

# What is the OSCE?



# Who we are



With 57 participating States in North America, Europe and Asia, the OSCE — the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe — is the world's largest regional security organization. The OSCE works to build and sustain stability, peace and democracy for more than one billion people, through political dialogue and projects on the ground.

The OSCE is a forum for political dialogue on a wide range of security issues and a platform for joint action to improve the lives of individuals and communities. The Organization helps to bridge differences, build trust and foster co-operation within and between states. Where there is instability, the OSCE works to prevent conflict, manage crises, and promote post-conflict rehabilitation.

With its expert units, institutions and network of field operations, the OSCE addresses issues that have an impact on our common security such as arms control, terrorism, good governance, energy security, human trafficking, democratization, media freedom and national minorities.

# Our history

The OSCE's origins date back to the early 1970s, to the Helsinki Final Act (1975) and the creation of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), which during the Cold War served as an important multilateral forum for dialogue and negotiations between East and West.



The Helsinki Final Act, signed on 1 August 1975, established ten fundamental principles (the 'Decalogue') governing the behaviour of States towards each other as well as towards their citizens. The document guides the OSCE's work to this day. (akg-images)

The Helsinki Final Act, which was signed on 1 August 1975, contains a number of key commitments on politico-military, economic and environmental and human rights issues. It also establishes ten fundamental principles (the 'Decalogue') that govern the behaviour of States towards each other, as well as towards their citizens.

From 1975 until the 1980s, the CSCE, through a series of meetings and conferences, built on and extended its participating States' commitments, while periodically reviewing their implementation. It created a clear link between human rights and security, and was one of the few channels

of dialogue between the Eastern bloc and the West, as well as the neutral and non-aligned countries.

With the end of the Cold War, the Paris Summit of November 1990 set the CSCE on a new course. In the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, the CSCE was called upon to play its part in managing the historic change taking place in Europe and responding to the new challenges of the post-Cold War period. This led to the establishment of permanent structures, including a secretariat and institutions, and the deployment of the first field operations.

After the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and the

ensuing conflicts, the CSCE helped to manage crises and re-establish peace. It also worked with participating States to support the process of democratic transition.

In 1994, the CSCE was renamed the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to reflect more accurately these changes. Since then, the Organization has continued to evolve in order to better address security threats and challenges, while remaining rooted in its founding principles.

# What we do

The OSCE has a comprehensive approach to security encompassing three dimensions: the politico-military, the economic and environmental, and the human dimension.

Through this three-dimensional approach, the OSCE supports its participating States in building trust and working toward a free, democratic, common and indivisible Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community.

In **military matters**, the OSCE seeks to foster greater openness, transparency and co-operation and has developed the world's most advanced regime of **arms**

**control and confidence-building** measures. Areas of work include security sector reform and the safe storage and destruction of small arms, light weapons and conventional ammunition.

**Economic and environmental** issues are also key factors in building security. The OSCE helps with promoting **good governance; tackling corruption; raising environmental awareness;**

sharing natural resources and the sound management of environmental waste.

**Human rights and fundamental freedoms** are the bedrock of stable societies. The OSCE helps its participating States to build democratic institutions; hold genuine and transparent **elections**; ensure respect for human rights, **media freedom**, the **rights of persons belonging to national minorities** and the **rule of law**; and promote **tolerance and non-discrimination**.

The OSCE also addresses transnational security challenges, such as **violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism; cyber-**

**attacks; trafficking in drugs, arms and human beings; migration**; and the **environmental and human impact of climate change**. These are shared issues on which states need to work together.

Across the full spectrum of its work, the OSCE aims to ensure **gender equality** and to engage with **youth**.

The OSCE works closely with other international and regional organizations and co-operates with its Mediterranean and Asian partner countries (Partners for Co-operation). It involves civil society in many of its activities and increasingly reaches out to a wide range of other partners, including in academia and the private and development sectors.

## The many branches of the OSCE



# On the ground

Most of the OSCE's staff and resources are deployed in field operations in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Recognizing that schools are an excellent place to nurture mutual trust, break down stereotypes and broaden understanding of universal human rights, the OSCE engages actively with children, young people and educators.

Field operations are established at the invitation of the host countries and their mandates are agreed by consensus of the participating States. They support the host countries in implementing their OSCE commitments through projects that respond to their needs. Some field operations work to reduce tensions, and others play a critical post-conflict role, helping to restore trust among affected communities.

