



The EU's role in a shifting global order

Promoting peace through a strong
Women, Peace and Security agenda

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European Peacebuilding Liaison Office

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■ Executive summary

The EPLO Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) Policy Meeting on *The EU's Role in a Shifting Global Order: Promoting Peace through a Strong Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda* brought together over 70 civil society representatives and 20 policymakers from the EU institutions and the UN. The discussions explored the state of the WPS agenda 25 years after UN Security Council Resolution 1325, assessing progress, setbacks, and the EU's evolving role in promoting peace, gender equality, and inclusive security globally.

Across plenary and breakout sessions, participants recognised the **WPS agenda as a vital political framework for rethinking security** through prevention, accountability, and participation. Yet, they warned that its transformative intent is being undermined by increasing militarisation, shrinking civic space, and the erosion of democratic norms. The shift in global priorities toward deterrence and defence risks sidelining gender equality and human security. Participants stressed that the WPS agenda must remain a political and normative tool, not a technical exercise, and that women's rights and participation are inseparable from sustainable peace.

The discussions underscored the urgent need for **direct, flexible, and long-term funding** to women-led and grassroots organisations across all regions. Current funding models which are characterised by bureaucracy, short project cycles, and risk aversion, were deemed incompatible with the realities of peacebuilding. Participants urged the EU and its Member States to simplify access, share risk with partners, and shift toward **trust-based, adaptive partnerships** that enable local actors to lead, innovate, and sustain impact over time.

A central message emerging from the meeting was the need to **protect and sustain women peacebuilders**, recognising their work as both high-risk and indispensable. Participants called for systematic investment in **protection measures and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)** to safeguard women leaders, human rights defenders, and mediators working in repressive or conflict-affected environments. Ensuring their safety, wellbeing, and resilience was seen as a prerequisite for meaningful participation in peace and security efforts.

Another key theme was the importance of **movement-building and advocacy** as drivers of structural change. Participants stressed that funding must go beyond short-term projects to **strengthen collective action, amplify local voices, and support the ecosystem of networks that connect grassroots and policy levels**. Regional and cross-border collaboration, linking women's networks, mediators, and activists, was highlighted as essential to sustain solidarity, enable shared learning, and bridge the gap between local experience and global policymaking.

Ultimately, the discussions converged on a shared vision: for the EU to champion a **political, transformative WPS agenda** rooted in prevention, accountability, and equality. This requires integrating protection, participation, and rights across all dimensions of security policy, ensuring that women's leadership is not an afterthought but a foundation of peacebuilding at local, national, and international levels.

■ Background

2025 marks the 25th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and therefore offers an important moment to reflect on past commitments and reimagine the future of the WPS agenda in a rapidly evolving global context. Against the backdrop of heightened geopolitical tensions, an increase in fragility, global rearmament, democratic backsliding and increasing attacks on women's rights, the need to reaffirm and strengthen the WPS agenda as an essential part of the EU's external action has never been more urgent.

The EU has repeatedly affirmed its commitment to WPS, including through the [2018 Council Conclusions on WPS](#) and the accompanying EU Strategic Approach to WPS and its [WPS Action Plan](#), recently extended to 2027. The EU reinforced this support in its [2022 Council Conclusions on WPS](#). These documents frame the EU's policy on WPS, alongside the 2020 [Gender Action Plan III](#) (GAP III), which serves as the main vehicle for implementing and evaluating gender equality objectives in the EU's external action. Both the Action Plan on WPS and GAP III are due for renewal in 2027. As the EU reflects on its global role and prepares for the next phase of its external action programming and gender policies, this Policy Meeting aimed to place the WPS agenda at the heart of broader discussions on peace and security governance, including rethinking what peace and security mean in the European context today.

The exchange brought together 70 civil society representatives from conflict prevention, mediation, and peacebuilding organisations, alongside more than 20 policymakers from the EU institutions and the UN. Discussions unfolded across two panels and a series of thematic and regional breakout groups, fostering direct dialogue between civil society and EU representatives. The conversations focused on assessing progress in

implementing the WPS agenda, evaluating the EU's role, and identifying priorities for its future advancement. The recommendations which emerged are directed at both the EU and its Member States, and at civil society, reflecting their complementary roles and shared responsibility in implementing the WPS agenda. As the meeting did not aim to reach a consensus, the measures discussed highlighted in this report do not necessarily represent a majority view of participants.

