



EUROPEAN PEACEBUILDING  
LIAISON OFFICE

## Ensuring the EU continues to finance conflict prevention and peacebuilding after 2027

### EPLO's position on the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework

February 2025

#### Introduction

The European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) calls on the European Union (EU) to **increase investment in conflict prevention and peacebuilding (CP-PB)**. The EU has played a critical role in fostering global stability through its support to civil society and locally led initiatives to prevent violence and promote peace. Preventing and addressing violent conflict is not only a **moral imperative** but also a **strategic and economic necessity**:

**Strategic:** The EU's role as a leading donor and actor in conflict-affected regions is **vital for maintaining its influence internationally** amid rising challenges. Today's global landscape is marked by the highest levels of active conflicts since the end of the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> Insufficient peacebuilding efforts have left many conflicts unresolved, with reliance on military responses proving ineffective. Investing in CP-PB fosters **stability for all**. Even distant conflicts have domestic repercussions, fuelling political polarisation and social tensions. These trends highlight the urgent **need for cooperative, comprehensive strategies to address interconnected global challenges**.

**Economic: Preventing violent conflicts makes economic sense.** The cost of violence was EUR 18.2 trillion in 2023, equivalent to 13,5% of the world's economic activity, or EUR 2 266 per person.<sup>2</sup> Today's conflicts are disrupting critical supply chains, forcing the displacement of over 117 million people at the end of 2023,<sup>3</sup> exacerbating impacts of the climate crisis, and creating conditions for transnational crime and armed groups to thrive. One quarter of the world's population live in countries affected by violent conflict, with these countries the furthest behind in progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The UN and the World Bank have demonstrated that **investments in prevention yield significant returns** in terms of avoiding conflict-related costs, with **every EUR 1 invested in peacebuilding saving EUR 16 in costs due to conflict**.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rustad, Siri Aas (2024), Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946–2023. PRIO Paper. Oslo: PRIO.

<sup>2</sup> Converted from USD. Institute for Economics and Peace (2024), Global Peace Index 2024: Measuring Peace in a Complex World, Sydney. <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GPI-2024-web.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR (2024), Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2023. Copenhagen, Denmark: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2023>.

<sup>4</sup> UN/World Bank (2018), Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict, World Bank, Washington, DC, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337>.

Specifically, we call for the EU to:

- 1. Uphold, at a minimum, the total value of the budget allocation to external action from the current Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to post-2027.**
  - Maintain Heading 6 (Neighbourhood and the World) as distinct from Heading 4 (Migration and Border Management) and 5 (Security and Defence).
  - Ensure that greater flexibility in external action is additional to predictable funding.
- 2. Increase the budget allocations for the Thematic Programme on Peace, Stability and Conflict Prevention.**
  - Divide the budget of the Thematic Programme equally between the two areas of intervention, CP-PB and crisis preparedness, and global, trans-regional and emerging threats.
  - Sustain and enhance the dedicated specialised staffing resources and the multi-country, cross-regional approach embedded in the current programme structure.
- 3. Include conflict prevention and peacebuilding as objectives in all External Financing Instruments (EFIs).**
  - Include specific objectives for CP-PB into all EFIs, including any successor to the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance.
  - For all EFIs, ring-fence funding to CP-PB to ensure that these funds cannot be diverted to serve shifting, short-term political interests.
  - Enhance the linkages between flexible crisis response mechanisms and longer-term programming.
  - Enhance the capacity of EU Delegations and geographic units at headquarters to design and deliver CP-PB initiatives, mirroring the successful approaches used by thematic programmes. This includes ensuring that staff possess the necessary expertise to implement CP-PB effectively.
- 4. Increase meaningful engagement with and budget allocations to civil society.**
  - Increase the overall budget allocations within EFIs for civil society organisations (CSOs).
  - Within these allocations, increase the funding available for direct and long-term funding for locally led CSOs.
  - Maximise the effectiveness of the EU's external action by making it a legal requirement to meaningfully engage with civil society in the design and implementation of all external action programming.
- 5. Ensure that all EU external action is conflict- and gender-sensitive.**
  - Maintain current commitments to conflict-sensitivity and gender-sensitivity and the use of gender-sensitive conflict analysis screening tools to inform programming.
  - Expand the mandatory use and application of these tools to inform programming of all external actions, including the Global Gateway.
  - Ensure that these tools are properly resourced throughout EU external action, to enable full and effective implementation.

Further detail under each recommendation is outlined below:

### 1. Uphold, at a minimum, the total value of the budget allocation to external action of the MFF

The challenges facing the EU's partner countries are set to intensify in the coming years. In a rapidly evolving global context, the EU seeks to “contribute to peace and security and the sustainable development of the Earth.”<sup>5</sup> Achieving these ambitious objectives requires **maintaining, at a minimum, the current budget levels of EUR 101 085 million (2018 prices) for external action** under the MFF.<sup>6</sup> Without sufficient funding, the EU risks undermining its credibility and compromising both its global commitments and strategic interests.

