



# **CONFLICT PREVENTION, PEACEBUILDING AND CRISIS RESPONSE IN THE NEXT MULTIANNUAL FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK**

**CSDN Meeting Report**

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## European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO)

The European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) is the largest independent civil society platform of European NGOs, NGO networks and think tanks that are committed to peacebuilding and the prevention of violent conflict. EPLO's mission is to influence European policymakers to take a more active role in securing peace and resolving and preventing conflict through nonviolent means in all regions of the world, and to do so more effectively.

## Civil Society Dialogue Network

The Civil Society Dialogue Network (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 European Union (Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe). It is managed by the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), a civil society network, in cooperation with the European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS). The fifth phase of the CSDN will last from 2023 to 2026. For more information, please visit the EPLO website.



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## Background

The next EU long-term budget, the Multiannual Financial Framework, will shape the EU's actions from 2028 to 2035, including its external action. The [proposal](#) put forward by the European Commission in July 2025 outlines an increase in the budget allocated to external action under the Global Europe regulation. This regulation merges several external action instruments, including the Humanitarian Aid instrument, the Instrument for Pre-Accession and NDICI-GE, which currently funds conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crisis response.

The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union will issue positions in the coming months on the proposal of the Commission and interinstitutional negotiations will follow. Against this backdrop, this CSDN Policy Meeting aimed to feed into the reflections on the EU's next long-term budget for external action and how it can best address drivers of conflict and fragility through conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crisis response. By drawing on concrete examples and operational insights from civil society experts and practitioners working in conflict-affected settings, the meeting informed reflections among policymakers shaping the EU's future financial architecture.

The dialogue meeting brought together 35 civil society participants from diverse backgrounds and geographies, as well as 26 representatives of Member States and EU institutions, including the European Commission, the European External Action Service and the European Parliament.

This meeting report summarises the exchanges among civil society participants and EU interlocutors and provides a **set of 12 recommendations** for EU policymakers which emerged during the meeting (see page 13).

# Conflict prevention, crisis response and peacebuilding: a strategic investment for the EU

In the first session of the meeting, participants explored the strategic role of conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crisis response within the EU's external action. Drawing on concrete examples, they discussed why sustained investments in these approaches remain essential to addressing fragility and instability, and how they can be prioritised alongside other EU external action objectives.

EU interlocutors and civil society participants reflected on the rising levels of conflict worldwide. They cited the ICRC and the Global Peace Index according to which active conflicts are at their highest number since the end of World War II, with a doubling of this number in the last fifteen years and a deterioration in 97 countries. Conflicts continue to increase, including in the EU's neighbourhood. Participants also noted the fragmentation of the multilateral framework, limiting its capacity to address fragility and conflicts.

Civil society participants and various EU interlocutors highlighted that, beyond the principled agenda that underpins the EU's contributions to peacebuilding, there is also a **strategic rationale** for the EU to invest in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crisis response tools.

They underlined that to **achieve comprehensive security**, conflict prevention and peacebuilding were necessary to complement the EU's hard security tools. Participants stressed that without investing in its tools for peacebuilding, the EU would miss opportunities to sustainably tackle instability and prevent conflicts. They highlighted that peacebuilding allowed to reduce the need for costly hard-security tools while also addressing the complex, networked nature of today's conflicts and the roots of instability. Civil society representatives highlighted that the economic value of conflict prevention had been quantified, notably by the UN.

Participants also pointed out that in the context of the EU's Global Gateway Strategy, peacebuilding was necessary to **ensure that investments would not negatively contribute to conflict dynamics** and that such investments can contribute to sustainable development in peaceful environments. They stressed that projects that are not sensitive to conflict could cause conflict to break out or escalate, thereby undermining the overall goals of EU international cooperation and of the Global Gateway Strategy itself, as well as increasing the risk for investors.

Peacebuilding was also stressed as a strategic investment to **limit the impact of conflict on displacement** and to address its root causes.