One of the OSCE's core activities is to address

protracted conflicts in its region through agreed negotiation formats. These include the Transdniestrian Settlement Process, aimed at achieving a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict over Transdniestria; the OSCE Minsk Group, which seeks a peaceful negotiated solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; and the Geneva International Discussions on the aftermath of the August 2008 conflict in Georgia, which the Organization co-chairs with the United Nations and the European Union.



The OSCE observes elections, and advises governments on how to develop and sustain democratic institutions.



Independent and professional media are a cornerstone of democratic societies, and a key focus of the OSCE's work.



Promoting professional and effective policing is an integral part of the OSCE's efforts in conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation.



The OSCE, through its field operations, helps to stop the spread of surplus weapons and offers assistance with their destruction.

# How we work

Inclusiveness underpins everything the OSCE does. OSCE participating States enjoy equal status and take decisions by consensus.



The OSCE is an intergovernmental organization in which the 57 participating States work as equals in all decision-making bodies.

## Decision-making bodies

Each week, the participating States' permanent representatives meet in the Permanent Council, the OSCE's regular decision-making body, and in the Forum for Security Co-operation, where decisions are taken regarding military aspects of security. A Ministerial Council is held annually to review OSCE activities and provide overall political direction. Summits of heads of state or government of OSCE participating States can take place periodically to set priorities at the highest political level.

## OSCE Chairmanship

A different participating State chairs the OSCE each year, with that country's foreign minister serving as Chairperson-in-Office (CiO) and working alongside the previous and succeeding Chairs: together the three Chairs form the OSCE Troika.

The CiO may appoint personal representatives. Currently there are personal representatives covering a wide range of issues from preventing and managing conflicts in the OSCE region, and ensuring co-ordination in specific areas like gender and youth issues to promoting tolerance and non-discrimination.

## Secretariat

Elected for a three-year term by the Ministerial Council, the Secretary General heads the Secretariat located in Vienna and directly supports the OSCE Chair. In addition to its administrative functions, the Secretariat comprises the Conflict Prevention Centre as well as departments and units focusing on economic and environmental activities, co-operation with partner countries and organizations, gender equality, anti-trafficking, as well as transnational threats. They monitor trends,

provide expert analysis and implement projects in the field.

## Institutions

The OSCE includes three institutions dedicated to specialized areas of work:

The Warsaw-based **Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)** promotes democratic development and human rights. Its work includes election observation, supporting the rule of law, promoting tolerance and non-discrimination and improving the situation of Roma and Sinti. ODIHR hosts the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, the largest annual human rights conference in the OSCE region.

The Vienna-based **Representative on Freedom of the Media** monitors media developments and provides early warning on violations of

freedom of expression and media freedom, promoting full compliance with OSCE media freedom commitments.

As an instrument of conflict prevention, the **High Commissioner on National Minorities**, based in The Hague, uses quiet diplomacy and early action to seek resolution of ethnic tensions that might endanger peace, security and stability.

## Parliamentary Assembly

The Parliamentary Assembly brings together more than 300 lawmakers from the parliaments of OSCE participating States to advance the OSCE's goals of comprehensive security through inter-parliamentary dialogue. OSCE parliamentarians also play a key role in the Organization's election observation activities, conduct field visits, and engage in parliamentary diplomacy.

# OSCE structure

## Decision-making bodies

### OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

The OSCE PA is made up of more than 300 parliamentarians from the OSCE's 57 participating States. It provides a forum for parliamentary dialogue, leads election observation missions, engages in parliamentary diplomacy and strengthens international co-operation on OSCE-related

### Personal Representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office

The Personal Representatives are tasked by the Chair to work on preventing and managing conflicts in the OSCE region, to ensure co-ordination in specific areas like gender and youth issues, and to promote tolerance and non-discrimination.

### Summit

Meetings where heads of state or government of OSCE participating States set priorities, take decisions and provide orientation at the highest political level. The last OSCE Summit took place in Kazakhstan in 2010.

### Ministerial Council

Annual meetings of the foreign ministers of OSCE participating States, which constitutes the central decision-making and governing body of the OSCE.

### Permanent Council

The Permanent Council is the OSCE's regular body for political dialogue and decision-making, in which the permanent representatives of the participating States meet weekly in Vienna.