The EU should ensure that the successor to **Heading 6 (Neighbourhood and the World)** remains **distinct** from the successor to Heading 4 (Migration and Border Management) and Heading 5 (Security and Defence). Merging these areas would risk diverting funds from external action priorities, such as addressing the root causes of conflict and insecurity, towards internal objectives like migration control, border management and European industrial capacity.

Further, the successor to Heading 6 must incorporate sufficient flexibility to address unforeseen crises and urgent conflict prevention needs in partner countries. However, **flexibility must complement—rather than replace—predictability**, predictable funding being essential to effectively tackle the underlying drivers of conflict and insecurity and address the complex challenges of today's global landscape.

### 2. Increase the budget allocations for the Thematic Programme on Peace, Stability and Conflict Prevention

The current budget for this programme falls short of what is needed to prevent conflict, respond to crises, build peace, and address global, trans-regional, and emerging threats. Therefore, it is crucial for the new MFF to **increase the budget allocation for the Thematic Programme on Peace, Stability, and Conflict Prevention (TP on PSCP)**. The external mid-term evaluation of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI-GE)<sup>7</sup> notes that “the EU risks losing leverage if it does not maintain strong engagement for crisis response and peacebuilding, particularly in fragile countries and protracted crises”.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Article 3 Treaty on European Union.

<sup>6</sup> 2018 prices, see COUNCIL REGULATION (EU, Euratom) 2024/765 of 29 February 2024 amending Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2093 laying down the multiannual financial framework for the years 2021 to 2027 [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L\\_202400765](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202400765).

<sup>7</sup> Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe.

<sup>8</sup> Particip GmbH (2024), Evaluation of the European Union's External Financing Instruments (2014-2020 and 2021-2027) Volume I: Synthesis Report.

Therefore, **expanding the budget for this programme represents a strategic investment in global peace and stability**, as well as a cost-effective means of advancing EU interests and values.

The budget for the Thematic Programme under the current MFF has been divided between two areas of intervention. ‘Assistance in addressing global, trans-regional and emerging threats’ is allocated 69% of the total budget of the Thematic Programme and focuses on supporting partner countries in introducing institutional reforms needed to address security threats, such as violent extremism and organised crime.<sup>9</sup> ‘Assistance for conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crisis preparedness’ is allocated only 29% of the budget. This area of intervention encompasses “all the dimensions of conflict, including prevention, promoting nonviolent settlement of difference, upholding human security and dignity and addressing root causes of conflict”.<sup>10</sup> It builds capacities for conflict management beyond the state level, harnessing the potential of engagement at local and community levels to promote a culture of peace. Any successor to the NDICI-GE should include, within the regulation itself, a commitment to **divide the Thematic Programme budget equally between the two areas of intervention** to ensure a holistic approach to conflict prevention and peacebuilding, which are also important building blocks towards addressing security threats.

It is essential to **preserve—and where feasible, enhance—the dedicated specialised staffing resources and the multi-country, cross-regional approach** embedded in the current Thematic Programme structure. Sustaining this model will ensure the EU has the expertise to address the increasing complexity of global challenges. It also enables the EU to strategize, analyse, and operate across borders and regions, fostering stability, security, and broader development worldwide.

### **3. Include conflict prevention and peacebuilding as objectives in all External Financing Instruments**

It is essential that the EU **integrates specific conflict prevention and peacebuilding objectives into all External Financing Instruments (EFIs)** and ensures that **dedicated funding for these priorities is ring-fenced** within each to ensure that these funds cannot be diverted to serve shifting, short-term political interests. This includes any successors to the **Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and the NDICI-GE**. The rapid response mechanism accounts for only 4% of the NDICI-GE, and the Thematic Programme on Peace, Stability and Conflict Prevention only 1%.<sup>11</sup>

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[https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fa67d6be-550b-450a-b3c3-f9d5959f55af\\_en?filename=evaluation-eu-external-financing-instruments-2014-2020-and-2021-2027-main-report-provisional\\_en.pdf](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fa67d6be-550b-450a-b3c3-f9d5959f55af_en?filename=evaluation-eu-external-financing-instruments-2014-2020-and-2021-2027-main-report-provisional_en.pdf) p.54.