Participants also underlined that peacebuilding enabled the EU to **build or retain partnerships with stable and peaceful third countries**. They provided an array of examples. In Kenya, in the context of elections in 2022, the EU supported a civil society-led project to de-escalate violence and establish a ceasefire monitoring during tensions at the border among ethnic groups, which contributed to the fact that Kenya is one of the most stable and peaceful states in the region. In Tanzania, a civil society-led project supported by the EU has fostered dialogue with security

forces, contributing to preventing conflict in a context of post-electoral violence. In Somalia, peacebuilding projects supported by the EU have contributed to state-building. In the Great Lakes, the EU's support to inter-community trust-building has contributed to limiting the spread of the conflict. In Moldova, a civil society-led project supported by the EU on conflict prevention has increased social cohesion, in the context of elections.

Civil society representatives also underlined that EU-supported peacebuilding contributes to **preventing recruitment by armed groups**. Participants shared several examples, including in Somalia, where the EU supports efforts to reduce the risk of youth recruitment into armed groups through a Civil Society Organisation (CSO)-led project.

## Preventing recruitment by armed groups

In Rwanda, the EU and Member States, through an informal Team Europe approach, are supporting a project to reintegrate former genocide perpetrators in society.

This project uses approaches that focus on family and community re-acceptance of these offenders, while incorporating livelihood initiatives to discourage former inmates from rejoining cross-border armed groups and from perpetuating extremist ideologies in the Great Lakes region.

Participants also stressed that civil society-led peacebuilding and mediation **contribute to peace-making efforts by building or maintaining dialogue through back channels** even when diplomatic or national dialogue efforts are halted. For instance, in Ukraine, the EU supported a CSO-led project which started a closed-door dialogue with several stakeholders to discuss the key security arrangements that have become part of the suggested solutions on the negotiations table today. In the South Caucasus, the EU has supported civil society actors working on the backchannels that contribute to the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace process.

## Building backchannels when diplomatic or national dialogue halts

In Sudan, the national dialogue is blocked, and a national ceasefire is not within reach. Yet, peacebuilding at the local level can prove successful and yield significant improvements for civilians, even in the shadow of national civil war.

In South Kordofan, a region of Sudan, a civil society project supported by the EU has contributed to dialogue between tribal leaders, religious leaders, armed actors, civilian government officials, pastoralists, and farmers. A cornerstone of this dialogue has been a local community-based conflict mitigation structure, which received tailored support from an international NGO. Together, they worked to address long standing tensions over resource scarcity and migration routes, to promote unarmed ways to protect civilians and break cycles

of violence. Conflict prevention, conflict mitigation, and compensation measures should conflict break out were agreed upon in a peace agreement.

In the part of South Kordofan where this project has taken place, conflict did not occur during the harvest season for the first time in 10 years, despite the much higher risk of atrocities induced by the continued fighting at national level. This local peace agreement continues to hold, despite conflict persisting at national level.

## Maintaining the EU's track record in building peace

Participants shared their perception that the EU has a **well-known track record in conflict prevention and peacebuilding**, in which the EU's capacity to link short-term deals with long-term outcomes stands out. From the EU's own roots as a peace project, to its support to the particularly successful peace processes in Northern Ireland and Colombia, the EU has a visible track record as a peace actor. In Colombia for instance, the EU's support to the peace process, including through civil society, has been recognised as a key factor in the successes of the peace process.

Civil society participants also shared the perspective that the EU's role as a mediator and its support to **mediation** processes, including through the UN, has become a core asset of European external action.

Participants underlined that civilian peacebuilding complemented **EU diplomatic engagement**, which remained essential, with CSOs notably commending the impact of EU Delegations and EU Special Representatives.

