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# **Policy Meeting on European Civil Society Organisations' input to the UN Peacebuilding Architecture Review 2025**

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**Meeting Report**  
03 March 2025

## Background

On 20 February, the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), in cooperation with the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations (UN) and the European Commission's Service for Foreign Policy Instruments, organised a full-day exchange to gather civil society recommendations for the 2025 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture. Among the contributors to the discussions were: the UN Assistant-Secretary General for Peacebuilding Support, Elizabeth Spehar, and the Deputy Chief of the Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund, Marcus Lenzen; European Union (EU) Ambassador for Gender and Diversity and Deputy Managing Director for Values and Multilateral Relations, EEAS, Stella Ronner-Grubačić, Head of Division for Peace, Security and Defence Partnerships, EEAS, Guillem Riutord Sampol and Team Leader- Sub-Saharan Africa & Conflict Prevention and Peace Building, Service for Foreign Policy Instruments, Gaëlle Nizery; alongside EU representatives from the EEAS, the European Commission (Service for Foreign Policy Instruments and the Directorate General for International Partnerships); and leading civil society actors.

The discussion took place under the Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) mechanism. The CSDN is a mechanism for dialogue between civil society and EU policymakers on issues related to peace and conflict. It is co-financed by the EU and managed by EPLO in cooperation with the European Commission and the EEAS.

## Executive summary

The exchange gathered 35 civil society representatives from European conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding organisations to discuss the ongoing review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture (PBA). Discussions took place in plenary format, allowing for exchange between civil society participants and EU and UN representatives, and in smaller thematic-focused groups. In line with the Terms of Reference for the Review, discussions centred on the functioning of the PBA and the ambition to enhance the impact at field level of the UN's work to build and sustain peace. The recommendations which emerged are directed both at the UN and the EU and its Member States, with a view to both the reform of the PBA and to the role of the Union and its Members within the Review process and in supporting the PBA more broadly. As the meeting did not aim to reach a consensus, the recommendations do not necessarily represent a majority view of participants.

The discussions gathered insights on how the UN PBA can be strengthened, and the potential role of both the EU and its Member States in this process. Participants also discussed three key challenges for the PBA, namely supporting and leveraging **national prevention strategies**, enhancing **coherence** for peacebuilding and sustaining peace across the entire UN system, and addressing **horizontal priorities**.

Throughout the discussions, recurring topics included the impact of the **trust deficit** which has made international and multilateral cooperation increasingly challenging and the need to reconcile approaches to peacebuilding and sustaining peace with the growing focus on security and defence. Considering the increasingly fraught global order, the necessity of fostering more **effective partnerships**, including between the EU, the UN and civil society, was repeatedly highlighted by participants. In addition, the importance of **effective communication** on the work of the UN was highlighted in various ways, from the need to destigmatise conflict-affected states' cooperation with the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), to the need to demystify the UN's operations at country level.

The role of the UN and the EU in supporting civil society in its diversity was stressed, particularly in light of **shrinking civic space**. It was further emphasised that the EU has a role to play in supporting the Women, Peace and Security (**WPS**) and Youth, Peace and Security (**YPS**)

agendas. The importance of engaging with youth in particular emerged strongly throughout the course of the consultation, with recommendations on institutionalising interactions between the PBC and youth representatives put forward.

The need to establish clearer definitions or standing principles for both **national ownership** and meaningful **inclusion** were discussed at length. Participants stressed that effective conflict prevention strategies require a cross-sectoral, multi-stakeholder approach, which would be facilitated by **breaking down siloes** across the UN system. Participants also flagged that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly **SDG 16**, are powerful conflict prevention tools, but with implementation lagging so far behind they appear to have been forgotten. Participants were mindful of the fact that the 2025 Review is the fourth such review; the importance of implementing the recommendations of the Review and **monitoring and evaluating progress** was stressed by the majority.

## Summary of the discussions

This summary report synthesises the main discussions which took place both in plenary and in smaller breakout groups around four main themes.

### 1. The EU and its Member States supporting a strengthened UN PBA

Participants discussed the opportunity presented by the Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR) to reform the PBA and render it more fit to deliver on the actions laid out in the Pact for the Future and the New Agenda for Peace. Given the current challenging geopolitical climate, in which international law and international humanitarian law are under threat, multilateralism is faltering and there is a growing backlash on women's rights, participants expressed caution about pushing for ambitious reforms or commitments for fear of losing ground on progress already gained. Given the growing global challenges to peace and security, participants underlined the importance of using the PBAR as an opportunity to push forward existing agendas but are mindful of the risks inherent in opening up discussions on certain areas and jeopardising previously agreed commitments. It was emphasised that the EU, as an important multilateral actor, should leverage its diplomatic and political influence to support peacebuilding efforts, maintain standards in the use of conflict sensitive approaches, and bridge divides between UN Security Council (UNSC) members. Participants stressed the need for the EU to advocate to uphold existing multilateral commitments, particularly on women and youth, and to encourage UN Member States who have not traditionally engaged on conflict prevention and peacebuilding to do more.