Summary of the discussions

The following section captures the key insights and recommendations that emerged from both plenary debates and breakout group exchanges.

‘The relevance of a strong WPS agenda in a shifting global security landscape’

The opening panel reflected on 25 years of progress under the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, celebrating its transformative impact while acknowledging the urgent challenges it now faces. Speakers recalled the early days of advocacy that led to UNSCR 1325 and noted that, while the agenda has achieved recognition and a degree of institutionalisation at global and EU levels, the current context of war, rising militarisation, and shrinking civic space demands renewed strategic thinking. The panellists emphasised that the WPS framework has empowered local and national actors to engage in peacebuilding and policymaking, but that this progress is threatened by funding shortages, weak institutions, and an intensifying backlash against gender equality.

EU representatives highlighted significant milestones, such as the integration of WPS into the EU’s Gender Action Plan (GAP) and the requirement that 85% of external action contribute positively to gender equality. They cited concrete examples from Afghanistan and Liberia, demonstrating how gender-sensitive approaches to peace and stability are increasingly mainstreamed in EU external action. However, they warned that increased military spending and global crises could undermine these commitments unless WPS is deliberately embedded in security and defence strategies.

Panellists called for a stronger, more unified voice linking political leadership, diplomacy, and activism. They stressed the need to prioritise innovation, gender-responsive budgeting, and digital inclusion, and to ensure that the WPS agenda remains transformative and not reduced to a technical exercise. The conversation closed on a forward-looking note: despite backlash and resource constraints, there remains political will within the EU to lead by example, reinforce partnerships with women’s organisations globally, and ensure that WPS continues to shape peace and security efforts for the next generation.

Thematic focus groups

■ 1.- Resourcing WPS: new approaches to funding women's rights organisations

This breakout session explored practical and innovative approaches to funding the WPS agenda and women's rights organisations (WROs) in the current constrained funding environment. Participants emphasised the need to move beyond siloed, competitive, and overly bureaucratic funding models toward trust-based, risk-sharing partnerships that enable genuine movement-building and sustainability. Key points raised included expanding funding access to informal, unregistered organisations and movements and grassroots actors, supporting the mental health and safety of women leaders, recognising advocacy as a legitimate activity worthy of funding, and addressing the shrinking of civic space. Innovation was discussed not only in terms of technology but also in terms of rethinking funding modalities, for instance through direct awards, consortium models, and deliverable-based contracting. The EU was seen as having both the resources and convening power to reshape the WPS financing landscape and link peacebuilding, prevention, and participation efforts under a more coherent, long-term strategy.

Measures discussed

For both EU and CSOs to consider:

- **Invest in movement building** by strengthening local WPS actorness, fostering transnational links, and inclusive networks, while avoiding donor-driven approaches. Use micro-grants to enable local advocacy and movement-building from community to national levels.
- **Engage communities first** to identify trusted local organisations and priorities, co-designing programmes with both emerging and established WROs. Evaluate the impact of projects through direct engagement with local communities who have been supported.
- **Adopt flexible, deliverable-based funding** with simple milestones, reduced reporting, and adapted procurement to enable the participation of smaller organisations or informal actors.
- Include **mental health, safety and wellbeing support and digital protection** for women leaders as an integral part of all programmes, allowing space for reflection, rest, and resilience-building.
- **Build trust between donors, grassroots actors, philanthropic actors, and the private sector** through transparent, long-term partnerships.

For the EU to consider:

- Adopt more flexible, context-responsive funding models for WPS, including direct

awards, micro-grants, scalable models and support for non-registered and grassroots organisations. Allow flexible programming in restrictive or high-risk environments, using adaptive framings and discreet approaches to protect civic space and local partners.

- Recognising the 10–15-year horizon needed for transformational change, **invest in movement-building and enabling infrastructure**, such as network and convening platforms, and provide long-term institutional support, rather than funding isolated projects.
- Commit to allocating at least 50% of WPS-related funding directly to local actors, using intermediaries only where necessary, and ensuring transparent, fair selection processes.
- **Broaden outreach to non-traditional** actors (e.g., faith-based and community groups) and promote decolonised, context-driven approaches that centre local advocacy.
- Develop **clear risk-sharing frameworks** that define acceptable levels of operational and contextual risk, shifting away from punitive accountability measures and toward shared responsibility and learning.
- **Promote co-design and participatory planning** by engaging local organisations early in programme design, starting with priorities identified through National Action Plans and community consultations.
- Limit reliance on private consultancy companies in the peacebuilding sector and instead **fund CSO-led consortia that pool expertise and administrative capacity and reduce duplication**.

