



ASSESSING TRENDS IN PEACE, SECURITY, STABILITY AND RESPONSE TO CRISES FOR GLOBAL INITIATIVES UNDER THE NEXT EU MULTIANNUL FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK (2028-2034)

Meeting Report

July 2026

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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Contents

Background	1
Thematic programming under the next MFF.....	1
Lessons learned from EU-thematic programming under NDICI-GE.....	2
Major Peace & Security issues of continued relevance for 2028-2034	3
New challenges to take into account	6
Innovation and opportunities	7
Distinct areas of intervention	8
Main recommendations	9

Background

On 9 July 2026, the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), in cooperation with the European Commission's (EC) Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) and the European External Action Service (EEAS), organised a Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) Funding Instruments Meeting online.

The objective of the meeting was to bring together **EU services, civil society organisations** and **practitioners** to discuss major trends in peace, security, stability and crisis response.

Specifically, this Funding Instruments Meeting aimed to assess the challenges and opportunities encountered in recent years on achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16 and provide suggestions on how to take these into account for **future multi-annual programming on peace and security** under the **Global Pillar** of the proposed **Global Europe** regulation. This programming will be implemented under the next **EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)**, from 2028 to 2034.

The meeting also provided an opportunity to exchange on **lessons learned from the 2021-2027 Multi-annual Indicative Programme** of the Thematic Programme on Peace, Stability and Conflict Prevention under NDICI-GE.

The CSDN meeting was held under Chatham House Rules and gathered 66 participants from a broad range of civil society organisations and think tanks (40), as well as representatives of EU services (16), EU Member States Agencies (7), and technical international organisations (2). The meeting was preceded by an online survey, the results of which were shared through a [survey report](#) and presented at the meeting.

The following sections gather the key observations and recommendations that emerged during the discussions, which did not aim for consensus. The survey report contains complementary observations.

Thematic programming under the next MFF

EU representatives informed participants on the **process of thematic programming under the next MFF**. Highlighting that the MFF negotiations were still ongoing, they shared that EU services were undertaking assessments of priorities for the coming years at country, regional and global levels until the end of October 2026. They further indicated that programming should start at the end of 2026. They highlighted that in this context, consultations were also being held with the United Nations, and with Member States through Council meetings. At the time of this CSDN meeting, the budget of the Global Pillar under the proposed Global Europe instrument had not yet been specified. Discussions were held under the presumption that the envelope for thematic peace and security programming would be reduced compared to the envelope under NDICI-GE. EU representatives stressed the need to do more with less, prioritise and work on the

interconnection across issues. They also emphasised that global thematic programming would only complement geographic programming, given the intent to further geographise funding under the proposed Global Europe regulation under the next MFF.

Civil society participants provided their **perspectives on the growing geographisation of EU external action funding**. They highlighted that while geographisation could in theory bring positive results for peacebuilding, there was significant concern that other priorities would prevail in geographic programming. This would especially be a concern if the approach under geographic programming was to be largely based on requests of third country governments and immediate EU interests. They underscored that this would result in a focus on approaches sidelining fragility and social cohesion issues. Civil society participants emphasised the need for thematic programming to play a specific role in **addressing issues that are not in the short-term political focus** but remain important for peace and security. They also underlined that thematic programming should maintain its **essential partnership with civil society**, especially at a time of global shrinking civic space. They further emphasised that thematic programming also allowed for cross-context learning. Civil society participants called for more involvement in consultations on geographic programming.

Representatives of Member State Agencies highlighted that, beyond thematic programming, the EU should take a **comprehensive approach across external action instruments** to ensure that they are conflict sensitive and support the EU's peace and security agenda, including through Global Gateway. They stressed that conflict analysis should be mandatory for such EU initiatives, and that the EU should ensure that it addresses fragile contexts and invests in stability.

Lessons learned from EU-thematic programming under NDICI-GE

The meeting offered the opportunity to explore lessons learned from EU-thematic programming under NDICI-GE, in particular in its first session, dedicated to this exercise.

Civil society participants highlighted the **key role played by thematic peace programming** under NDICI-GE, referring to it as the most important stream of EU funding to support peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Over 60% of the funding of the area of intervention on conflict prevention and peacebuilding was channelled through civil society.

