discussed in relation to localisation efforts in Chapter 6.5.

Nevertheless, when considering what insights the data can provide regarding the engagement with gender and contributions to the WPS implementation, the priority given to gender mainstreaming is pronounced and a clear driver of an alignment to the goals of the WPS agenda, including explicit commitment and recognition of UNSCR 1325; making reference to its similar value-alignment with the OSCE's 2004 Gender Action Plan.

This is supported by data collected in semi-structured interviews with OSCE practitioners working on Ukraine when they position gender mainstreaming as a key priority and objective across their work, including in comments such as:

> "our main objective is to make gender mainstreaming of mine action shift from more declarative and nominal role to the real one, which would be actually present in the legislation and, of course, in practice." (Interview 2)

> "trying to turn attention more to this [gender mainstreaming] topic and to importance and complexity of this topic, and especially to the benefits this would bring" (Interview 2)

> "the innovative ways of including gender equality and I mean gender mainstreaming in the sense for all dimensions of work on the OSCE." (Interview 4)

The quotes make particular reference to commitments that go beyond being performative. Arguably, this is evidenced by the data when there is a recognition of how gender mainstreaming efforts should not be simply "declarative", but instead make an impact "in practice".

Further evidence of gender mainstreaming across portfolios is also heavily featured across the data, from policy reports and interviews that state 'the SPU…in a new business related project.'(Policy Report 2023), to "judicial education, we have on constitutional justice, we have continuation that relates to how to make gender sensitive and inclusive justice." (Interview 1), training experts in gender mainstreaming in "their humanitarian responses" (Interview 4), and reflections made by state partners working with the OSCE programmes in Ukraine that support those made in interviews, regarding the integration of, "gender perspectives into trainings and expert discussions, [which] encourage a balanced participation of women and men in capacity-building activities. They (OSCE) share international best practice on gender equality within justice institutions and raise awareness of the importance of gender-sensitive policies in judicial and administrative processes." (Interview 6)

Additionally, in examining the thought process and planning behind gender mainstreaming, the data shows through the quote, "when we do the project planning, we take into account what is the situation with gender equality in this specific sphere, how [is] the situation between men and women different and what can we do to bridge the gaps that we identify." (Interview 1), that the OSCE understands and engages with 'gender as difference' (Jaggar 1983); alluding to discriminatory experiences as a result of gender differences, with a goal of minimising such impacts.

Furthermore, when asked why gender mainstreaming in mine action is important, the understanding of gender is further contextualised through the sub-theme 'reasoning' and is explained across the data largely from a security standpoint, highlighting similar arguments to the WPS agenda. This is presented in the data through the following quotes:

> "Equal opportunities and the engagement of women is the national interest of the state…One reason [for accepting gender equality] is also, of course, the security situation, because for Ukraine… there's a huge lack of a workforce" (Interview 2)

> "This [military] context cannot be separated [with gender equality] because you have a society that is still operational…it's all part of the canvas of the whole society." (Interview 4)

> "Russia's war against Ukraine is having devastating and disproportionate impacts on Ukrainian women and girls who are today at high risk of abuse, trafficking and violence…" (Public Communications)

Identifying again that policy is a key driver leading to the centrality of gender mainstreaming in Ukrainian programmes, when stating "We always consider our gender action plan and other OSCE documents when we develop the new projects" (Interview 3).

As such, the research finds that the OSCE aims to reduce gender inequalities by recognising why the inclusion and participation of women is beneficial in conflict-settings, arguing the importance of addressing gender equality in conflict-settings, and acknowledging the gendered impacts of war; all in great alignment with WPS agenda argumentation under the participation and prevention pillars.

5.3 Supporting Resilience

The consistent referencing to a strengthening of state institutions and social systems suggests a provision of support that goes beyond the militarised, towards a capacity-building of resilience and fortitude, heightened after Russia's full-scale invasion. There is an emphasis placed on support at the state and civic level with the aim of improving access to justice and accountability and preparing for recovery and rehabilitation in a forward-looking approach. Through the sub-theme 'Supporting Ukraine Through Resilient Institutions', the data evidences such points:

> 'addressing the immediate threats and risks posed by the war and on supporting Ukrainian institutions and civil society organizations in developing Ukraine's long-term democratic and social resilience' (Public Communications)

> 'Supporting Ukraine - its government, people, civil society and institutions - has been and remains the OSCE's top priority' (Public Communication)

> "we already started in 2022 to strategise what was next, what was going to happen after any kind of military action is going to stop or I mean ceasefire or anything" (Interview 4)

> "We are helping Ukraine to deal with the consequences of the war on the one hand, and on the other, we are helping Ukraine to implement its commitments in terms of the resilience of its democratic institutions, the rule of law institutions. So it's a two side effect…One is enhancing the security versus challenges of war. And another one is helping the institutions to grow and become more resilient" (Interview 1)

> "A strength has been the OSCE's constructive cooperation and responsiveness to Ukraine's evolving needs, especially in the context of ongoing reforms" (Interview 6)

> "the programme definitely contributes to rehabilitation and recovery, which is essential because...Ukraine cannot wait for the war to be over to start recovery" (Interview 2)

Interestingly, there is somewhat of a distinction between support given in response to the conflict compared with support provided to state institutions in a longer-term vision of growth, suggesting that democratic and judicial institutions are in need of attention for stable security, irrespective of the war. These findings, when considered in tandem with other data expressing the gendered nature of the OSCE's work, indicate a contribution towards the goals of the WPS agenda in its relief and recovery pillar.

In a similar vein, when taking into account the position of women and engagements with gender in resilience-building initiatives, the OSCE indicates the importance of women's inclusion for recovery, through the sub-theme 'Gendered Justice, Recovery and Rehabilitation'. The areas of recovery are heavily focused on the judicial institutions and incorporate "judicial education…this group of civil society trained on trial monitoring on gender-based violence cases." (Interview 1), which mirrors statements made in the naturally-occurring data such as the focus on the 'on a variety of projects to promote gender equality, address gender-based and sexual violence, as well as non-discrimination...' (Policy Report 2024), and data from state partners interviewed when they describe how "The OSCE encourages partner institutions, including courts, to incorporate gender-sensitive approaches in professional development, internal policies, and institutional culture." (Interview 6).