For CSOs to consider:

- Work collectively to build inclusive, cross-sector WPS movements that overcome silos and competition and involve non-traditional actors such as faith-based or community groups. **Adopt consortium models to share administrative functions** and strengthen local leadership within multi-partner frameworks.
- Explore strategic partnerships with private sector actors for peace financing and youth-led investment, while maintaining safeguards and transparency. Develop **guidelines on conflict sensitivity for investors** to ensure financial flows better support peace outcomes.

■ **2.- Fighting digital gender-based violence: protecting women, girls and marginalised groups in conflict-affected contexts and holding perpetrators**

The discussion in this group highlighted the growing threat of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), from online harassment and sextortion to disinformation and hate campaigns, that disproportionately targets women, girls, and marginalised groups. Participants examined how digital spaces are increasingly weaponised against women peacebuilders, human rights defenders, and activists, and discussed policy responses to combat tech-enabled GBV, ensure accountability, and support survivor-centred approaches in line with the WPS agenda. In fragile settings like Iraq, TFGBV is compounded by stigma, impunity, and weak institutional responses, leaving survivors isolated and at risk of further harm. Security actors are often

untrained—or at times complicit—while reporting mechanisms are inefficient and inaccessible. Across contexts, online attacks against women in politics and public life are shrinking civic space and deterring participation, mirroring the erosion of trust and cohesion that digital disinformation fuels. The rapid evolution of technology, profit-driven models, and lack of platform accountability have outpaced prevention and regulation. Participants stressed that tackling TFGBV requires coordinated action that combines gender equality, peacebuilding, and digital governance, particularly in societies already strained by conflict and fragility.

Measures discussed

For both EU and CSOs to consider:

- **Strengthen local support systems**, including community-based protection mechanisms like digital stewards or local peace teams, to provide rapid response, safe reporting channels, and survivor-centred support. Include **protection and contingency funds in project budgets** for those at risk of digital attacks.

For the EU to consider:

- **Hold tech companies accountable** by enforcing stricter regulation, oversight, and transparency requirements under the Digital Services Act and related frameworks. Push platforms to adopt **pro-social design**, privacy by design, and faster content removal procedures, while ensuring these measures do not restrict civic space.
- Treat **TFGBV as a cross-cutting issue within gender, democracy, human rights, and crisis response policies**. Incorporate protection and digital safety measures into all EU-funded projects, and support partner countries in developing inclusive digital governance strategies.
- Champion international standards for online safety, ethical AI, and accountability, aligning digital regulation with human rights and humanitarian law.
- Encourage inclusion of **digital ceasefires** in peace agreements and **digital codes of conduct** in electoral processes.
- **Support civil society and local initiatives** by providing funding and technical support for grassroots organisations tackling online violence, misinformation, and hate speech. Strengthen partnerships with regional and local actors to ensure responses are context-specific, survivor-centred, and sustainable.

For CSOs to consider:

- **Treat digital safety as a core gender and peacebuilding issue**, pushing for accountability from tech companies and governments. Build public awareness on TFGBV, amplify survivor voices, and develop strong counter-narratives that promote equality and nonviolence online.
- Expand **programs on digital literacy, online safety, and fact-checking**, especially for women, youth, and local peacebuilders. Prevention should address harmful gender norms, engage men and boys as allies, and build community resilience against online

manipulation and hate.

- **Collaborate and coordinate** to form stronger alliances between gender, peacebuilding, and tech actors to share insights, tools, and advocacy strategies. Partner with local fact-checking networks and human rights organisations to improve reporting, early warning, and accountability mechanisms.