Many civil society participants praised the EU's **crisis response funding**. In Afghanistan, the EU's crisis response funding was extremely important as it allowed investment in multiple rounds of rapid response and support to CSOs, including at grassroots level. In Yemen, the EU's crisis response funding allowed the EU to fund women-led organisations very efficiently in a difficult context. In Syria, the EU's crisis response funding enabled the EU to seize openings to build peace flexibly and fast.

Civil society participants noted that the EU could face **reputational damage** if it divested from this important work.

## Current funding trends in conflict prevention and peacebuilding

Civil society participants noted that **at the global level, funding for conflict prevention and peacebuilding (CP-PB) had been decreasing since 2018**. CSOs mentioned the wider global Official Development Assistance (ODA) crisis, noting that these **cuts were in particular affecting funding for gender equality**, with women's rights organisations being forced to scale down or close.

They mentioned that the EU institutions' ODA to highly and extremely fragile contexts had remained stable in absolute terms but had been decreasing as a share of total EU ODA. They also emphasised that there was a **wider funding decline in ODA from EU actors**, with 17 EU Member States having made significant cuts to their ODA in 2025 and the ODA of EU institutions having decreased overall by 13.8% in 2025.

Civil society participants noted that the funding of EU institutions for CP-PB had a growing focus on crisis response, with **less focus on prevention** since 2022. Civil society participants also highlighted that there was a need for the funding to reach local CSOs more efficiently.

EU Services stressed that the EU's crisis response and CP-PB budget, consisting of 2.3% of NDICI-GE, had been maintained as planned throughout the current MFF (which is front-loaded), aside from a 5% cut imposed at the mid-term review.

## The need to defend an ambitious Global Europe budget

Civil society participants **welcomed the increase in external action funding in the Commissions' July 2025 Global Europe proposal**, compared to the current MFF. They however noted that the allocation to this heading would come under pressure during the negotiations. They noted that external action is the first sector to see cuts in the MFF discussions, and that there was a need to engage with Ministries of Finance to prevent this from being the case. They highlighted that decreasing this amount would be particularly detrimental in the context of national cuts in the ODA budgets of Member States, including to peacebuilding. They also **called for any decommitted funds to flow back to their budget lines of origin in Global Europe**, rather than being re-directed to other priorities, potentially outside the scope of external action.

## Localisation

Many civil society participants asked to **enhance the accessibility of funding for local CSOs** in the next budget cycle, notably through flexible grants and implementation modalities, as well as through a better shared understanding of risks. Regarding the current MFF, participants reported better accessibility for local CSOs under the thematic programmes of the NDICI-GE than under geographic programming. **CSOs deplored the loss of a dedicated thematic programme on civil society support** in the Global Europe proposal.

CSOs cited examples in which the EU's effectiveness was hampered by not funding local CSOs sufficiently. Several participants notably mentioned the case of Afghanistan, reporting that the EU delegation encountered administrative roadblocks to funding local CSOs.

Civil society participants recommended **maintaining the capacity of the EU's diplomatic footprint to engage with local civil society** and to contribute to early warning, and called for an assessment of the impact of proposed restructuring plans on these functions.

Some civil society participants highlighted the need to **ensure intermediaries are accountable** in their relationship with local actors, for instance by issuing specific guidelines.

Some EU representatives underlined that their services were further developing their localisation practices. A participant from the European Parliament (Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality) stated that more ambition was needed to ensure funding was directed to local organisations in the Global Europe proposal.

## Ensuring non-programmable funding is sufficiently available to respond to crises and opportunities

Civil society participants noted that the need for crisis response would likely increase. They highlighted that the amount available under the current NDICI-GE for crisis response had not been sufficient and was depleted early in the current MFF cycle. They stressed the need to ensure this would not occur under the next MFF.

They shared their concern that **non-programmable funding** under the Global Europe proposal would also be used for **competitiveness actions**, recommending **this category be removed from the eligibility criteria for this type of funding**. As a fallback, they suggested introducing a cap on such allocations if its removal does not secure sufficient political support.