CSOs and think tank participants highlighted the **overall relevance of the 2021-2027 Multi-annual Indicative Programme (MIP)** for thematic peace and security programming, its areas of intervention and priorities¹. Civil society participants underlined the close link

¹ The current MIP contains two areas of intervention: 1) Conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and 2) Countering global, trans-regional and emerging threats.

between the current MIP and the Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises,² which was praised as a strong EU-specific asset.

- In addition to perspectives shared in the [survey report](#), civil society participants underlined areas of improvements identified under the current MIP: Renewing the focus on **long-term impact and processes**, rather than short-term outputs.
- Greater **funding flexibility** for more flexible methods of implementation.
- **More direct support to local actors**, both through more flexible funding but also more local engagement, including through EU Delegations (some participants suggested mediation/peacebuilding focal points).
- Better addressing the **interconnection of challenges between global threats and peacebuilding**, citing for instance the proliferation of weapons as a global threat fuelling local conflicts.
- Introducing **longer-term financing modalities** (such as in Horizon Europe programming) to support key long-term enablers of peacebuilding such as trust-building.
- Building more **synergies with geographic programming** and rapid response, with greater institutional flexibility to respond to challenges and opportunities.
- Budgeting for **mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)** for teams, partners and beneficiaries in conflict settings.

Major peace & security issues of continued relevance for 2028-2034

Looking ahead at the 2028-2034 period for which the next cycle of thematic programming will be designed, participants reflected on the issues already contained in the 2021-2027 MIP that would remain strongly relevant or even more important.

Across both the global threats and the conflict prevention areas of intervention, participants identified the **impact of climate change on peace and security**, and **disinformation** as major, cross-cutting issues of continued relevance. These salient issues were identified both in breakout group discussions and in a plenary live polling on major geopolitical trends affecting peace and security.

² Council of the European Union. (2018, January 22). Council conclusions on the integrated approach to external conflicts and crises. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/31700/st05418-en18.pdf>

1. Key issues of continued relevance for conflict prevention and peacebuilding

Participants expressed broad support for the priorities contained in the conflict prevention and peacebuilding area of intervention of the current MIP.³ They emphasised that support to **peacebuilding and conflict prevention actions in third countries should be at the core of programming** (2021 -2027 MIP priorities 2 and 3). They nonetheless underscored that **EU analytical tools, methodologies, and mechanisms** (generated through priority 1 of the 2021 -2027 MIP) should however be maintained and implemented to support early warning systems and responses.

In addition to perspectives shared in the [survey report](#), participants highlighted in the meeting the following issues, referred to under the 2021-2027 MIP, as issues of continued or growing relevance:

- **The Climate peace and security agenda.** Climate and environmental impacts on peace and security ranked first in two live polls (one on major geopolitical trends affecting peace and security and one on issues of continued relevance from the 2021-2027 MIP). Participants emphasised that climate change and environmental degradation was fuelling inequality, grievances, and tensions. They also underscored that while peace and security programming needed to integrate climate and environmental dimensions, EU-supported climate and environmental actions should also integrate conflict sensitivity.
- **Dis/misinformation.** Participants underlined the need to focus on digital and informational resilience, and on the impact of dis/misinformation on conflict dynamics and post-conflict stabilisation, including truth-seeking processes and memorialisation. Participants emphasised that foreign interference in this field was hindering peace processes, and that political engagement, both with internationally recognised actors and non-recognised actors was needed to counter it.
- **The Women Peace and Security agenda.** Participants especially stressed the need for approaches that strengthen and emphasise the agency of women in peace and security.
- **Supporting mediation.** The need to address intra-state and inter-state conflicts by supporting mediation ranked as a top issue mentioned in the current MIP of continued relevance.
- **Engaging armed and de facto authorities.** Participants underscored the increasing need to engage with these actors to prevent spillover and protect civilians.