Furthermore, the data shows how OSCE practitioners are concerned with a neglect of issues such as GBV in recovery and reconstruction efforts in Ukraine when they explain:

> "GBV is usually not part of the discussions, even for the recovery and reconstruction. It's in some more informal settings yes, but the formal agenda doesn't have the clear messages regarding the violence and the response, especially the prevention. So we are advocating for having and including these aspects of recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine." (Interview 4)

The research also finds that this inclusion of gender in resilience and recovery activities is present due to a strong belief that:

> 'supporting women's leadership and centering women's voices and experiences in recovery and peacebuilding, Ukraine and other participating States across the OSCE region can build not only stronger institutions and economies but also more resilient and inclusive societies.' (Public Communications)

They reflect broader findings that indicate that the OSCE see great value for the inclusion of women in resilience, leadership, peacebuilding and recovery, and utilise the WPS agenda to support goals in these areas. For example, the data discusses:

> 'Resolution 1325 affirmed that women are indispensable actors in building peace, security and recovery…how central the WPS agenda remains, both in times of war and in planning for a sustainable and just peace in the future.' (Public Communications)

> "we needed to adapt in many ways regarding the war crimes, support to women in security… the major focus was on the accountability for the war crimes in the part of the security, like the WPS agenda." (Interview 4)

> 'focused on sustaining long-term support for GBV survivors, ensuring inclusivity and adopting a needs-based approach' (Policy Report 2024)

Arguably, the impact of all of these areas cannot be fully explored until post-conflict but the impact of initiatives such as leadership support is present in the research, as the data explains, "training for women who want to be leaders and have some plans to have a role in the territory communities on "leader[ship] skills, [including] speaking…how you should use your voice to influence", are found to be "very impactful… They really use the skills in our life." (Interview 5).

Overall, the findings under this theme highlight that women's inclusion in recovery and peacebuilding processes is a priority and draws attention to the challenges faced in a context that does not advocate for such inclusions and does not view issues such as gender-based violence as central in the recovery of Ukraine post-conflict. There is also a sense of this work being a long-term area of focus, not only in the OSCE's statements but through their initiatives, such as the exchange project established between Ukrainian women and women from Bosnia and Herzegovina on the topic of conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence. Similarly, through their focus on rule of law and gender mainstreaming within judicial reform, practical examples of what building blocks are being formed by the OSCE to support this long-term recovery are offered. This is mirrored when assessing constructions and understandings of peace and security presented in the data, discussed in Chapter 5.4 below and Chapter 6.4.

5.4 Security through Gendered, Human and Transnational Lenses

When considering the framing and delineation of peace and security by the OSCE in Ukraine, there is a combination of hard and human security themes within the data, with a stronger sense of human security being understood in gendered terms. For example, this is evidenced with statements like 'Sustainable security demands that women participate and play an integral role in decision-making processes at all levels.' (Public Communications).

Similarly, the current status of the conflict was arguably the leading factor in these delineations but not frequently separated from gender and the inclusion of women is it explained:

> "we have Ukraine as the core efforts for our project… it's of course cross-cutting, like in the nexus of the WPS, and economical and environmental dimension and the third dimension is the elimination [of] violence against women and this is one of our key priorities." (Interview 4)

> "Women in conflict and post-conflict settings are particularly affected, suffering job loss, curtailed access to education and economic opportunities, and a sharp increase in gender-based violence" (Policy Report 2022)

> "lightning for instance on the streets like even this...and of course now is the focus on the security, this heavy security and the women in the security sector to enhance their capacity and to localise their needs" (Interview 4)

These findings are supported by the CSO partner who explains the use of an OSCE network under the GIP:

> "we [as part of the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders] are sharing actual information about [our] situation with other countries. We have unique experience in this war. That is why our experience [is] very important to share to help other countries to prevent some actions or some invasion. After sharing, we try to understand some common[alities]... which helps us to analyse a global situation and find success stories." (Interview 5)

Furthermore, the research finds a delineation of security by the OSCE as a broader expression of human security covering psychological, economic, environmental, food security with transnational elements. Thus, understanding peace and security as regional and global, not just domestic. This is evidenced in the data in the following extracts:

> "if you deal with projects that will help Ukraine better demining [and] clear lands that were affected by the security, it means that Ukrainian farmers will be able to work there faster. Then, it's also one of the things that can bring better, wider security because it also means that these farmers will not flood other countries as refugees. They will not take the jobs of other people in other countries, raising some tensions there. That's a very theoretical example, but that's how it works. If you strengthen these elements, like in a puzzle, you add it here, here, and here, in the end, you have better security." (Interview 1)

> "Mine contamination led to the chain of negative events…increasing the prices abroad...it's going far away from the world's well-being and food security" (Interview 2)

> "violence will go and grow in other places rather than just in Ukraine. So it will be trans-border issue. And for us, it's again, in my opinion, and what we're doing, it's again investing in the security and the human capital" (Interview 4)

In addition, although references to peace were less explicit, when the meaning of peace was evident, this took a more mixed approach with emphasis placed on notions of immediate and negative peace as unavoidable when considering pathways to sustainable peace, such as through the recognition that:

> "We cannot stop Putin with these trainings but peace in the country, well, hopefully, the war sometime will end. I want to believe in it. So, these trainings and these projects will contribute to the future peace of the country, because there has to be the inner communication and mutual understanding between people inside the country to have peace." (Interview 3)

Whilst also discussing the rise in domestic violence in Ukraine since the war and its relation to peace; uniquely framing peace in a way that is a potential outlier when it describes:

> "Since 2022, there has been a 25% increase in domestic violence cases in Ukraine. That's why when all these veterans come back to their families, there will be even more problems [with violence] because of an adaptation to peace, to a peaceful life because of psychological problems of veterans." (Interview 3)

> "So the military context is where we live and this should be integrated into the whole planning of the policies. Of course, it's the priority. Our defence is the priority" (Interview 4)

Although there is an underlying understanding of insecurity due to domestic violence, the idea of peace for a (male) veteran, is presented as the home, away from the war-zone, even with the presence of psychological issues and violence. As such, this indicates a closer notion of negative peace. This differs from the wider findings that have constructed and framed peace in more of the positive sense, taking into account the status of women, gender insecurities and human security concerns.

After considering the data holistically, the research finds that peace is understood as external, with the end of war, internal with inner mutual acceptance and understanding, and transnational. The data indicates the OSCE's approach and perspective of security, alluding to its three dimensions and this alignment with the WPS. It is wide-ranging in scope, moving beyond a militarisation and masculine perspective towards the consideration of women's security concerns when referring to economic, educational, and physical security risks posed by war, as well as the globalised impact of the war and how sharing of insights at a global level through the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders is beneficial for future, regional peace, solidarity and support through women's participation and networks. This offers insightful understandings of how the OSCE

makes a varied contribution to the WPS agenda through feminist and gender-inclusive approaches in responding to insecurity and planning for peace.

5.5 Barriers to Implementation and its Impact on Localisation

Although the research has found an array of influential drivers of WPS implementation and value alignment, it has also identified some critical internal and external barriers that do restrict its contributions and effectiveness. Externally, these are predominantly focused on the physical security situation and limitations to programme implementation in a state at war. Internally, institutional regulations and capacity do limit its impact, as well as an incoherency of localisation of the WPS agenda, in part due to the security situation. The research finds that the barriers do not pose critical restrictions on contribution but their presentation in the data was significant enough for discussion.