■ 3.- WPS in a context of global rearmament

This breakout session focused on examining the impact of militarisation, arms proliferation, and weapons-related risks on women's security and participation. Participants voiced concern over the accelerating militarisation of global politics and governance, with military spending reaching its highest levels since the Cold War. This shift, driven by security and deterrence narratives, has diverted resources and attention away from diplomacy, prevention, and peacebuilding toward defence and rearmament agendas. Participants emphasised that militarisation is not gender neutral, as it exacerbates inequalities, narrows civic and political space, sidelines women from decision-making, and fuels gender-based violence. Concerns regarding the perceived lack of democratic oversight of defence policy in Europe were raised. Once a transformative framework for redefining security through prevention, accountability, and inclusion, the WPS agenda is increasingly being depoliticised and reduced to a technical exercise. Civil society organisations face mounting constraints on participation, mobility, and funding and the growing disconnect between high-level political debates and local realities risks eroding lessons learned from past peacebuilding efforts. Participants flagged that in many conflict-affected contexts, military responses alone have failed to provide real protection for civilians, but rather deepened local grievances and increased insecurity.

Measures discussed

For the EU and Member States to consider:

- **Integrate human security and gender equality into defence and rearmament policies** and instruments. Ensure robust democratic oversight of defence planning and spending to enhance transparency and accountability. Allocate part of military budgets toward strengthening the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle and advancing the WPS agenda, which encompasses prevention, peacebuilding, and resilience.
- **Protect civic space** by guaranteeing safe participation and funding for civil society, women's groups, and peacebuilders. Ensure a diversity of voices are included in EU and national decision-making related to security and defence.
- Link agendas for impact by **embedding WPS across all EU external and security**

policies, connecting it with Youth, Peace and Security and Climate, Peace and Security agendas. Strengthen networks like women mediator networks for long-term peacebuilding.

- **Champion accountability** by promoting arms control and transparency and accountability in defence spending.
- **Address the environmental and social costs of militarisation** and align EU action with feminist and human-centered foreign policy principles.

For CSOs to consider:

- **Reframe the security narrative** by challenging the notion that greater armament equates to greater security. Reassert the WPS agenda as a political, transformative framework rooted in prevention, accountability, and protection.
- **Strengthen advocacy** through coordination across movements and alliance building, including with allies inside security institutions. Use collective advocacy to stay present in decision-making spaces and identify new entry points for influence and funding.
- **Promote inclusive participation** to ensure women, youth, and local actors, especially from conflict-affected areas, are meaningfully included in peace and security processes. Support their expertise, access, and visibility in political and security dialogues.
- **Raise public awareness** of the real costs of militarisation and **the benefits of peacebuilding**. Promote education and campaigns that foster a culture of peace, justice and equality.

■ **4.- Localising WPS: partnerships for sustainable peace**

This breakout session examined ways to effectively advance the localisation of the WPS agenda, empowering women-led organisations and grassroots peacebuilders to actively participate and influence decision-making. The persistent gap between global WPS frameworks and local realities was explored, with participants highlighting that systemic barriers in donor systems, especially within EU funding and engagement structures, continue to limit access and impact for local organisations. It was flagged that while the need for women's participation in peace processes is widely acknowledged, implementation remains weak, particularly in conflict-affected contexts dominated by patriarchal and militarised structures. In many of these settings, women sustain the local private sector while men are engaged in combat, underscoring the importance of championing rights-based recovery that defends women's political, economic, and land rights in post-conflict contexts. Genuine localisation requires shifting power and resources toward local actors, recognising existing community-led peacebuilding practices, and valuing indigenous knowledge rather than imposing external models. Participants highlighted the need to translate WPS principles into local languages and contexts, and to document the contributions of local women that often go unseen. The

conversation underscored the importance of flexible, trust-based partnerships, long-term funding, and support for women's networks that connect grassroots and regional actors, promoting peer-to-peer learning and solidarity. For example, an initiative in which South Sudanese women supported Sudanese survivors of gender-based violence through experience-sharing was cited as contributing to trauma healing.

Measures discussed

For the EU and CSOs to consider:

- **Broaden the definition of 'local'** to include groups recognised and trusted by their communities, not only formally registered organisations. Ensure that women working in informal structures and displaced women are actively included in WPS efforts.

For the EU to consider:

- **Reform funding systems to enable genuine localisation.**
 - o Simplify applications, reduce bureaucracy, and translate calls for proposals into local languages to make funding accessible for small and non-registered organisations.
 - o Engage grassroots women's organisations as co-designers and decision-makers, not merely implementers.
 - o Provide multi-year, flexible, and adaptive funding that allows local actors to respond to changing contexts and learn from experience.
 - o Adopt scalable models to expand successful projects and use micro-grants to support advocacy and movement-building at local and national levels.
 - o Integrate safety and protection measures into grants for organisations operating in repressive or high-risk environments.
- **Strengthen engagement at EU Delegation level** by enabling EU staff to travel beyond capital cities, improving language accessibility, and creating structured channels for regular dialogue with local WPS actors. **Ensure women's organisations engage directly with the political sections of EU delegations**, not only gender focal points, so that local insights inform peace and security policymaking.
- **Promote regional learning and exchange** by funding cross-border women's networks to facilitate peer-to-peer support and shared learning.