³ Priority 1: Continuing to enhance capabilities relating to analytical tools, methodologies, and mechanisms; Priority 2: Promote conflict prevention and conflict resolution measures; Priority 3: Supporting peace processes and transitions of conflict-affected societies/ communities, including stabilisation and peacebuilding efforts

- **Cross-border conflict dynamics.** Participants stressed in particular violent extremism, forced displacement and resource governance issues as having increasingly cross-border impacts. Participants, including EU services, noted that these cross-border dimensions of conflict dynamics were becoming more complex.
 - **The Youth Peace and Security agenda.** Participants emphasised successful EU support, notably in the Great Lakes region and highlighted the need for this work to be invested in further.
 - **Dialogue with civil society actors** and practitioners in the fields of peacebuilding, mediation and conflict prevention at the local, national and regional levels. Participants underscored the need to support not only dialogue between civil society practitioners and EU institutions, but also cross-context learnings between practitioners.
 - Participants highlighted the need to continue addressing some issues that had been addressed through 2021-2027 thematic peace and security programming, but which were not explicitly mentioned in the Commission proposal for the Global Europe regulation. This included **access to justice** and **explosive ordnance contamination**.⁴
2. **Key issues of continued relevance for countering Global, trans-regional and emerging threats**

Participants stressed the need to continue investing in particular in the following issues, referred to under the 2021-2027 MIP, which remain priorities:

- **The Climate peace and security agenda.** Participants notably referred to environmental issues connected to military equipment in conflict areas and the need for EU standard setting in this field.
- Participants also referred to **dis/misinformation** as an important trend in Global, trans-regional and emerging threats.
- Regarding the **Women Peace and Security agenda** and Global Threats, participants made the observation that mainstreaming should be pursued from design to implementation of EU actions, and that protection should be supported. Participants also underscored that the EU should increase its support for the participation of women in the security sector, which reaped larger societal benefits.
- Participants underlined that various **organised crime** trends were on the rise, from cybercrime to synthetic drug trafficking, and encouraged the EU to continue

⁴ Participants noted that the Council had recently proposed to include mine-action in geographic pillars in its Partial General Approach on the Global Europe regulation

addressing them. They highlighted the geopolitical use of organised crime by state actors (Russia, China, Iran and North Korea mainly). Organised crime was identified by participants as a major geopolitical trend affecting peace and security in the live polling.

- **Violent extremism** was identified by various participants as an important major trend to continue addressing, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. While counterterrorism was not ranked as a top issue in the live polling on priorities of continued relevance referred to under the 2021-2027 MIP, several civil society participants stressed the relevance of countering violent extremism in various contexts, notably through peacebuilding tools.
- The need for further professionalisation and accountability of armed forces in partner countries was underscored, with support for **Security Sector Reform** underlined as a relevant response.
- Participants also highlighted **the rising number of ex-combatants** and the need for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration to prevent spillovers fuelling other conflicts (examples were given of notably Columbia and Ukraine).
- Some participants mentioned the need to continue supporting risk mitigation and preparedness regarding **dual-use items** as such components can be used for conventional weapons and Weapons of Mass Destruction.

New challenges to take into account

Participants highlighted throughout the meeting new issues that the EU should take into account in thematic programming on peace and security. The **erosion of international norms and of multilateralism, shrinking global civic space** and the impact of **artificial intelligence** on conflict dynamics were among the most cited challenges having emerged since 2021.

The **erosion of international norms and multilateralism** was stressed as having impacts across peace and security areas of interventions. Participants emphasised the need for the EU to respond by promoting respect for international norms and supporting accountability, but also by leading by example, including in the way it addresses various global threats.

Shrinking global civic space was cited as a major new trend, with cross-cutting impacts on peace and security. These include safety challenges for peacebuilders, reduced civil society resources and space to pursue the Gender Peace and Security agenda and decreasing access to justice for victims in conflicts and post-conflict societies. Closely linked, the **rise of authoritarianism** was underscored as affecting geopolitical trends and peace and security. The rise of far-right movements was ranked as a top new issue to take into account in the live polling of participants.

Participants to the meeting underlined the numerous challenges arising with the fast-paced emergence of **artificial intelligence**. They in particular stressed the need for safeguards on autonomous systems in military equipment and the need for the EU to lead by example.

The impact on peace of the rising demand for **critical minerals** was underscored by participants as a growing issue. Participants notably gave the example of conflicts fuelled by this trend in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The issue ranked as a top new issue to take into account in the live polling of participants, who underlined the need for the EU to address it as it attempts to secure supply chains for these minerals. **Illicit commodities trafficking** was also referred to with examples given of conflicts fuelled notably by gold trafficking in Sudan.