### Forum for Security Co-operation

The Forum is an autonomous decision-making body in which representatives of participating States meet weekly to consult on military stability and security.

### Chairperson-in-Office / OSCE Chair

A different participating State chairs the OSCE each year, with that country's foreign minister acting as Chairperson-in-Office. The OSCE Chair co-ordinates decision-making and sets the OSCE's priorities during its year in office.

### Troika

The Troika consists of representatives of the current, preceding and future OSCE Chairs.

## Executive structures

### Secretary General / Secretariat, Vienna

The Secretary General heads the OSCE Secretariat, acting under the guidance of the Chairperson-in-Office. The Secretariat, which includes the Conflict Prevention Centre, assists the OSCE Chair in its activities, provides operational and administrative support to field operations and, as appropriate, to other institutions.

### Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Warsaw

ODIHR promotes democratic elections, respect for human rights, the rule of law, tolerance and non-discrimination, and the rights of Roma and Sinti communities.

### Representative on Freedom of the Media, Vienna

The Representative observes media developments in all 57 OSCE participating States and provides early warning on violations of free expression and media freedom.

### High Commissioner on National Minorities, The Hague

The High Commissioner's role is to provide early warning and take appropriate early action to prevent ethnic tensions from developing into conflict.

## OSCE in the field

The OSCE's field operations support host countries in implementing their OSCE commitments and fostering local capacities through concrete projects that respond to their needs. The field operations enable the OSCE to tackle crises as they arise and support post-conflict rehabilitation.

### South-Eastern Europe

- Presence in Albania
- Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Mission in Kosovo
- Mission to Montenegro
- Mission to Serbia
- Mission to Skopje

### Eastern Europe

- Mission to Moldova

### South Caucasus

- Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on the conflict dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference

### Central Asia

- Centre in Ashgabat
- Programme Office in Astana
- Programme Office in Bishkek
- Programme Office in Dushanbe
- Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan

## OSCE-related bodies

### Joint Consultative Group

This Vienna-based body deals with questions relating to compliance with the provisions of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe.

### Open Skies Consultative Commission

This body meets regularly in Vienna and consists of representatives from each of the State Parties to have signed the Open Skies Treaty.

### Court of Conciliation and Arbitration

This Geneva-based Court serves as a mechanism for the peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law and OSCE commitments.

# Facts and figures

## Budget:

(as of October 2021)

**€139 million**  
OSCE Budget for 2021

**Additional funding:**  
**€39 million**  
for extra-budgetary projects

## Staffing:

(as of April 2023)



**2,267 total staff**

employed by the OSCE (fixed-term staff)

Composed of:

**1,600 staff**

in the field in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia

**667 staff**

in the Secretariat and the institutions together

## Gender balance:

(as of April 2023)



Share of female and male staff across the OSCE:

	Male	Female
Staff	52%	48%
Senior Management Staff	67%	33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>41%</b>

## OSCE participating States

Albania  
Andorra  
Armenia  
Austria  
Azerbaijan  
Belarus  
Belgium  
Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Bulgaria  
Canada  
Croatia

Cyprus  
Czech Republic  
Denmark  
Estonia  
Finland  
France  
Georgia  
Germany  
Greece  
Holy See  
Hungary  
Iceland

Ireland  
Italy  
Kazakhstan  
Kyrgyzstan  
Latvia  
Liechtenstein  
Lithuania  
Luxembourg  
Malta  
Moldova  
Monaco  
Mongolia

Montenegro  
Netherlands  
North Macedonia  
Norway  
Poland  
Portugal  
Romania  
Russian Federation  
San Marino  
Serbia  
Slovakia  
Slovenia

Spain  
Sweden  
Switzerland  
Tajikistan  
Türkiye  
Turkmenistan  
Ukraine  
United Kingdom  
United States of America  
Uzbekistan

## Partners for Co-operation

Afghanistan  
Australia  
Japan  
Republic of Korea  
Thailand  
Algeria  
Egypt  
Israel  
Jordan  
Morocco  
Tunisia

## Follow OSCE



Vacancies and internship opportunities are posted regularly on the OSCE website: [vacancies.osce.org](https://vacancies.osce.org)

For more information about the OSCE, its work and structures, visit the website: [osce.org](https://osce.org)

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