The data indicates external barriers in implementing gender mainstreaming and equality initiatives that would otherwise contribute to the WPS implementation. Whether this be the internal mandate of the OSCE that requires reliance on the political will of national stakeholders through consensus, recognised by OSCE practitioners as they understand "we have some certain limitations for the involvements…we're not excluding anyone, it's still the consensus in this organisation" (Interview 4), and their partner, as they describe how "Challenges generally arise from the OSCE's comprehensive institutional framework and its need to maintain transparency, accountability, and consensus among participating States. While these safeguards are essential, they can occasionally result in slower implementation or additional bureaucratic steps." (Interview 6)

Additionally, the research identified external issues for reaching key state officials in gender equality training as they describe "challenges because a lot of National Police Officers have to go to the front-line and the workload is really high for them right now." (Interview 3), and other extracts explain the lack of political will and abilities of state institutions the OSCE work with:

> "There are some things that they like more. Some treatment or some trainings that are really needed and the topic of gender mainstreaming is pretty usually disregarded...Some phrases like, we don't have any problem with women… I

> think that the OSCE has a very good capacity and practices in terms of the gender mainstreaming approaches, but of course, we are following the political will of the country, because it's the requirement and agreement between the host country and the OSCE…You cannot just resolve it with your own political will. It's the question of the whole economy. So I think resources are the main issue in the way of securing gender equality." (Interview 2)

> "the role of gender advisors, which are embedded in the governmental agencies, they are carried out most usually by people for whom this is not the main role...So, basically, this is the additional role, most nominal, because they have to do it, but they don't usually, they are usually very motivated, but [do] not know how to implement the policies and everything. And again, of course, it doesn't matter how good they would be, if there is no political will, then it's really hard to advance something." (Interview 2)

Furthermore, there is also an indication of an unmet demand that threatens the effectiveness and reach of projects and activities from both the OSCE and its CSO partners:

> "they [civil society] are looking for more and more support, and we are not in a position to meet all the requests. So this is one of the challenges that we are afraid that there is a risk that some of the expertise that was accumulated by Ukrainian civil society, it may, so to speak, degrade as the civil society is losing funding". (Interview 1)

> "Maybe it is an additional gap that they do not have long term projects, for example, half a year, maximum one year…to have some long term projects as minimum two years would be good...We created this [Women Peace Dialogue] platform in 2015. Time to time we have support from OSCE…But now, it has another funding, not OSCE." (Interview 5)

> "we have very little funding from OSCE…but we have good communication." (Interview 5)

Whether this indicates somewhat of a reliance on civil society as an implementing partner or reliance on their ability to provide greater localisation efforts through their expertise is not explicitly understood but could be deferred in the data when the role of NGOs and the OSCE's relationship with them have been discussed. Here, the extent of the OSCE's role in localisation of the WPS can be analysed using key data extracts that indicate an incoherence in the OSCE's engagement with and focus given to NGOs and civil society, including inconsistency with funding and long-term project support.

Moreover, the research finds that this localisation thus varies depending on the programme, through the sub-theme 'levels of localisation', explained in the following extracts:

> "we, as the OSCE and we, as SPU, we don't contact the common people. We contact the people who support the common people, I would say, with specialists…We teach psychologists, social service providers, national police officers." (Interview 3)

> "work on the request of our national partners and national partners are the ministries, sometimes the NGOs but in the majority of the cases, there are the ministries. We can form our project based on the request of the ministry and based on the real life challenges that we know from the ground level." (Interview 3)

> "If we start with the localisation. First of all, the primary focus of the organisation that we supported was to make the comprehensive local action plans because sometimes what regional councils do [is] they just copy paste the text of the national action plan…and it was the way of saying okay, we have the local needs, we have the local problems". (Interview 4)

> "The primary goal was to strengthen the female civil society and especially now when women have more voice and the local women are also more represented in various levels of work. Local women are also part of our focus with gender… we are trying to work mostly with all women organisations…Nothing about women without women." (Interview 4)

This includes mixed feedback from the CSO partner interviewed as they agree that "Yes [the OSCE does value and prioritise working with civil society]..., yes, I am very happy that the OSCE has the possibility at times to support all we need for a period. When we have some needs, we communicate with OSCE…it's very helpful for us." (Interview 5) but also comment about difficulties of working in a conflict-setting, as they describe how "Every day our situation changes, it is very dynamic. We live for more than 12 years in war. It is a unique situation and the OSCE should understand. I'm not sure they understand really." (Interview 5)

The research finds that the GIP programme, specifically working on the advancement of gender equality, is more committed to localisation and the inclusion of civil society actors at the local level. There were findings that evidenced a freedom and flexibility in this support to civil society in which they had the jurisdiction to decide on the projects that

would be supported and delivered, with little imposition on an agenda or mandate, besides an alignment with the OSCE commitments. This is in comparison with the SPU programme where it is found to work more closely with national partners such as ministries and state authorities, citing capacity as a restriction in this regard.

In addition, the research finds that the extent of localisation is also impacted by the security situation and the safety risk in some parts of Ukraine, through the sub-theme 'Impact of the Security Situation on Localisation'**.** The following extracts from the data explain:

> "you need to think about what to do in case of a raid alert...We've managed to refocus our operation on how to mitigate those security challenges, but there are still challenges" (Interview 1)
>
> "We [demining] do not work directly, at least for now, with the communities in the east or south, because unfortunately, we have a lot of security limitations…" (Interview 2)
>
> "we are not allowed to go there with the business trips to these cities. And this is a security issue." (Interview 3)

As shown, the security situation restricts the extent of localised operations and places demands on partners to travel to Kyiv, limiting the ability of the OSCE to be 'on the ground'. Having said this, there is a clear recognition of this limitation and the data indicates a certain discontent by OSCE practitioners for not being able to have a wider, more localised reach when they describe, "This is a challenge for me because as [a] Ukrainian, it's difficult for me to explain that "we can't come to you. Yeah, but we live here, so why don't you come to me?" It's just a security issue." (Interview 3), and they recognise the value of greater contact at the local level when they argue "it would be much more beneficial to speak to people there and to be able to take a look at the demining process as it is." (Interview 2).

5.6 Conclusion

To conclude, the research findings reveal a compelling alignment of values and goals between the OSCE and its activities in Ukraine and the WPS agenda. Similarities arise in

areas of interest, such as women's participation in peacebuilding and recovery, gender equality advancements in judicial systems and humanitarian responses, and survivor-centred and justice-oriented responses to gender-based violence.

The findings also indicated an extensive and gendered delineation of peace and security which included explicit references to the use and value of the WPS agenda in security initiatives, which gave attention to security as transnational, environmental, economic and psychological, the importance of women and girls' perspectives for security, and the pressing issue of gender-based violence as a major security concern.

Finally, the research also identified a number of barriers faced by the OSCE which impacted the significance of its contributions towards WPS implementation, namely the political will of national stakeholders, resource and capacity, and the extent of localisation due to limitations with physical access and a varied level of engagement with civil society actors.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

In this penultimate chapter, the key findings will be contextualised within the wider trends and findings identified in the academic literature in chapter 2 and discussed through the theoretical framework set out in chapter 3. The findings will be placed within debates concerning the interpretation and application of the WPS agenda through gender equality and security constructions, as well as the role and extent of international organisations to localise the WPS agenda and avoid militarisation, even in highly militarised contexts. The discussion largely argues that the OSCE has made significant and wide-ranging contributions towards the implementation for the WPS in Ukraine that spans across prevention, participation, protection,and relief and recovery. Through the exploration of militarisation and localisation, similarities to the previous literature are found, similarities which have fuelled feminist critiques of the WPS agenda. It can be suggested that this research would provide further evidence of these critical claims but not to the extent or strength of studies researching other international organisations such as NATO and the EU. In addition, the discussion chapter pays particular attention to the influence of OSCE policy and its contributions on responding to GBV. Finally, the chapter ends with reflections on the significance and implications of the research, including for key stakeholders such as civil society, the OSCE and other IOs operating within Ukraine, and outlines the limitations and recommendations for future research.

