



# **Keeping Peace on the Agenda**

***A European Civil Society Strategy for  
Advancing Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution***

**EPLO Strategy 2026–2030**

## **Who We Are and our Added Value**

EPLO is the largest European network of civil society organisations, think tanks and networks committed to promoting peace and preventing violent conflict. Supported by a secretariat in Brussels, EPLO serves as the primary platform for convening and connecting experts and practitioners with one another, as well as with policymakers, providing a unique, unified entry point for peacebuilding into European policy developments.

From local to global levels, EPLO Member Organisations bring specialised knowledge across a wide range of thematic areas and global geographic reach. Founded in 2001 by 16 organisations, EPLO has grown to represent more than 50 members and has established itself as a key interlocutor within European and international policy spaces. EPLO creates opportunities for exchange and critical reflection among its Member Organisations ensuring they remain closely engaged with policy developments at EU and Member State level. Without such collective platform, the diverse perspectives of the European peacebuilding and conflict prevention sector would become fragmented and weakened. EPLO strives to amplify the work of its Member Organisations, and the diverse experiences of their partners in conflict-affected contexts and create synergies and cooperation among them.

Thanks to its expertise-based approach, EPLO promotes dialogue and cooperation among its Members, the wider civil society and institutional partners engaged in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. It strives to sustain and strengthen commitment to peace across policymakers, international institutions, practitioners, and civil society. EPLO translates Members' expertise into concrete recommendations and practices, supporting the EU and other European actors to deliver more effective, evidence-based contributions to global peace and security. At the same time, EPLO supports EU and European stakeholders by bringing evidence and analysis from conflict-affected contexts, drawing on the field experience of its Members and their partners, ensuring that policymaking is informed by the experiences of people directly affected by conflict.

EPLO is committed to the fulfilment of human rights, the principle of non-discrimination, gender equality and inclusion, sustainable development and local ownership, and the advancement of good governance and the rule of law in European external action.

## **Strategic Context**

The global landscape EPLO operates in today is profoundly different from that of its foundation 25 years ago. The current context is defined by systemic volatility and a rapid, multi-dimensional erosion of international law and the multilateral system. Conflicts are not only on the rise and more frequent, but more lethal, with civilian casualties surging dramatically and marginalised groups disproportionately impacted by the collapse of protection norms. Many of these conflicts are protracted and increasingly cross borders, destabilising entire regions and demanding cooperative, multilateral responses. This instability is further compounded by the climate crisis, which is not just a future threat but a conflict multiplier, driving resource scarcity and humanitarian disasters. Similarly, the rapid advancement of technology and AI is fundamentally reshaping the landscape of peace and security. While offering new potential for mediation and early warning systems, these tools are being co-opted to accelerate modern warfare, spread disinformation, and deepen the digital divide. Furthermore, the systemic sidelining of essential long-standing pillars of inclusive peace, such as the Women Peace and Security (WPS) and Youth Peace and Security (YPS) agendas, is not merely a delay but a reversal that threatens decades of progress.

Europe is not immune to these shifts. The return of large-scale conflict to the continent and the retreat of traditional allies from shared norms of international law are undermining the European Union's historically values-based foreign policy. As European governments pursue their immediate economic and security interests, their decisions carry weight far beyond Europe's borders. The peacebuilding and conflict prevention sector faces a double crisis: a rapidly shrinking civic space that marginalises independent civil society, and severe funding constraints that jeopardise the sustainability of long-term outcomes, in favour of militarised narratives. Security and peace must be understood as intrinsically linked, yet the support for nonviolent responses to conflict resolution is waning. The European Union, itself a peace project, has long been a vital supporter of conflict prevention and empowerment of civil society as a watchdog for democratic values. To remain credible and legitimate global actors, the EU and its Member States must resist the trend toward short-term transactional deals and remain united in the defence of a rules-based international order.

What has not changed is the commitment of civil society organisations to advancing peace worldwide. In this landscape, where the space for independent action is under threat, the need for collaboration and mutual support has become existential. Responding to these challenges demands civil society to act with greater agility, adaptability, and a willingness to explore new approaches to strengthen our collective impact.

The EPLO Strategy for 2026-2030 will guide the work of the network over the next 5 years. To ensure its continued relevance and assess the need to adapt priorities and approaches, a mid-term review will be conducted after 2.5 years.

## EPLO Strategic Focus 2026-2030

Over the five years of this strategy, EPLO will pursue three core objectives designed to navigate a shifting political landscape and reinforce the foundations of peacebuilding and conflict prevention at the basis of our work.

1. Expand a robust, connected European network to widen the commitment to peace
2. Promote political support for a peace-centred understanding of security
3. Support improved European peace-responsive action

By focusing our work through these three pillars, EPLO will ensure that the diverse expertise of civil society remains an indispensable force for global peace and security.