For CSOs to consider:

- **Strengthen and elevate local practices** by building on the expertise of local actors, rather than imposing external methods. This includes offering flexible assistance, capacity-sharing, and protection mechanisms for organisations operating in restrictive or repressive environment.
- **Foster solidarity** by supporting and expanding networks for mentorship and peer exchange among women peacebuilders to enhance collective resilience.
- **Engage culture as a catalyst:** Use creative, context-sensitive approaches, as in Iraq's women-only demining teams, to shift gender norms and expand women's visibility in public life.

Regional focus groups

■ 1.- Sub-Saharan Africa

The discussion underscored that Sub-Saharan Africa stands at the crossroads of multiple intersecting crises, including climate change, armed conflict, displacement, and governance challenges, each with profound gendered implications. Participants stressed that women are not only among those most affected but also at the forefront of adaptation and peacebuilding efforts. Examples from across the region illustrated this vividly: in Kenya, women-led rainwater monitoring informed equitable resource management; in Ethiopia, solar panels in refugee camps enhanced safety and livelihoods; and in South Sudan, GBV services persisted through severe flooding. The examples put forward demonstrated that peacebuilding is possible even amid war and humanitarian crises, challenging donors' traditional separation of peace, humanitarian, and development responses. Participants called for a more integrated Triple Nexus approach that acknowledges the interdependence of these dimensions.

Participants noted that human rights and gender have been deprioritised in multilateral frameworks, and donors are progressively withdrawing from fragile contexts. As partner states have progressively withdrawn from fragile contexts, authoritarian governments have been emboldened and accountability eroded in Sub-Saharan Africa. The normalisation of human rights violations, tolerated under the guise of 'stability', was identified as a cause for grave concern. Many African governments are asserting sovereignty, which can be positive, but it has also led to a withdrawal from international norms and institutions that have historically underpinned peace. Participants highlighted that the EU must reckon with perceptions of double standards, as partners perceive the EU to be promoting democracy and human rights abroad while tolerating regression and inconsistency at home and in its geopolitical choices.

Participants reflected on the fragility of democratic systems and the limited credibility of current models. Elections, often framed as democratic milestones, have too frequently fuelled violence or failed to deliver tangible improvements. The group called for more context-specific approaches to democracy, acknowledging that different societies may require distinct models of representation and participation. They emphasised that peace, not formal electoral processes alone, is the foundation for development. Moreover, meaningful progress depends on long-term local engagement, particularly with communities and women's organisations that remain when institutions collapse, or regimes change.

The conversation also pointed to new challenges and opportunities: the unregulated spread of technology, disinformation, and tech-facilitated gender-based violence;

external interference by Russia and China; and the need for the EU to engage more strategically with African businesses and civil society actors, rather than only with governments. They called for recognition of African agency, locally driven solutions, and investments in inclusive peacebuilding that deliver value for money by generating sustainable peace and preventing future crises.

Measures discussed

For the EU to consider:

- Adopt a joined-up **Triple Nexus** approach that funds peacebuilding even during conflict. Move from short-term projects to flexible, multi-year support that lets local actors plan sustainably and work across humanitarian, development, and peace divides.
- **Go beyond “elections-only” models of democracy support.** Tailor democracy assistance to diverse contexts, focusing on participation, inclusion, and institutional reform that reduce violence and strengthen legitimacy.
- **Embed gender-sensitive conflict analysis in all programming.**
- Build **partnerships** with communities, civil society, and the private sector that **endure political change** and reward business models that contribute to peace.
- **Close the tech and information gap** in Sub-Saharan Africa by supporting digital literacy, countering disinformation, and tackling TFGBV. Partner with African media and innovators to build accountable, pro-social digital spaces.

For CSOs to consider:

- **Build stronger alliances between peacebuilding, gender, and climate organisations** to avoid fragmentation and amplify regional influence through pan-African collaboration.
- Develop long-term strategies that move beyond immediate crisis response, positioning **women’s empowerment as a core driver of sustainable peace and national stability.**
- **African civil society should assert its agency as an equal partner in the global WPS agenda,** promoting accountability and reform in ways that respect local ownership and the diversity of governance models across the continent.