6.2 Centrality of Gender Through Mainstreaming: from policy to practice

The 2004 Gender Action Plan has been a key driver in WPS alignment and implementation through its provisions on gender mainstreaming (GM). The policy puts into practice the values and goals of the WPS agenda. Most importantly, advancing gender equality and instilling a gender-sensitivity in activities and outcomes. With this in mind, it can be argued that gender inclusion has become an institutional norm expressed through the activities, aims and actors operating within the OSCE. For example, the presence of strong advocates in the OSCE, such as Helga Schmid and Dr Lara Scarpitta,

are key actors driving gender mainstreaming throughout OSCE activities, particularly with concern to Ukraine and the gendered consequences of the conflict seen domestically and throughout the OSCE region. Activities and areas of focus cut across the four pillars of the WPS agenda due to this GM approach, including: participation, with initiatives such as the Young Women 4 Peace programme, the Women Peace Leadership Programme and the Global Network for Women Peacebuilders; prevention through efforts to offer psychological support to veterans and demining in farming communities; protection via anti-GBV and combatting trafficking in human beings (CTHB) work; and relief and recovery through resilience-building, centring gender in reconstruction decision-making, and the continued delivery of an exchange initiative between human rights defenders and civil society representatives from Ukraine and Bosnia and Herzegovina to advocate and stress the prioritisation of including the issue of violence against women and girls and CRSV in post-conflict recovery and reconstruction.

The requirement of the OSCE to adhere to its broader policy and commitments when working with national partners supports previous findings within the literature that international organisations do increase political will for advancing the WPS agenda (Ansorg and Haastrup 2018). Despite further findings that political will can be barrier to implementation, generally the OSCE's commitment to gender mainstreaming has built capacity of many national partners and state institutions, such as law enforcement, social service providers, and the constitutional court, to integrate gender sensitivity within their work, as well as offering training to improve the ability of gender advisors across ministries to perform their roles.

Within a militarised society, the WPS agenda and surrounding scholarship indicate the frequent downfalls and challenges when attempting to place women's needs and voices in influential positions during times of war, often due to a relationship of masculinity with militarisation (Cockburn 2013). The OSCE have been able to demilitarise the agenda to some extent due to this institutionalisation of gender but the extent of its work beyond making conflict safe for women can be debated and will be discussed throughout the chapter. For example, the data analysed from public communications expresses the OSCE's familiarity with the devastating impacts of the war on Ukrainian women and the

inability to remove gender inequality concerns from the military context, whilst their efforts to minimise and respond to these impacts are evident. However, there are some references to how efforts towards gender equality are not driven by the prevention mandate of the WPS agenda but by its benefits to a militarised society in which gender equality is useful for strengthening security through the workforce and making demining more effective with the inclusion of women in this sector. As such, the OSCE's work currently is very much centred on managing consequences of militarisation and reducing the impact of war. As will also be argued in section 6.4, this does align with the values and goals of the WPS agenda under its protection and participation pillars but also provides evidence as to why demilitarisation of the WPS agenda is not prioritised or realised in practice, despite criticisms, and indicates the inability of IOs to demilitarise societies during periods of active conflict.

Additionally, the militarisation of society is clearly presented as a catalyst for domestic violence across the data. Yet, in one section of the data, militarisation is viewed as a priority when it comes to planning policy and defence of the state. It can be stated that there is not sufficient data to argue the OSCE has favoured a militarisation of the WPS agenda but can offer interesting considerations of how militarisation cannot be solely avoided in conflict-settings.

Similarly, it can be argued that the strength of the OSCE 2004 Gender Action Plan policy is its distinction as a policy not of WPS implementation specifically, but of institutionalised gender mainstreaming, irrespective of the context in which it is applied. The literature recommended organisations such as NATO to look inwards when applying WPS policies (Wright 2022), which is arguably what the 2004 Gender Action Plan and gender mainstreaming practices offer the OSCE. Gender mainstreaming and its alignment with the WPS agenda are not sectioned off to a special representative or working group but integrated at project planning, approval and delivery across the ExB SPU and GIP programmes. These insights affirm the value in applying a feminist institutionalist theory when making contributions towards the WPS scholarship and can help to explain why gender mainstreaming policies that shift institutional norms on gender are more impactful than when there is a segregation of the activities and reporting on global normative

frameworks such as the WPS agenda. The policy's impact on the OSCE's WPS contributions is a clear example of how gender equality initiatives impact the output from institutions, as explained by Holmes (2020).

Therefore, unlike the findings by Ansorg and Haastrup (2018) in their analysis of gender mainstreaming processes within the EU's SSR Ukrainian programme, when this research applied feminist institutionalism, it found an extensive gender inclusive approach that spans across actors, activities and values. In turn, resulting in the conclusion that active implementation of the WPS agenda through the OSCE was not limited, as in the case of the EU, but instead broad and far reaching.

6.3 Supporting Resilience: spotlight on GBV

Supporting resilience through the strengthening of democratic and rule of law institutions such as state ministries and the constitutional court is one key aspect of recovery and reconstruction identified as an area of focus for the OSCE. The research finds this was a continuous and prioritised area of work, conducted before Russia's full-scale invasion, which was framed as a goal set despite the conflict but reorganised and heightened due to the war. Within these areas, the research found numerous references not only to providing support to Ukraine but also to the importance of the participation and leadership of women and their voice in peacebuilding and recovery measures, to ensure its inclusivity.

One example that came up time and again in the research was the exchange initiative between human rights defenders and activists from Ukraine and from Bosnia and Herzegovina focused on protection in the response to VAWG and the long-term support for survivors of GBV that could be offered in recovery and reconstruction efforts. Here, brought forward is the idea of transnational feminist networks explored by Harrington (2016) in their understanding of the origins and drivers of the WPS agenda. The examples of the OSCE's use of transnational networks of women such as the Young Women 4 Peace, the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, the Women's Peace Leadership Programme and the exchange described above, all indicate the use and contribution that such networks can make in strengthening the WPS agenda. As such, it is

argued here that the OSCE does not only align with the goals of the WPS agenda but also to reflect and continue its origins through the exchanges between women and exchanges between East-West.

Moreover, the research supports O'Sullivan's (2019) findings that IOs, in this case the OSCE, are key drivers in peacebuilding, state-building and humanitarian support for Ukraine and mirrors their findings that the OSCE is one IO particularly committed to funding gender equality projects. When understanding why this may be the case, the strong policy on gender mainstreaming discussed in section 6.2 of this chapter can be considered.