It was highlighted that the configuration of the non-programmable envelope in the Global Europe proposal would imply constant and direct trade-offs between crisis response, humanitarian aid and macro-financial assistance. This would weaken the EU's ability to sustain long-term interventions and undermine funding predictability, hampering implementing partners' ability to deliver impactful projects.

Civil society participants advised that the percentages being floated by some institutional stakeholders for non-programmable funding were inadequate. In particular, they underlined that **if the percentage of non-programmable funding was set at 15% of Global Europe, it would severely hamper the EU's rapid response capability**, given that humanitarian funding (€25 billion) would already represent 13% of the total budget allocation of the instrument. Civil society highlighted that **any percentage below 20% would leave little margin for crisis response**, and that **20% would still remain insufficient if competitiveness remained eligible** for non-programmable actions. Civil society nonetheless supported the principle of setting a **clear ratio between non-programmable and programmable funding** to allow for **predictability**.

Some representatives of EU Services clarified that **the Commission's position (in line with the proposal) is not to set any percentage** on this ratio in the Regulation to allow for maximum flexibility.

A participant from the European Parliament highlighted that the draft report of the Parliament on Global Europe did not ask to remove competitiveness from non-programmable funding, while calling for better accountability safeguards on how non-programmable funding would be allocated to the various eligible categories of actions, notably in order to limit allocations to competitiveness under this type of funding. Civil society participants recommended that should it remain eligible under non-programmable funding, the Parliament and Council should

**introduce a fixed cap for competitiveness**, and that governance safeguards in the regulation should be further strengthened.

## Ensuring long-term funding in the context of geographisation

Many civil society participants highlighted that long-term and predictable funding was also essential for peacebuilding, and that crisis response and long-term funding should be better linked.

This was highlighted in particular in cases of protracted conflicts but also in general in order to develop trust-building in the long-term among parties to a conflict and with peace actors.

Civil society participants noted that the Global Europe proposal set out to further rely on geographic programming in Global Europe (geographisation), which would see 80% of funds channelled through geographic pillars and 20% through the global pillar. They highlighted that this would only contribute to more long-term funding for peacebuilding if **adequate staffing, with peacebuilding expertise**, was ensured in geographic programming units and EU delegations. They noted that building such expertise will require time and resources.

It was stressed that peace had already been an objective of the geographic pillars under the NDICI-GE, but that little programming had been undertaken in that respect, even in contexts where peacebuilding was a very prominent need. They highlighted that this had been attributed by think tanks to the fact that geographic programming units were ill-equipped in terms of human resources to carry out peacebuilding programming. CSOs notably referred to an example of a geographic programming unit that declined working on peacebuilding despite their context being a country in a civil war less than 10 years ago. Participants reported that the view of this geographic programming unit was that peacebuilding was only the remit of FPI or ECHO.

Civil society participants therefore stressed that, while setting the right basis for peacebuilding in geographic programming was necessary in the Global Europe regulation, it would also be necessary to **monitor that peace is taken up as a priority in the Programming Guidelines and in Multiannual Indicative Programmes**.

Participants suggested that the Global Pillar could act as a safeguard to ensure that key actions supported by the EU, such as in the field of peacebuilding, are not discontinued. However, neither funding for the Global Pillar, nor its objective on peace and resilience is ring-fenced. Civil society participants recommended that **the allocation to the Global Pillar should be increased to €15 billion and be ring-fenced**. A participant from the European Parliament shared that the draft report of the Parliament asked to introduce a minimum on the budget of the Global Pillar, and proposed to introduce peace, stability and conflict prevention as one of the three “common specific objectives” across Geographic Pillars, which would collectively receive 30% of the geographic funding. Some other EU interlocutors also highlighted the need to preserve, through the Global Pillar the **EU’s capacity to act on a global level**.

## Adopting a differentiated approach to address fragility

Civil society participants noted that the polycrisis was having an impact on new and protracted conflicts, often causing increased fragility. They welcomed that a **differentiated approach to fragility** was being discussed and would be embedded in the regulation to offer an alternative to the Global Gateway Strategy, in particular where these investments would not be immediately feasible.