■ 2.- Middle East and North Africa

The discussion on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region highlighted the deep intersection between conflict, colonial legacies, and entrenched patriarchy, all of which continue to exclude women from decision-making and peace processes. Participants underscored that while some

governments, such as Iraq's, have adopted National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS, implementation remains largely rhetorical, with the term "gender" even banned from official documents. The militarisation of the WPS agenda was noted as a worrying trend, especially in contexts where protection and accountability for women human rights defenders are largely absent.

Participants called for a rethinking of peacebuilding approaches in the region that often reproduce "toxic" deal-making and exclude women's voices. They stressed the need to connect grassroots movements to higher-level political processes, without overburdening local actors who lack resources and protection. Protection and participation must advance together as there can be no genuine participation without safety. Examples from Iraq showed that bringing local voices into national and international dialogues is possible but requires sustained institutional support and risk-sensitive funding.

The discussion also examined the EU's role in the region. While participants acknowledged the importance of EU support, they expressed frustration with bureaucratic rigidity, reliance on intermediaries, and perceived double standards in its actions. They called on the EU to move beyond a "cheque book" approach toward genuine partnership, providing direct, flexible, and long-term funding while ensuring local ownership of the WPS agenda. Participants emphasized that conditionalities imposed by Western frameworks can be counterproductive, and advocated for WPS initiatives grounded in decolonial, context-sensitive feminist approaches that respect both international law and local realities.

Finally, participants stressed the importance of engaging men and boys as allies in protection and peace efforts, building community-based protection groups, and investing in sustainability beyond short-term projects. They called for stronger media accountability, particularly regarding online safety for women leaders, and greater coordination between EU institutions and member states. Linking local, national, and regional efforts, and learning across contexts, was seen as essential to advancing a truly inclusive and transformative WPS agenda in the region.

Measures discussed

For the EU and CSOs to consider:

- **Support decolonial and context-driven feminist approaches** that are grounded in local realities, rather than imposing Western frameworks or conditionalities.
- **Strengthen coordination between local and regional women's movements**, linking insider mediators, activists, and networks across countries for collective advocacy.

For the EU to consider:

- Provide **direct, flexible, and sustained funding** to women-led and grassroots organisations, reducing bureaucratic barriers and dependence on intermediaries. Invest in sustainability mechanisms that bridge short-term grants to longer-term support, ensuring continuity for community-led peace and protection work.
- **Integrate protection** measures and risk assessment into all funding and programming, especially for women human rights defenders and political candidates.
- **Facilitate connections across levels**, linking grassroots actors to national, regional, and international decision-making spaces, and providing safe platforms for dialogue.
- Engage strategically with digital platforms (e.g., Meta, X) to **enhance online safety and accountability for gender-based harassment and disinformation**.

For CSOs to consider:

- **Engage men and boys as allies** in protection and community peacebuilding, forming gender-balanced protection groups that promote shared responsibility.
- **Ground WPS work in local priorities and realities**, avoiding donor-driven language or frameworks that limit access or authenticity.
- **Advocate for digital and physical safety** as integral to participation, highlighting the intersection of online threats and real-world risks for women leaders.

■ 3.- Asia and the Pacific

The discussion on WPS in the Asia–Pacific highlighted the complex intersections of climate change, conflict, and gender in the region, with research from the Philippines and Kashmir illustrating how environmental pressures such as droughts, floods, and landslides exacerbate vulnerabilities and inequalities. In areas where environmental degradation, displacement, and resource competition are reshaping gender roles, women often take on greater economic and social responsibilities as men migrate, yet their participation in crisis decision-making remains limited. Indigenous and displaced communities are disproportionately affected, and relocations or recovery efforts frequently overlook women’s practical needs. Women environmental defenders, especially those opposing extractive industries or land grabs, face heightened risks of violence. Participants emphasised that integrating climate analysis into conflict and gender frameworks could not only mitigate risks but also create opportunities for peacebuilding, citing community-led water projects as examples of successful local initiatives rooted in trust and collaboration.