Similarly, there was notable reference to GBV and the importance of its address for future peace and security in Ukraine through the idea of 'war-related gender justice' (Policy Report 2022).When assessing the findings, the research claims that the actions of the OSCE in responding to GBV and CRSV is survivor-centric and positions activists and defenders in places of empowerment, ownership and community whilst ensuring responsibility for justice, accountability and psychological support is firmly situated with duty-bearers such as judicial bodies, the State Emergency Services of Ukraine (SESU), and social service providers. Actions have included trial monitoring training for civil society on cases related to GBV, advocacy for the inclusion of GBV in broader recovery and reconstruction initiatives, and promoting gender equality in judicial systems. These forward-facing and survivor-centric values presented in the research align and reflect the values and goals of the WPS agenda and the contributions of IOs the agenda hoped would come to fruition as a result of its introduction.

When considering the findings within the broader literature, they indicate that particular attention has been paid to the sexual violence resolutions foundational to the WPS agenda (Otto 2018). It can be argued the OSCE is conscious of the positon and centrality of sexual violence and GBV during conflict for the agenda and for Ukraine, and helps to contribute to the seriousness and scale of the issue in Ukraine that is highlighted in the literature. More specifically, the recommendations expressed in the literature, such as the need for survivor-centred provisions which are sensitive to survivors' needs and

conditions, are reflective of the values, goals and activities of the OSCE in Ukraine on GBV (Morgan et al. 2023) but given the continuous call for greater investment in these areas and other research findings that indicate gaps in capacity-building for psychosocial and legal support for survivors (Schved and Nokhrina 2024), the limitations in the capacity, resource and reach of the OSCE are felt.

Furthermore, the goals of the OSCE to improve justice and accountability measures and the inclusion of survivors in peacebuilding initiatives through regional networks, with the intention of improving sustainable peace and reconciliation efforts in the future, align with the literature's advocacy of transitional justice tools and the destigmatisation of CRSV using past examples present in the OSCE region to drive this prioritisation (Schved and Nokhrina 2024).

Overall, the OSCE helps to work in areas where gaps exist in the coverage and response of CRSV identified by Capasso et al. (2022a) through its activities in Ukraine and the values the OSCE applies, strengthening the overall impact and application of the WPS agenda. However, gaps persist and the impact of the OSCE does not address all areas in need of resources and investment.

6.4 Security through Gendered, Human, and Transnational Lenses

The research found that the OSCE's delineation of peace and security went beyond a militarised and 'heavy security' conception, even whilst operating in a conflict-setting. It found that the OSCE's security had gendered, human and transnational dimensions that intersected, including in instances of 'heavy security' issues such as demining. In this case, mine action was a priority due to its psychological, economic, social and global impacts. Security issues presented including women's safety and lighting on the streets, access to educational and economic opportunities, mental wellbeing, and most prominently, GBV, as previously explored, in alignment with previous studies that evaluated WPS implementation through the consideration of material changes in the lives of women (Kähkönen 2023). There was some reference to supporting women in the security sector and encouraging their involvement in demining, which leans more towards the militarisation of the WPS agenda but this was not to such a large extent. As

such, findings by O'Sullivan (2019), such as the prioritisation of security sector reforms above socio-economic inequalities, were not reflected in this research.

Having said this, there was no strong evidence of the OSCE's contributions towards disarmament or demilitarisation. The strong rhetoric of support for Ukraine by the OSCE, the reference to defence as a priority and the noting of the recognition of female soldiers in the celebration of defenders day by the state being positively framed as an advancement of gender inclusion and equality in one interview, does not indicate a political stance towards pacifism as a priority, as is often the advocation in feminist peace organisations such as the WILPF, who in-part helped to develop the WPS agenda. Disarmament was not openly expressed as a key priority or goal under the idea of security, so its absence in itself can be an indication of the OSCE's limits in terms of the prevention pillar.

Having said this, although the scope of the research did not extend to an evaluation of the efforts of the OSCE in conflict prevention before Russia's full-scale invasion, the broad understanding of security found within this research indicates an understanding of peace that goes beyond the beginning and end of active conflict or invasion; in other words, negative peace. When considering this point, Renzulli's (2017) findings regarding the neglection of the prevention pillar of the WPS agenda can be challenged if considering prevention through the concept of a continuum of violence (Kelly 1987) and insecurity, aimed at avoiding the escalation or recurrence of social and gendered insecurities, such as GBV, as opposed to preventing solely military insecurities (European Parliament 2025). It is argued that the OSCE is contributing to this prevention pillar through the combination of this forward-looking approach explored under the theme, 'supporting resilience', and the combating of society-wide gendered inequalities under the human, comprehensive security approach of its mandate.

Therefore, when applying the recommendations of Cockburn (2013) to broaden understandings of peace and security beyond militarism towards feminist peace and root causes, the research argues that the OSCE is contributing in this way. For example, recognising that the psychological state of veterans once home increases cases of

domestic violence leads to efforts in supporting veterans. This indicates a focus on the prevention of the continuum of violence that women could be subjected to post-conflict. However, when future prevention is not based on preventing war per-say but preventing the extent of the negative impacts of war, it is also contributing to the notion of 'making war safe for women' proposed by Shepherd (2016), which falls into arguments posed in the critique of the WPS agenda and its failures to go beyond this militarisation. This itself does not fall in contradiction with the WPS agenda but can act as evidence to show the merit and validity of this critique.

The analysis also shows how one issue, such as GBV, can be approached from different angles and through different projects by one organisation, which results in the addressing of different pillars of the WPS agenda, such as prevention and relief and recovery, as is the case with the OSCE and their work on both judicial trainings and psychologically-focused trainings.

Furthermore, this transnational and global perspective on security offers support to the argument within the literature of the necessity and benefit of looking beyond the global north/south binary (Santoire 2023), particularly in terms of the regional insecurities Ukrainian women are facing when seeking refuge in Central and Eastern Europe (O'Sullivan and Krulišová 2023).

6.5 Barriers to Implementation and its Impact on Localisation

The research findings revealed that internal and external factors to the OSCE acted as barriers to full WPS implementation, mainly in relation to the nature and extent of activities. External factors included the political will of national partners and the abilities of national gender advisors to deliver gender-sensitive work in combination with their capacity to engage with OSCE activities on gender-related areas posed as obstacles in how the OSCE works towards gender mainstreaming and the advancement of gender equality in Ukraine. Other external factors include the economic priorities of these partners and the security situation in the country given the challenges Ukraine faces in its time of war, which have infringed on localisation abilities. Internal factors identified were in combination with external, including their organisational mandate common to

international organisations which requires activities and actions to be approved by the participating State, difficulties with consistent and adequate funding, and project structures that are often limited to the short-term, creating uncertainty over project trajectories for CSO partners.