CSOs recommended that the **differentiated approach should be based on grants** and aim to foster peace and improve social cohesion, access to basic social services, and governance.

They highlighted that the threshold of fragility that would trigger this differentiated approach for a given state would need to **encompass not only extremely fragile states** (the threshold in the Commission proposal) **but also highly fragile states**. CSOs highlighted important risks of not including highly fragile states, including the likelihood of EU partner countries being significantly left out of EU external action funding, but also the risk of missing opportunities to prevent conflicts before states become extremely fragile.

Highly fragile states in the OECD's typology include for instance Lebanon, Niger and Mali. Civil society participants stressed the need to include these conflict-affected states within the differentiated approach. They also pointed to additional examples of highly fragile settings, such as Kenya and Nigeria, noting that while these environments may attract Global Gateway investments, they continue to present significant peacebuilding needs.

A participant from the European Parliament shared that the draft report of the Parliament on Global Europe asked to use high fragility as a threshold for the differentiated approach. Member States mentioned that Council Conclusions were being developed on the EU's approach to fragility.

## The scope of peace & resilience objectives

Civil society participants highlighted that the scope of activities under the peace and resilience objectives of the geographic and global pillars (presented in Annex II of the proposed Global Europe regulation) was significantly reduced compared to the scope under NDICI-GE. They noted in particular that the **following intervention fields should be added**:

- **Mine-Action**
- **Transitional Justice**
- **Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR)**
- **Disarmament and non-proliferation initiatives**

They highlighted that not mentioning explicitly these in the objectives under Annex II would create the risk of decreased EU support for these critical areas of peacebuilding.

A participant from the European Parliament shared that the Parliament's draft report on Global Europe proposed to bring back clear mentions of such intervention fields.<sup>1</sup>

## Maintaining conflict sensitivity for all actions

Civil society participants highlighted the **essential role of the conflict sensitivity requirement enshrined in the NDICI-GE regulation** in ensuring that EU-supported actions do not exacerbate conflict dynamics or create tensions that may lead to conflict. Various EU representatives also noted the importance of conflict sensitivity. Civil society participants underlined that this was particularly important in the context of the Global Gateway Strategy, which aims at delivering large infrastructure projects. They highlighted that such large investments, in particular in Least Developed Countries, could lead to significant tensions if not conflict-sensitive, creating or worsening conflict dynamics which can, *inter alia*, lead to the interruption of infrastructure projects.

For instance, civil society participants based in Lebanon highlighted that water infrastructure projects had already created tensions between communities when not conflict sensitive. Participants based in Rwanda underlined that in a country where historical grievances between communities are particularly present, investments should follow a thorough conflict analysis screening to detect community conflicts early on.

### Large infrastructure projects and conflict sensitivity

Civil society participants highlighted the case of a large-scale investment in liquefied natural gas (LNG) by TotalEnergies in Mozambique, in Cabo Delgado. They shared the view that the €20 billion investment was not conflict-sensitive and contributed to conflict dynamics. According to the Institute for Security Studies ISS Africa, the project's operating model limits direct economic benefits to nearby communities, reinforcing local grievances that insurgent groups could exploit for recruitment.<sup>2</sup> ISS Africa also notes that the insurgency in Cabo Delgado has already drawn support from marginalised youth who perceive themselves as excluded from economic opportunities associated with natural resource projects.<sup>3</sup>

The project was halted in March 2021 after a terrorist attack on Palma, which served as a base of operations for many of TotalEnergies' construction workers. The terror attack killed at least 800 people according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED).

TotalEnergies is currently facing a lawsuit in France filed by the European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights, for alleged complicity in war crimes, torture and enforced disappearance, centred on events between July and September 2021 at TotalEnergies' gas

<sup>1</sup> The draft report notably includes mine-action, transitional justice, but not DDR or support to disarmament and non-proliferation initiatives.

