



Helsinki+50 from below? Building bottom-up approaches for climate resilience

Today, climate change represents an existential crisis that connects people and inspires them to take action in civic life. The impact of climate change is one of the most pressing concerns for average citizens' everyday lives. In the OSCE region, Central Asia is the most impacted by this global shift. In the Fergana Valley, for example, summer temperatures rise to over 40 degrees Celsius, inhibiting peoples' economic and social wellbeing.

Climate change has motivated one of the largest transnational social movements. Indeed, addressing climate change and environmental degradation requires a cooperative, multi-level process. Civil society organizations can serve as an important bridge between the public, governments, and the international community in helping to raise awareness, foster understanding and advocating for stronger environmental and climate policies.

Environmental groups in the 1970s and 1980s utilized the Helsinki Principles to connect their struggles with broader social and political movements. Engaging civil society actors in the field of environmental movements more broadly offers an opportunity to revive Helsinki from below, or what has been termed the "conscience of Helsinki." This offers opportunities to develop climate resilience in the context of a whole of society approach. Yet, across the OSCE region, civil society actors engaged in climate and environmental affairs are increasingly in need of diplomatic support to simply participate in the civic space.

Civil societies are a critical part of resilient societies. Civil society actors are trusted partners in many societies for collecting data on climate change, offering firsthand information in environmental crises, and partnering with governments to shape more targeted action in addressing acute crises. This work is not only important in holding governments accountable for climate and environmental policies and actions, but also in driving the implementation of national climate agendas. In Ukraine, for example, environmental NGOs continue to make sure that legislation is in line with environmental standards, even in wartime, and have also been fundamental in documenting environmental damage caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Against this backdrop, this side event addresses the following questions:

- What are the main entry points for civil society engagement in OSCE's economic and environmental dimension? What makes the OSCE an appropriate platform to discuss the cooperation between participating States and civil society?
- How can local communities and civil society actors remain valued partners in OSCE's projects to address environmental and climate challenges of today?
- How could the history of the CSCE/OSCE help us to build an inclusive Green Helsinki process where climate and environmental security are at the core?