<sup>9</sup> Multiannual Indicative Programme, NDICI- Global Europe – Thematic Programme on Peace, Stability and Conflict Prevention 2021 - 2027 [https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-01/mip-2021-c2021-8985-peace-stability-conflict-prevention-annex\\_en.pdf](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-01/mip-2021-c2021-8985-peace-stability-conflict-prevention-annex_en.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Art. 6, *Regulation (EU) 2021 / 947 establishing the NDICI-GE*

In order to have an impact at scale in partner countries, it is imperative to **effectively engage with CP-PB under the geographic programmes**, which account for 76% of the NDICI-GE budget,<sup>12</sup> rather than solely funding the EU's response to rising levels of violent conflict through the more limited budgets of the other programmes.

While the inclusion of CP-PB objectives in the NDICI-GE's geographic programming was a positive step, there is room for improvement in their practical application within any successor instruments. There must be a greater will to enhance the **capacity of EU Delegations and geographic units at headquarters to design and deliver CP-PB initiatives**, which includes Global Gateway initiatives. This includes ensuring that staff possess the necessary expertise to implement CP-PB effectively. Investing in CP-PB through the geographic programmes is cost-effective as it contributes to human development, fosters an environment conducive to poverty reduction, and supports the achievement of the SDGs as well as the EU's approach to the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus.

As the EU increasingly focuses on projects under the Global Gateway Initiative, it should ensure that **funding continues to be allocated to conflict-affected and fragile contexts**. The EU must prioritise **longer-term investment in CP-PB** to ensure sustainable impact, alongside rapid-response funding for emergencies to prevent atrocities and contain conflict escalation. Strengthening the connections between short-term crisis response funding and longer-term programming under the geographic pillar is vital for contributing to peace, the prevention of conflict and therefore to stability. We therefore urge the EU to act on the Council's recommendations, which "recall that support for 'Peace, Stability and Conflict Prevention' and security is a cross-cutting priority of the NDICI-Global Europe, including within geographic pillars and encourages the Commission to **enhance the linkages between flexible crisis response mechanisms and longer-term development**."<sup>13</sup>

#### **4. Increase meaningful engagement with and budget allocations to civil society**

Civil society organisations (CSOs), particularly locally led CSOs, play a critical role in peacebuilding by addressing the root causes of conflict and tackling the key drivers of instability. Yet, as civic space shrinks, civil society is facing an increasingly challenging political and funding landscape. Consequently, EU support is more crucial than ever. CSOs are essential for building resilience, accountability, and transparency, especially amid rising instability and increasing threats to democracy.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Mid-Term Evaluation of the NDICI-Global Europe external financing instrument - Council conclusions (24 June 2024).

Supporting civil society aligns with the EU's commitments to peace, democratic governance and the respect of human rights and dignity enshrined in the Treaty on European Union (TEU)<sup>14</sup>. To uphold its values, strengthen its credibility and to demonstrate global leadership, the EU must **increase the overall budget allocations within EFIs for CSOs** and ensure civil society has access to **more and to longer term funding**. By strongly supporting CSOs, particularly locally led CSOs, the EU not only defends these principles but also demonstrates its commitment to being a reliable partner in times of fragility and conflict. Further to funding, the EU should **make it a legal requirement to meaningfully engage with civil society in the design and implementation of all external action programming** to maximise effectiveness.

Beyond funding CSOs directly, the EU must ensure that partnerships with local civil society actors that are established through intermediaries (UN and Member State agencies, international NGOs etc.) are more equitable, transparent and responsible.

## 5. Ensure that all EU external action is conflict- and gender-sensitive

EPLO welcomed the **promotion of a conflict-sensitive and gender-sensitive approach** in all NDICI-GE actions and programmes<sup>15</sup> and the introduction of **conflict analysis screenings** as a requirement when drafting programming documents for fragile and conflict-affected countries and regions under the current MFF. **This requirement must be maintained in any successor EFI(s) under the next MFF**, and efforts should continue to regularly update conflict analyses and ensure their integration in programming, as well as to ensure conflict analyses are gender-sensitive.

Well-designed external actions that continue to adapt to changing contexts are more likely to succeed. With adequate investment in conflict- and gender-sensitivity during both the design and implementation phases, actions avoid causing unintended harm, namely exacerbating social, political, and economic tensions, deepening inequalities, and further marginalising already vulnerable groups. Understanding and responding to these dynamics is essential for reinforcing the positive impact of and public support for the actions themselves. Consequently, to achieve more sustainable outcomes, the EU should **expand the mandatory use and application of these tools to inform programming of all external actions**, beyond just fragile and conflict-affected countries and regions, and ensure that they are **properly resourced**, to enable full and effective implementation. This includes investments under the Global Gateway Initiative to minimise potential harm and ensure that investments have a positive impact for the EU, partner countries, and local populations.

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<sup>14</sup> Article 3, 21 of the TEU.

<sup>15</sup> Recital (58), EU (2021), *Regulation (EU) 2021 / 947 establishing the NDICI-GE*.