<sup>2</sup> Nhamirre, B. (2026). Mozambique's LNG renewal: Opportunity amid security and secrecy risks. Institute for Security Studies Africa.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

site. The company has also faced a lawsuit filed in 2023 by survivors and relatives of victims of the March 2021 terror attack which led to halting the project, for its alleged negligence.

TotalEnergies restarted the LNG project in January 2026 despite the UN reporting nearly 60,000 people having been displaced in only three weeks in July 2025 by insurgent attacks on villages in Cabo Delgado.

CSOs underlined that conflict sensitivity should therefore not only be a requirement for crisis and foreign policy needs actions (as reflected in the Commission proposal of July 2025) or even crisis and post crisis contexts (as reflected in the December 2025 Council compromise). Instead, they recommended that the **requirement should apply to all actions and be embedded in the general principles of the Global Europe proposal**, as under NDICI-GE. They highlighted that this was notably recommended by the OECD-DAC Peer Review of EU development cooperation of December 2025. A participant from the European Parliament shared that the Parliament's draft report on Global Europe proposed to reintroduce conflict sensitivity in the general principles of the instrument (Article 9.4).

Civil society participants also suggested that bridges should be built between corporate social responsibility and conflict sensitivity, including as regards critical raw materials extraction. They recommended implementing conflict sensitivity through local consultation and in a gender-sensitive and climate-sensitive manner.

Member States mentioned that Council Conclusions were being developed on the Global Gateway.

## Thematic targets and mid-term review

Civil society participants recommended including **quantitative thematic targets** in the Global Europe regulation. They recommended notably:

- **Gender action targets as percentages of funding** (with 20% for gender marker 2 actions and 85% for gender marker 1 actions)
- A target of **20% of ODA for human development**
- A **DAC-ability target at 93%** without the possibility to change it through a delegated act
- A **climate and environment target at 35%**.

They underlined that the alternative proposal, the Performance Framework, was insufficient for target-setting. They also recommended that the **regulation should include a mid-term review**.

A participant from the European Parliament (Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality) mentioned that greater ambition was needed for gender targets, notably setting them in terms of a percentage of funding and not a percentage of actions (for which the funding attached can vary greatly).

EU Services mentioned that the Commission was not in favour of targets, to have more flexibility.

## Recommendations

1. Maintain at least the amount proposed by the European Commission for the Global Europe instrument.
2. Ensure decommitted funds flow back to their budget lines of origin in Global Europe.
3. Remove (or at least cap) competitiveness in the actions that are eligible for non-programmable funding in the proposed Global Europe regulation.
4. Encompass both highly and extremely fragile states in the “differentiated approach” mentioned in the proposed Global Europe regulation and base this differentiated approach on grants as a funding modality.
5. Include the conflict sensitivity requirement in the general principles of the Global Europe proposal, making it applicable to all Global Europe actions, not only actions in crisis or post-crisis situations or crisis and foreign policy needs actions.
6. Ensure that geographic programming units acquire the relevant staff and expertise to undertake peace and resilience programming, notably through peacebuilding and conflict prevention.
7. Monitor that peace is taken up in the Programming Guidelines and in the selection of priorities for Multiannual Indicative Programmes; ensure that funding is allocated to this priority.
8. Increase the allocation for the Global Pillar to €15 billion at a minimum and ring-fence it.
9. Include mine-action, transitional justice, DDR and disarmament and non-proliferation initiatives in the scope of activities under the peace and resilience objectives in Annex II of the Global Europe proposal.
10. Include quantitative thematic targets in the Global Europe regulation, notably gender targets, but also a human development and a climate target.
11. Maintain the capacity of the EU’s diplomatic footprint to engage with local civil society and contribute to early warning. Assess the impact of restructuring plans on these functions.
12. Issue specific guidelines for intermediaries on partnering with local CSOs.