### ■ **Strategic Objective 1: Expand a robust, connected European network to widen the commitment to peace**

In a context characterised by shrinking civic space, the collective power of a unified civil society is no longer only an asset, it is a prerequisite for impact. EPLO will leverage its position to strengthen broader, more resilient alliances that re-establish commitment to conflict prevention and peacebuilding as the most sustainable responses to conflict

To achieve this, **EPLO will:**

- Serve as a community of practice engaging a wide range of interlocutors, including policymakers, international institutions, civil society and other relevant actors to facilitate exchange and deepen collective expertise in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Contribute to the development of a broad European constituency that champions peacebuilding and conflict prevention, across geographies and thematics.
- Ensure that at the basis of this European commitment to peace is a common understanding of peace and security rooted in the diverse realities of those most affected by conflict.
- Strengthen connections and shared understanding across national and regional levels, supporting member organisations and partners' efforts in shaping discussions nationally and internationally.
- Support cross-context and peer-to-peer learning that strengthen collective knowledge and practice.

■ **Strategic Objective 2: Promote political support for a peace-centred understanding of security**

As political support for non-violent approaches to conflict is increasingly challenged, EPLO will focus on making the case for conflict prevention and peacebuilding within European policy. In an environment where political actors increasingly prioritise increased military spending and securitised responses to violence, EPLO will work to ensure that policy-makers understand the unique strengths and long-term potential of peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts.

To achieve this, **EPLO will:**

- Champion an understanding of security that is intrinsically linked to nonviolent conflict resolution and prevention, and rooted in human security, human rights, and the lived experiences of people affected by conflict.
- Demonstrate that inclusive multi-stakeholder cooperation, integrating state, regional and international action and civil society expertise, remains the most rational, impactful, and cost-effective approach to preventing and resolving conflict.
- Mobilise support for the adequate and sustainable resourcing of civil society, ensuring that political commitments to peacebuilding are matched by the financial capital necessary for implementation.
- Contribute to the safeguard of civic space as a fundamental component of the European peace and security architecture, ensuring that the role of civil society as an active peace actor is protected against restrictive political pressures.
- Advance gender equality and inclusion to address the unequal power structures and root causes of inequality that undermine sustainable peace, promoting political approaches that centre the expertise and leadership of diverse women, girls, youth and marginalised groups in peacebuilding processes.
- Draw attention to risks linked to the climate crisis and fragility and promote environmental peacebuilding approaches.

■ **Strategic Objective 3: Support improved European peace-responsive action**

EPLO will act as a critical partner in ensuring that policy is not only conflict-sensitive but peace-responsive. By providing a bridge between Member Organisations' and partners' expertise and institutional policymaking, EPLO seeks to improve the quality, coherence, and long-term impact of Europe's engagement in conflict-affected contexts.

To achieve this, **EPLO will:**

- Enhance the effectiveness and impact of European external action in support for nonviolent conflict prevention and resolution by:
  - Informing peacebuilding policy and practice through the provision of expertise, evidence-based research and analysis grounded in peacebuilding and conflict prevention principles and best practices.
  - Advancing local ownership, inclusiveness and the protection of civic space as core values underpinning effective European external action for peace.
  - Working on the impact of emerging technologies and AI on global stability and conflicts, ensuring that digital innovation serves as a tool for conflict prevention and resolution.
  - Expanding support for conflict-sensitive approaches and social cohesion initiatives outside and within the European borders, across all foreign policy areas.
  - Advancing gender, peace and security (GPS) and considerations of the climate-environment-peace nexus as cross-cutting priorities within European external action.
- Monitor and critically evaluate the coherence and impact of Europe's external action policies, especially if they risk exacerbating conflict dynamics, to ensure that European engagement sustains a principled contribution to peace and human security.
- Leverage civil society's expertise and field-based knowledge to inform the design and implementation of conflict-sensitive and effective European policies.

## How? Operational Pillars:

- **Dialogue:** EPLO will continue to act as a primary convener of dialogue between practitioners and policymakers, ensuring that policy processes are directly informed by the lived experiences of people directly affected by conflict. Through established mechanisms, EPLO will provide the essential bridge between field reality and institutional policymaking.
- **Expertise and knowledge:** EPLO will showcase and amplify the experience and analysis of its Member Organisations and their partners, providing dedicated spaces for information sharing, coordination, and peer-to-peer learning to support the collective resilience and agility of the sector.
- **Strategic engagement:** EPLO will engage constructively with European and multilateral institutions, as well as governments, by providing the technical support needed to refine policy tools and processes aimed at conflict prevention, peacebuilding and the nonviolent resolution of conflicts.
- **Cross-sectorial collaboration:** EPLO will foster collaboration across sectors, connecting humanitarian, development, peace, security, climate and other actors. By breaking down operational silos, EPLO will support the development of a European external action that is integrated, comprehensive and sustainable.
- **Equity and Inclusion:** EPLO will ensure all its actions are informed by feminist principles of promoting equal participation by centring the leadership of diverse women, youth, marginalised groups and those most affected by conflict and by addressing unequal power structures and root causes of inequality and discrimination.