The group also discussed persistent gaps in WPS implementation, noting that women are often excluded from political and resource management decisions despite their frontline role in climate adaptation. Strengthening women’s agency in patriarchal societies can provoke backlash, yet demographic shifts, such as male migration, can

create openings for women's leadership, though these require long-term support to be sustainable. Participants stressed that short-term interventions are insufficient, and consistent accompaniment is needed to consolidate gains and prevent regression.

Democratic backsliding and shrinking civic spaces in countries including Afghanistan, Myanmar, India, and Cambodia were identified as additional challenges, though participants highlighted the vibrancy of grassroots, women-led movements in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Indonesia, and Thailand. These movements often operate informally and face barriers to registration, making them invisible to conventional donor frameworks. Supporting such actors effectively requires flexible, trust-based approaches that respect local autonomy and the organic, decentralised nature of their work.

A significant focus of the discussion was on EU funding models, which participants described as bureaucratic and risk-averse, limiting support for informal or rapid-response initiatives. Alternative approaches proposed include rapid-reaction funds, seed and core funding, third-party administration to ease administrative burdens, and philanthropic-style trust-based models emphasising mutual accountability. Direct funding to women's organisations remains crucial, though offering options for intermediated arrangements can enhance efficiency and choice. Participants recommended that the EU act more as an accompanier and convener, providing safe spaces for dialogue, investing in long-term partnerships, and bridging siloed programming.

Measures discussed

For the EU to consider:

- Integrate **climate analysis** into WPS and conflict-prevention frameworks, ensuring that all climate responses are gender- and conflict-sensitive.
- Support **locally led, context-specific climate and peace initiatives**, especially those involving indigenous and displaced women, avoiding one-size-fits-all approaches.
- **Reform funding systems**
 - o Create **flexible and rapid-response funding mechanisms** to address emerging crises and sustain long-term peacebuilding and climate adaptation efforts.
 - o Shift toward **core and trust-based funding** that empowers local actors to set priorities and manage resources autonomously.
 - o Reduce administrative burdens through **intermediated or consortium-based models** where larger partners handle compliance on behalf of smaller groups.
 - o Adopt a role as **accompanier and convener**, investing in dialogue spaces, safety, care, and long-term partnerships rather than top-down control.
 - o Enable **five-year or longer funding cycles** with adaptive learning phases to strengthen sustainability and responsiveness.
 - o Promote **mutual accountability frameworks** that share responsibility between donors and grantees for learning and results.

For CSOs to consider:

- Develop and share **locally rooted models that link gender, climate resilience, and peacebuilding**.
- Act as facilitators and buffers between donors and local partners, **absorbing administrative requirements** while enabling grassroots leadership.
- Strengthen alliances among informal women's movements, ensuring visibility and collective advocacy on WPS and climate issues.
- **Prioritise safety, wellbeing, and protection** of women environmental defenders and peacebuilders.
- Engage with customary and local governance systems constructively to **promote inclusion without confrontation**, supporting gradual transformation.
- **Engage men and boys as allies** in protection and community peacebuilding, forming gender-balanced protection groups that promote shared responsibility.

■ 4.- Europe

Participants in this breakout group highlighted how the return of war to Europe has deepened gendered insecurities and reshaped the peace and security landscape not only in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood but within the Union itself. In the Eastern Partnership region, Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine and the unresolved conflicts in places like Nagorno-Karabakh have had severe consequences for women and marginalised groups. Participants underscored the rise in small arms circulation, domestic violence, and trauma among returning soldiers, stressing the need for a strong gender lens in disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) processes. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) continues to be severely under-resourced, relying heavily on women's organisations which are operating in crisis mode. Participants emphasised the need for sustained, predictable support that addresses not only urgent humanitarian needs but also the deeper, structural gender inequalities that perpetuate violence.

Civic space is closing across the region, with women's and LGBTQI+ activists facing arrests, threats, and disinformation campaigns. The growing anti-gender backlash—present not only in the neighbourhood but within the EU itself—was described as a shared struggle. Participants warned that the rush to accelerate EU enlargement as a geopolitical counterweight to Russia risks deprioritising fundamental rights in the accession process, including gender equality commitments. It was noted that feminist and women's movements in Eastern Europe and the Balkans have developed strong, context-specific responses that Western European actors could learn from. Yet, participants noted the difficult balance between feminist principles and the growing calls

for militarisation: Ukrainian women's groups, for instance, are simultaneously advocating for arms as a form of protection while pushing for peacebuilding and accountability.