It was recognised that the EU has a vital role to play in sustaining and opening civic space, particularly as in contrast to the UN, the EU and its Member States have well developed strategic partnerships with civil society organisations (CSOs). Participants stressed that a robust civil society requires the development of sustainable financing models. In the context of an existential funding crisis in the sector, without long-term support, local organisations will soon cease to exist. Participants regretted that the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) has become less accessible to civil society actors since 2024. It was stressed that the PBF's focus on peace is important in terms of signalling at country level the value of engaging with civil society actors and in ensuring peace stays on UN Member States' national agendas. Given the EU and its Member States' contribution to the PBF, it was recommended that they align their peacebuilding efforts with those funded by the PBF, in order to ensure greater coherence at country level.

The potential for the EU to play a more important role in capacity building and providing technical support to national governments was highlighted, for example, through supporting the

implementation of national prevention strategies, early warning systems or joint conflict analysis. Participants emphasised the importance of supporting monitoring and learning, particularly to expand the evidence base for effective prevention. It was highlighted that these practices are often top-down, led by international organisations and can be distant from the realities at local level.

## Recommendations

### **The EU and EU Member States should:**

- Identify and engage relevant actors who have yet to be involved in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and sustaining peace, (e.g. smaller states) and explore ways to leverage their increased support.
- Support the institutionalisation of engagement between the UN and civil society, including through leading by example and providing financial support, and a renewal of the commitment to implement the UN Community Engagement Guidelines.
- Advocate for a renewed commitment to supporting local civil society actors, including by pushing for the PBF to be directly accessible to civil society organisations again.
- Maintain the space for the WPS and YPS agendas.
- Advocate for increased staff resources in the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) to strengthen analytical capacity to provide evidence-based support and to bolster the capacities of the Peacebuilding Impact Hub. This would in turn facilitate more bottom-up approaches to evidence gathering and monitoring, evaluation and learning practices.

### **The Peacebuilding Commission should:**

- Develop a mechanism for structural engagement with civil society, for example by establishing a technical advisory group composed of local peacebuilders, including youth representatives, and hosting yearly regional consultations with civil society.
- Have a complementary mandate to brief the UNSC on the drivers and root causes of conflict.
- Cooperate with the Group of Friends of Mediation, and if established, the Group of Friends of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding to increase exchange with the UNSC, through Arria-formula Meetings.
- Increase engagement with the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and with the UNSC.

## **2. Strengthening national ownership in the context of national prevention approaches**

Discussions were held on how best to leverage national prevention strategies to effectively build national capacities and infrastructures for peace. Participants discussed the meaning and framing of national ownership, recognising that it is a term that can be politically charged. It was stressed by some participants that the understanding of national ownership at the UN level often differs from that of actors at country level. In some contexts, processes billed simply as public consultations are seen as less exclusive. Participants argued for the establishment of standing principles on what constitutes inclusive, participatory national or local ownership to ensure civil society inclusion moves beyond tokenism or box-ticking. The role of the UN in opening civic space, creating opportunities for dialogue, and funding civil society organisations directly, was stressed as an essential means of supporting ownership, particularly in contexts where civil society involvement faces national resistance. It was further emphasised that the EU has a role to play in supporting these efforts.

In terms of strengthening national prevention approaches, the importance of viewing prevention as a continuum, addressing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of violent conflict, was identified as a means of establishing entry points with a broader variety of stakeholders at the multilateral and national level. Discussions around prevention must be cross-sectoral, moving beyond involvement of the security and defence sector, to encompass collaboration with justice, governance, development, and economic actors. Participants highlighted that many Resident Coordinators (RCs) have established good practice in conflict prevention, including in prohibitive contexts and across borders, that should be revisited to inform the development of national prevention strategies.

As conflicts often cross borders and are heavily influenced by regional dynamics, it was stressed that national prevention strategies cannot be developed without consideration of the broader regional and trans-national context. National prevention strategies should be elaborated using a combination of inclusive, bottom-up approaches and top-down approaches which take the broader geographic context and collaboration with regional partners into consideration. Participants highlighted the potential of peer-to-peer learning to enhance the development of national prevention strategies.

### Recommendations

- The development of national prevention strategies should be pursued as an end in itself. Inclusive, participatory processes help to build social cohesion and can increase buy-in for the resultant strategy. Civil society should be meaningfully engaged in the design, implementation and evaluation of national prevention strategies.
- National prevention strategies should draw on existing strategies and frameworks at both national and multilateral level to create coherence, rather than duplicate existing efforts.
- Support to the development of national prevention strategies requires the facilitation of multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral approaches.
- Prevention should be rooted in rigorous conflict analysis, ensuring national strategies integrate early warning mechanisms and conflict-sensitive approaches. Analysis should be gender- and climate responsive and trauma informed.
- The PBC should increase support to peer-to-peer exchanges and horizontal learning on national prevention strategies, national dialogue processes and peacebuilding efforts to strengthen national capacities.
- Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs) should be embedded in all Resident Coordinator Offices, funded by the general UN budget.