When reverting back to the literature, the findings align with arguments made by Aroussi (2017), in which it was argued that the gendered nature in state departments can often dictate political will. This is true for both the gendered nature found within the OSCE programmes under examination and the external national partners, and can demonstrate the impact of the former's stronger will on the latter's weaker one. The literature proposed that the role of men and the gender dynamics within institutions matter when setting their priorities. In the case of gender advisors and the OSCE, if these gender advisors are given this role as an additional responsibility without interest or knowledge, this will affect their engagement and ability to deliver change effectively. However, the research found the OSCE was very aware of such barriers and supported Ukrainian ministries in improving the will and ability of such gender advisors.

Moreover, it is argued that the factors identified have contributed towards an inconsistency and incoherence of localisation efforts by the OSCE, and thus, their contributions under the WPS agenda. Most prominently, engagement with civil society varied depending on the programme. It was evident that the programme with a clear, gendered focus had a stronger commitment and drive to engage civil society as partners than those in the ExB SPU programme and a worry was expressed that a lack of funding could impact the level of expertise in Ukrainian civil society. This finding aligns with the wider literature regarding the reliance on civil society's expertise, contribution and their funding driven by external bodies for localisation of the WPS agenda (Dudko and Langenhuizen 2022). There is a pattern of references to a lack of resources, capacity and funding, which led to some discontent from CSOs as they struggled to receive guarantees of long-term support that they argued would have been more beneficial for their projects and for the partnership. When considering the arguments made by Dudko and Langenhuizen (2022), these factors do impact the strength and scale of localisation, according to the literature and the findings of this research.

In a similar vein, the role and influence of gender champions also discussed by Dudko and Langenhuizen (2022) can help to infer the relevance and impact of champions both within the OSCE and the OSCE's fostering of such gender champions in state ministries through their training sessions and gender mainstreaming efforts. The research concludes that the OSCE does drive the presence of gender champions in Ukraine despite the external challenges identified.

Furthermore, the very prominent quote "Nothing about women without women" (Interview 4) reflects the values at the core of the WPS agenda that scholars have been concerned is often lost in its implementation by other IOs such as NATO (Wright 2022). Whilst a greater representation of Ukrainian women's voices have been recommended for more effective WPS agenda application, this research finds that the OSCE mirrors these values and certainly makes efforts at the national level to build networks that attend to the aims of the participation pillar. However, at the local level, despite the advocacy of local need and local action plans, security concerns and limitations to physical access places restrictions on connecting with people in those regions close to the front-line. The challenges of applying the WPS agenda in conflict-setting had impacts on the engagement with national partners and civil society at the local and regional level due to an inability to provide this work safely in-person in the Eastern regions of Ukraine.

Nevertheless, there was also evidence of an internal willingness within the OSCE to centre and prioritise localisation and the engagement of civil society, particularly women's civil society, and examples of these efforts, including positive responses from civil society regarding the benefits and support received from the OSCE, despite challenges. This is in addition to recognition by OSCE programme staff that a local action plan for the WPS agenda is extremely useful for Ukraine. Therefore, there has not been such a level of marginalisation of women's voices or the neglection of diverse gendered insecurities as found in the previous literature, thus positioning the OSCE as an international organisation with strengths in localisation of the agenda when understanding localisation of the WPS agenda in a similar vein as is within the literature, which believes strong localisation supports giving space to Ukrainian women' s voices and engagements with civil society (Wright 2022).

In addition, whilst large parts of the literature have examined NAPs as a way to assess the strength and influence of the WPS agenda in Ukraine and more generally (Kähkönen 2023; Dudko and Langenhuizen 2022; Shepherd 2016), this did not feature heavily in the work of the OSCE. The research found the OSCE programmes in Ukraine were not involved in a recent review and revision of the NAP and work conducted by CSOs on this area was done so without support of the OSCE. As such, it could be argued that the OSCE provides a similar shallow domestic institutionalisation of the WPS agenda that lacks local innovations and fails to comprehensively include local gendered insecurities in this respect, as found by O'Sullivan and Krulišová (2023). It is not to say the OSCE advocated for a replication of western NAPs in Ukraine, as was the case with the research findings of O'Sullivan and Krulišová (2023), but that contributions in this area were lacking all together. On reflection, this could arguably be a sign that the Western donor states supporting Ukrainian programmes are thus avoiding imperialistic impositions that the literature refers to due to the lack of influence and role, but nor are they supporting local organisations' inclusion in this work either.

6.6 Significance and Implications

The research presented offers a detailed, empirically grounded account of how a regional security organisation with a comprehensive security mandate operationalises the WPS agenda in an ongoing, highly militarised conflict in the post-socialist space. By using a feminist institutionalist approach to examine political institutions, as Mackay et al. (2010) suggests, the research has been able to assess the impact of gender equality initiatives, like the 2004 Gender Action Plan policy, on the OSCE's output (Holmes 2020) and has found that cross-organisational policies explicit in their aim to mainstream gender have advantageous effects on the implementation of the WPS agenda and the contributions made in this area by the organisation.

It has made significant contributions to the WPS scholarship by contributing to the limited literature on the OSCE in its analysis of the relationship between gender mainstreaming policy and the WPS agenda. The OSCE can now be considered as an influential actor in WPS implementation in Ukraine and its contributions can be

considered within best practices for international organisations aiming to support the implementation of the WPS agenda in conflict-settings.

Overall, the research has contributed towards the understanding of how international organisations with a security-centred mandate can better uphold their commitments under the WPS agenda and have demonstrated the positive effect that the comprehensive security approach can have for security-focused IOs, in a way not previously seen in Ukraine by other IOs or known prior to this research.

6.7 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Although the research has made important contributions to the literature, it was not without its limitations. Namely, these were limitations in access to civil society and state partners that had a substantial enough relationship with the OSCE for insightful data due to language barriers, war-time pressures on potential participants, and the short-term and sometimes limited nature of partnerships. As such, the depth and breadth of qualitative data from these sources was reduced. Nevertheless, the research was able to gather data from sources who had had significant engagement with either programme under analysis. Additionally, the staffing and portfolio structure within the OSCE offered challenges in identifying staff members who were primarily engaged with activities in Ukraine across the wide scope of work delivered and thus, did have a small impact on the range of organisational perspectives that could be captured through interviews but sampling strategies and the inclusion of naturally-occurring data in addition to the generated data helped to alleviate this limitation. Finally, the scope and focus of the research did limit the research's ability to challenge and extend the wider scholarship in ways that have been suggested. For example, by centring a prominent international organisation, the research remained largely state and institution-centric, reflecting a recurring critique within WPS scholarship that state and IO perspectives often overshadow those of local actors and grassroots initiatives (Kirby and Shepherd 2016). Also, the temporal scope of the research limited its ability to assess changes in OSCE practice and contribution over time, which would have been particularly insightful when evaluating the OSCE's contribution towards the prevention pillar of the WPS agenda.

It would be recommended that future research conduct an in-depth analysis of the impact of the OSCE's actions on gender inclusion and women's participation in peacebuilding during the construction and execution of any future peace plan or process, post-conflict, should this be the result of the conflict.