Domestic violence emerged as a central and cross-regional concern, particularly in the context of militarisation and post-conflict trauma. Across the EU and neighbouring states, violence against women remains pervasive and underreported, with returning soldiers often both victims and perpetrators. Participants stressed that while states tend to fund victim services, they rarely invest in long-term empowerment, employment, or representation of women in the security and law enforcement sectors. Examples from the Balkans and EU countries show that the presence of women in policing and cybersecurity can shift institutional cultures, yet progress is slow.

Finally, participants called on the EU to defend and operationalise its own normative commitments and to ensure that peace, rights, and gender equality are not sidelined in the rush toward rearmament and geopolitical consolidation. The enlargement process, while politically driven, could be used to integrate the WPS agenda more deeply into accession and funding instruments like the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA). Participants stressed that Europe is in a transitional phase, requiring new tools, sustained funding, and political courage to uphold the fundamental rights that underpin its peace and security framework.

Measures discussed

For the EU to consider:

- **Embed WPS in enlargement and security policies**, IPA funding, and broader external and internal security frameworks, ensuring gender equality and human rights are not sidelined by geopolitical or rearmament priorities.
- Move beyond short-term, project-based humanitarian aid to provide **sustained, predictable support for women's rights organisations**, particularly those delivering SGBV services and working on prevention, empowerment, and advocacy.
- **Protect and expand civic space**. Strengthen mechanisms to safeguard human rights defenders and counter anti-gender movements, both in partner countries and within the EU. **Prioritise partnerships with independent women's organisations in restrictive environments**.
- **Adopt a gender lens in DDR and post-conflict recovery**. Support demobilisation, reintegration, and trauma-healing processes that address the gendered impact of militarisation, including domestic violence linked to returning soldiers.
- **Uphold and champion international treaties** like the Istanbul Convention and Ottawa Convention and ensure consistency between EU internal and external policies to counter perceptions of double standards.
- **Invest in women's participation in security institutions**, including in policing, cybersecurity, and peacekeeping roles, ensuring empowerment extends beyond victim support to leadership and decision-making.

For CSOs to consider:

- **Advocate for gendered security policies**, including DDR, domestic violence, and conflict-prevention policies that incorporate WPS principles, emphasising that peacebuilding and protection are interlinked.
- Share expertise and strategies among women's movements in the Balkans, EaP countries, and EU member states **to build a united front against anti-gender backlash** and shrinking civic space.
- **Document and communicate the long-term impact** of WPS-focused interventions. Generate evidence showing the cost-effectiveness and societal benefits of the WPS agenda to influence EU and national funding priorities.
- **Build relationships with police, military, and cybersecurity** sectors to advance gender equality from within, challenging masculine institutional cultures and broadening the definition of security.

Reclaiming the future of WPS: main outcomes to take forward

The closing panel reflected on the need to preserve and expand the hard-won gains of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in an increasingly fragmented global landscape. Speakers underscored that while the WPS framework has opened crucial political and civic space, these spaces are now under threat and must be both defended and deepened. **Breaking silos between diplomacy, development, defence, and civil society** was identified as essential to embedding WPS principles across EU and Member State action. Participants reaffirmed that WPS is a political, not technical, agenda that must be “hardwired” into all aspects of EU external and internal policy, from security and trade to digital and climate action.

Accountability and justice emerged as key themes. Panellists called for a broader understanding of justice for survivors of SGBV, going beyond criminal prosecution to encompass reparations, rehabilitation, and comprehensive MHPSS for both survivors and women peacebuilders. Locally and globally, **networks of women's organisations were recognised as vital for mutual protection, solidarity, and visibility**, with participants stressing that these must be sustained over the long term.

The EU and its Member States were urged to act with greater coherence, agility, and long-term commitment, aligning funding and partnerships with the WPS agenda and integrating protection as a standard requirement in project design. Civil society, including INGOs, was called upon to help define **mechanisms that reduce competition among**

local actors and reinforce collective advocacy. The private sector, too, was identified as a necessary partner in advancing protection and digital safety in particular.

Finally, speaker highlighted the importance of **engaging men as co-leaders in transforming masculinities and ensuring inclusive participation**, while safeguarding safe spaces for women's organising. Overall, the discussion emphasised shared responsibility, between the EU, Member States, and civil society, to uphold and advance the WPS agenda as a cornerstone of global peace and security.