### 3. System-wide coherence for peacebuilding

Participants explored necessary reforms within the UN system to enhance the integration of the PBA, ensuring more effective engagement across the broader UN framework and positioning peacebuilding and conflict prevention as a fundamental, cross-cutting priority across all pillars of the UN's work. To increase system-wide coherence for peacebuilding and sustaining peace, it was argued that greater peace literacy is needed among UN staff. Participants reported that Resident Coordinators often have a greater understanding of humanitarian work than peacebuilding. RCs should be encouraged to integrate peacebuilding strategies into their work, including through specialised training and increased accountability to the UNGA and UNSC.

On the other hand, it was discussed that civil society actors often lack the necessary UN literacy or access. There is a need to demystify what the UN looks like at country level and how it operates as civil society often do not know how best to interact with UN staff, access support

and ensure coherence in their respective actions. This was flagged as being of greater importance now that civil society actors can no longer apply directly to the Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative (GYPi) of the PBF but must rely on an invitation to become a sub-grantee.

The system of Peace and Development Advisors was recognised by participants as a strong model of cooperation. PDAs, as they are shared between UNDP and UNDP/PA, help to break siloes across the UN system and promote overall coherence. Putting PDAs forward as more prominent peacebuilding liaisons at country level, acting as a link between UN agencies and civil society, would spread awareness among civil society of UN systems and operations and allow for greater information sharing.

The siloed nature of UN funding was identified as a cause of gaps in peacebuilding work. However, pooling of funding can force agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) into competition with one another, leaving little room for coordinated peace initiatives. Larger funding pots favour implementing agencies and INGOs that have adequate absorption capacity, often to the detriment of local civil society actors who lack the financial capacity to compete. Participants discussed the need for NGOs and CSOs to be part of networks and coalitions in order to access funding. National governments lead PBF priority setting, but CSOs are often excluded or only selectively included. Participants argued that the UN has a role in advocating for CSOs to have a formal role in consultations.

### Recommendations

- The deployment of Peace and Development Advisors should be scaled up. PDAs should act as peacebuilding liaisons at country level.
- Local and national civil society organisations should be funded directly, without intermediaries. Financing procedures should be simplified and the capacity of civil society actors in country to directly access funds increased.
- Conflict analysis should be carried out by mixed teams that combine international and local perspectives.
- There should be greater transparency on the workings of the UN system at country level.
- The PBAR should focus on the procedural elements which can support system-wide coherence, including procurement, human resources and finance procedures.
- The PBC should increase structured interactions with the UNGA and UNSC through informal consultations (e.g. Arria formula meetings).
- The PBF should remain as an extra-budgetary mechanism, but the core staffing structure of the PBA should be funded from the central budget of the UN, ensuring the Fund is used for programmatic purposes.
- The global call for civil society applications for the Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative (GYPi) should be reinstated.
- A mechanism should be established to monitor the implementation of PBAR recommendations.

## 4. Delivering on horizontal priorities

Discussions centred on progress made so far on delivering on horizontal priorities, particularly on WPS and YPS. It was highlighted that while advances have been made on these two agendas, progress has been more limited in addressing the climate, peace and security nexus. Furthermore, the importance of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and good governance as cross-cutting priorities has not been sufficiently recognised, particularly when it comes to the role these issues play in supporting conflict prevention. It was emphasised that

these priorities should not be pursued in isolation, but as cross-cutting to all the horizontal priorities discussed.

Participants emphasised that the focus must shift from developing new strategies to implementing existing policies and delivering on already agreed upon commitments. In terms of effective implementation, persistent barriers in accessing funds and inefficiencies in funding chains were discussed, including the resources wasted in financing models that rely heavily on international NGOs sub-contracting local civil society organisations.

The EU's role in ensuring that gender is not exclusively associated with women and girls but rather approached through an intersectional lens in both policy and practice was emphasised. Participants also advocated for deeper EU-UN collaboration to enhance the integration of climate change and peacebuilding, and to inform coherent, anticipatory action on the climate, peace and security nexus.

### **Recommendations**

- There should be greater attention paid to good governance, MHPSS and climate, peace and security as horizontal priorities for conflict prevention.
- The EU should support the UN in bolstering the protection of civic space and ensure that conflict sensitivity is applied without negating the human rights imperative.
- National prevention strategies should bridge local/national divides and ensure meaningful and regular inclusion of young people through participatory approaches that guarantee their agency and support co-leadership and co-creation of conflict prevention mechanisms and peacebuilding processes.
- The UN should hold country-level consultation processes (including outside capitals and central hubs) that are proactive in engaging stakeholders in all their diversity. Processes should move beyond passive consultation and allow for co-creation of agendas.
- There should be a focus on the existing priorities within horizontal agendas and an emphasis on their implementation, rather than on developing new policies, to the exception of integrating environment and climate, as well as MHPSS considerations as cross-cutting to the WPS and YPS agendas.
- An intersectional lens should be applied to gender and conflict sensitivity. SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual characteristics) considerations should be integrated.
- The EU and UN together should strengthen connections, cross-fertilisation and evidence-generation between climate change and peacebuilding programming.
- The EU and UN together should champion mainstreaming of environmental and climate considerations across the PBA.