Furthermore, a longitudinal evaluation assessing post-conflict transitional justice efforts in the area of GBV in recovery and reconstruction initiatives could offer compelling insights into the longer-term impact of the work of the OSCE on this issue. Alternatively, for a larger research project with greater scope, a longitudinal and historical study tracking the extent of gender equality work conducted by the OSCE and its impact at significant periods of insecurity within Ukraine's recent history, including post-conflict of the current period, may offer more detailed insights regarding the role of international organisations under the prevention pillar of the WPS agenda and how these have failed to offer greater security both in the sense of preventing future conflict and in preventing future gendered insecurity that are identified as both root causes of, and risks in, during conflicts (European Parliament 2025).

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

The following concluding chapter will provide an overview of the main research findings in relation to the research aims and questions. It will also consider these findings against the proposed hypothesis before moving on to briefly explain the value and contribution of the study to the field, to summerise the studies limitations, and to provide an overview of the suggested recommendations made for future research.

7.2 Overall Findings

The study finds that the OSCE has made positive contributions to the implementation of the WPS agenda in Ukraine, of which the impact is wide-reaching, if not uneven, at times. This is done so primarily through its strong commitment to gender mainstreaming and its comprehensive and broad understanding of peace and security. Despite such positive contributions, the research also found clear structural and contextual limits that tempered the OSCE's overall impact. Considering such findings, it is suggested that the OSCE's mandate and policies have avoided a heavily militarised approach to WPS implementation, unlike research findings regarding other IOs operating in Ukraine. Instead, the OSCE has a compelling and innovative engagement with gender, peace and security that aligns strongly with the values and goals of the WPS agenda.

Across the four research aims, the data show that the OSCE's priorities in Ukraine centre on strengthening state and judicial institutions, supporting resilience and recovery, and mainstreaming gender across programme design and delivery, particularly through the 2004 Gender Action Plan. These priorities are shaped by both the security context of Russia's full-scale invasion and the organisation's comprehensive security mandate, which pushes its activities beyond narrow, militarised responses. The centrality of gender equality and inclusion through mainstreaming is evident in project planning, implementation and capacity-building, and has fostered institutional norms that support women's participation, gender-sensitive mine action, justice reform, and survivor-centred responses to violence. Generally, the findings indicate that OSCE programmes in Ukraine

are strongly aligned with the agenda's values and goals across all four pillars of prevention, participation, protection, and relief and recovery, even if this alignment is not always framed explicitly in the language used in the WPS agenda.

Furthermore, the study shows that the OSCE positions women as integral actors in peacebuilding and recovery and reconstruction efforts in Ukraine for future, sustainable peace through its creation and support of networks. The OSCE also engages with gender as a way to consider differences in experience and impact and as a lens for guiding institutional practice through its policies and programmes on reducing gendered inequalities in access to justice, participation, and state institutions, including in the recognition of the strategic value of gender equality in Ukraine's conflict context.

When reviewing delineations of peace and security by the OSCE, these concepts are found to be understood through intersectional gendered, human and transnational lenses, combining areas of heavy security such as demining with issues of food security, psychological support, domestic and gender-based violence, human trafficking and the effect this has regionally and globally. As such, peace is framed not only in negative terms, as the absence of armed conflict and active warfare, but also as a social and gendered condition achieved based on the measuring of social, political, and economic stability and prosperity on gendered terms; even if some discourse does frame peace through more negative notions when considering what peace is for veterans.

7.3 Reflections on the Hypothesis

After considering the main findings, it is worthwhile to reflect on how these findings support or oppose the hypothesis made. The hypothesis proposed that the OSCE's implementation of the WPS agenda would mirror those of other IOs in their heavy militarisation of the agenda in Ukraine but would benefit from the gender mainstreaming policy adopted across the organisation, which would improve alignment with values and goals regarding gender inclusivity and sensitivity in the security sector. It also hypothesised that the OSCE's contributions would be limited due to a weaker capacity and political influence in comparison to IOs such as NATO, EU and UN.

The research findings stand in opposition with the first part of the hypothesis proposed but seems to support the latter propositions regarding the influence of gender mainstreaming and the impact of the OSCE's capacity and political influence. Firstly, while the militarised context is ever-present and there are moments where gender equality is instrumentalised to strengthen security or improve the effectiveness of demining, the overarching picture presented is of an organisation using gender mainstreaming to broaden security beyond military concerns and to address the continuum of gendered violence during and after conflict. The OSCE's work is more focused on mitigating the consequences of militarisation, particularly GBV and the psychosocial impacts of war, than on deepening militarisation itself, even though it does not prioritise disarmament or demilitarisation as explicit goals.

Secondly, as mentioned, the hypothesis regarding the role and influence of gender mainstreaming policy is strongly supported. The 2004 Gender Action Plan is a central institutional mechanism that ensured gender inclusion and engagement across activities and programmes in Ukraine. The research suggests that this cross-organisational, institutionalised approach to gender has enabled a more extensive and integrated WPS practice than has been observed in other security-focused IOs in Ukraine, particularly by embedding gender norms within organisational routines and actor networks.

Thirdly, in regards to the final part of the hypothesis, this was to some degree supported as the findings referred to capacity and resource as internal factors which limited WPS implementation and its reliance on the political will of national partners, as opposed to outward political influence of the organisation being utilised for WPS implementation. There were also findings regarding the lack of support for the review of Ukraine's NAP but capacity or political influence were not explicitly determined as factors causing this limitation. Security restrictions further reduce the ability to operate in frontline regions and to engage directly with affected communities, contributing to a level of state-centrism that echoes wider critiques of WPS implementation. This was not identified in the hypothesis but did feature as a key factor affecting the OSCE's contributions to the WPS agenda in Ukraine, so is worth noting as a finding that challenged the hypothesis.

7.4 Contributions and Value of the Study

By applying a feminist institutionalist lens, the study demonstrates how institutional gender equality policies can reshape organisational norms and outputs in ways that move beyond rhetoric towards more substantive WPS implementation. Additionally, the study contributes to WPS scholarship by somewhat challenging dominant narratives of militarisation and shallow localisation in the contributions of IOs to the WPS agenda in Ukraine, showing that while some critiques remain valid, OSCE practice in Ukraine also provides evidence of fairly comprehensive, gender-sensitive programming, survivor-centred GBV responses, and meaningful engagement with women's civil society in parts of its work. As such, it further contributes to the limited literature on the OSCE by positioning the organisation as an important, if constrained, actor in WPS implementation and argues that the OSCE provides a strong example of how comprehensive security frameworks can support more expansive understandings of peace and security that better align with those found within the WPS agenda.

7.5 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The most significant limitation of this research was the access to civil society partners and state partners due to a number of factors including differences in language, their capacity during a period of state emergency due to conflict, and the short-term, inconsistent nature of these partnerships that meant partners of the GIP programme specifically, were sometimes minimal or one-time engagements, limiting the amount of in-depth data that could be collected from these sources. Furthermore, there were limitations to the capacity of the OSCE to participate in the research and the nature of their structure, by portfolio as opposed to country, made it difficult to seek staff that primarily focused on Ukraine to a significant extent for interview. Finally, due to focus of the research on a prominent IO, the OSCE, the research remained largely state-centric, which has been a critique of WPS implementation (Kirby and Shepherd, 2016).

After considering the findings, contributions and limitations of this research, interesting and useful recommendations for future research were suggested. These recommendations were predominately proposed within a post-conflict context of Ukraine and were

longitudinal and historical in design, considering topic areas of peacebuilding, transitional justice and institutional reform, sustainable peace, and the successes and failures of efforts aligning with the prevention pillar mandate.

7.6 Closing Summary

Overall, the chapter has shown that the OSCE's work in Ukraine reflects a strong engagement with the WPS agenda, rooted in institutionalised gender mainstreaming and a broad, human-centred delineation of security. The findings suggest that, even in a highly militarised context and despite political and operational constraints, the organisation contributes across all four WPS pillars, especially on GBV, justice reform, resilience-building and women's participation. At the same time, uneven localisation, state-centric tendencies and limited reach in frontline areas restrict the transformative potential of these efforts, reinforcing some key feminist concerns about the limits of WPS implementation in conflict-affected settings. Limitations did arise in the research, largely due to resource and time constraints which have limited the scope and scale of the research but areas for future empirical study were recommended that could in-part address the limitations of this study.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A - OSCE Practitioner Interview Guide

Opening

Hi,

How are you doing today?

Conducting this interview as part of a research project analysing the OSCE's work in Ukraine through a gendered perspective, examining gender inclusion and mainstreaming and constructions of security as a concept.

In this interview, I'm primarily interested in the [ExB Support Programme for Ukraine/Gender Issues Programme] and your work in this capacity, as well as more general opinions regarding the OSCE's policies and values on gender-mainstreaming and equality.

The overall benefit of the research is to provide a clearer understanding of the contributions made by international organisations (IOs) in Ukraine, particularly in respect to promoting gender inclusivity within the security sector. Ultimately, the research will offer recommendations to guide the OSCE and similar organisations in enhancing gender mainstreaming efforts and building on best practice.

As mentioned in the informed consent form, you are not obliged to share information you would not like to share or answer questions that you do not wish to answer. If you would like to stop the interview at any point, we can do so.

I will be recording the interview for research purposes but these audio files will be deleted after transcription and the transcription will retain your confidentiality.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Introductory Question

1. [Could you please introduce yourself, describing your role in the programme?]

Programme Overview

2. What are the main activities and projects delivered by the programme?

3. What do you understand as the programme's key priorities?

4. In your opinion, what are the most influential internal or external factors to the programme's success?

Peace and Security

5. What security concerns do you think the programme addresses for Ukraine?

6. In your opinion, how does this programme contribute towards peace?

a. Follow-up: Would you say that is a reflection of the OSCE's overall position on peace in Ukraine?

7. To what extent does the programme respond to gendered consequences of conflict in Ukraine?

a. Are there challenges that impact this response?

Gender Inclusion Approach

8. The OSCE has some prominent policies in gender mainstreaming. How do you think these policies inform the design and implementation of this programme?

a. What challenges does the programme face in this regard?

9. How do you think the programme contributes to advancing gender equality in Ukraine, if at all?

a. What factors influence the extent of this work?

10. Does the programme engage with women's civil society and grassroots organisations?

a. In what ways?
b. Does the programme face challenges in this engagement?

Summary

[Summarise the interview and what was covered/key takeaways]

Is there anything you would like to add?

End of interview

- Clarify the end of the interview verbally
- Thank the interviewee for their time and contribution

[post interview chat]

Appendix B - CSO Partner Interview Guide

Opening

Hi,

How are you doing today?

Conducting this interview as part of a research project analysing the OSCE's work in Ukraine through a gendered perspective, examining their contributions towards the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda.

In this interview, I'm primarily interested in the WICC's partnership with the OSCE and your perspectives on their influence, impact and support.

The overall benefit of the research is to provide a clearer understanding of the contributions made by international organisations (IOs) in Ukraine, particularly in respect to the WPS agenda. Ultimately, the research will offer recommendations to guide the OSCE and similar organisations in enhancing their work in this area and on building best practice.

As mentioned in the informed consent form, you are not obliged to share information you would not like to share or answer questions that you do not wish to answer. If you would like to stop the interview at any point, we can do so.

I will be recording the interview for research purposes but these audio files will be deleted after transcription and the transcription will retain your confidentiality.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

General

1. Could you please introduce yourself, describing in what capacity you have engaged with the OSCE?

2. How would you describe working with the OSCE?
    a. What topics were covered?
    b. How much influence did you have in the design and delivery of this work?

3. How would you describe the impact of the OSCE on your work?
    a. Why do you think the OSCE was able to meet/not fully meet these aims?

4. To your knowledge, what has the role of the OSCE been in the localisation of the WPS and the revision of the NAP?

5. From your experience, to what extent do you feel they value and prioritise working with civil society?

6. In your opinion, have there been any challenges or limitations when working with the OSCE?

    a. Why?

Gender

7. In your opinion, how influential is the OSCE in responding to gendered consequences of the conflict and gender equality in Ukraine?

Peace and Security

8. What security concerns do you think the work of the OSCE has helped to address for Ukraine?
    a. Why do you think this is the case?

9. In your opinion, do you think the work of the OSCE in Ukraine contributes towards peace?
    a. Why do you think this is?

Summary

[Summarise the interview and what was covered/key takeaways]

Is there anything you would like to add?

End of interview

- Clarify the end of the interview verbally
- Thank the interviewee for their time and contribution

[post interview chat]

Appendix C - State Partner Interview Guide

Opening

Hi,

How are you doing today?

Conducting this interview as part of a research project analysing the OSCE's work in Ukraine through a gendered perspective, examining their contributions towards the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda.

In this interview, I'm primarily interested in the [state institution]'s partnership with the OSCE and your perspectives on their influence, impact and support.

The overall benefit of the research is to provide a clearer understanding of the contributions made by international organisations (IOs) in Ukraine, particularly in respect to the WPS agenda. Ultimately, the research will offer recommendations to guide the OSCE and similar organisations in enhancing their work in this area and on building best practice.

As mentioned in the informed consent form, you are not obliged to share information you would not like to share or answer questions that you do not wish to answer. If you would like to stop the interview at any point, we can do so.

I will be recording the interview for research purposes but these audio files will be deleted after transcription and the transcription will retain your confidentiality.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Introductory Question

1. Could you please introduce yourself, describing in what capacity you have engaged with the OSCE?

2. What would you say are the main contributions made by the OSCE to the [name of state institution/partner]?

3. In your opinion, what are the strengths and challenges of this partnership?
    a. What drives these strengths?
    b. Why do you think these challenges exist?

Peace and Security

4. What security concerns do you think the work of the OSCE has helped to address for Ukraine?

Gender

5. Do you think the work of the OSCE impacts gender inclusivity in the operations of the [name of state institution/partner]?
    a. Why or why not?

6. In relation to your area of work, in what ways do you think the activities delivered by the OCSE impact gender inclusivity?

Summary
[Summarise the interview and what was covered/key takeaways]

Is there anything you would like to add?

End of interview
- Clarify the end of the interview verbally
- Thank the interviewee for their time and contribution

[post interview chat]