The **proliferation of weapons** was stressed by participants as a rising concerning trend, from **light weapons** and **drones** proliferation to **increases in nuclear arsenals** and **explosive ordnance contamination**. Weapons proliferation and explosive ordnance contamination ranked as a top new issue to take into account in the live polling of participants.

Some participants mentioned the **commercialisation of conflict** as a concerning increasing trend, from private military and security companies, with examples highlighted in Sudan and DRC.

Innovation and opportunities

Participants underscored that innovation and adaptation was necessary, and that it needed to be **combined with existing effective tools** to address conflict dynamics. They further underlined that innovation required political leadership, as well as stable and flexible funding mechanisms in order to be able to **test ideas** which potentially do not directly lead to the intended impact. They also emphasised that innovation could only be effective through **co-creation with implementing partners**.

One specific innovative approach that participants identified was **investing more directly in local civil society actors**. Participants underlined that the EU should in particular further leverage the potential of locally led peacebuilding and conflict prevention. They underscored that existing local peace structures, insider mediators and grassroots organisations, including women-led and youth-led organisations often have access to spaces that larger CSOs and international organisations do not have. Participants noted that enabling these actors requires the ability to work with non-registered organisations and adopting more **flexible contracting approaches** (for instance through fixed-amount contracts, milestone-based grants, or small grants to insider mediators). The role of **EU Delegations** was emphasised as central to achieve these innovative approaches, with participants stressing that they should play a more key role in funding peacebuilding and conflict prevention actions. The role of **intermediaries** in these innovative models was discussed, with various participants underlining that intermediaries can bring specific

programmatic expertise supporting effective locally led action. Various participants from both civil society and Member State Agencies also underlined the role that **local authorities** can play and the need for the EU to innovate by investing in their agency.

Another innovative practice that was discussed was leveraging **untapped technological tools**, including new technologies. While participants mentioned the applicability of **AI** tools to peacebuilding and conflict prevention, they also stressed the need to use wider **civic tech** tools in this field of work. Beyond civic tech, participants also underscored the importance of leveraging untapped technological tools in accordance with the local tech environments where they are deployed - noting for instance that, in some instances introducing radios can be innovative. **Drones** were also underlined as a new technology that had applications for peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

Distinct areas of intervention

Civil society participants recommended **replicating the programming distinction between the two areas of intervention** currently structuring the Thematic Programme on Peace, Stability and Conflict Prevention under NDICI-GE for thematic programming on peace and security under the Global Pillar of the Global Europe instrument. Participants underscored that the distinction between these two areas of intervention, i.e. 1) Conflict prevention and peacebuilding and 2) Global, trans-regional and emerging threats, allowed to apply relevant intervention logics to each. They emphasised that, if the two areas of intervention were merged, there would be a risk of **securitisation** of peacebuilding, which would **undermine the trust, legitimacy and local ownership** that effective peacebuilding requires. Participants also emphasised that merging the two areas of intervention would risk making the design of peacebuilding actions less relevant and context specific. They suggested responding to the interconnectedness between global threats and peacebuilding challenges by working on the complementarity and nexus between the two areas of intervention but maintaining the two areas programmatically distinct.

Main recommendations

1. **Focus peace & security thematic programming** on addressing issues that are not necessarily in the short-term political focus but remain important for peace and security; aim for **long-term impacts** rather than short-term outputs.
2. Keep future thematic programming aligned with **the Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises**.
3. Maintain the **partnership with civil society** in thematic programming on peace and security.
4. Build more **synergies** between **programmable** thematic funding, programmable **geographic** funding and **non-programmable** funding (crisis response).
5. Address the interconnection of **challenges between global threats and peacebuilding** by working on the complementarity and nexus between the two areas of intervention but keeping the two areas programmatically distinct.
6. Significantly increase the focus on **climate change and environmental** impacts on **peace and security** and on **mis/disinformation** as part of the major, cross-cutting issues of continued relevance for both countering global threats and peacebuilding.
7. Include major new issues that have arisen since 2021, including the erosion of **international norms and of multilateralism, shrinking global civic space**, the impact of **artificial intelligence** on peace and conflict and the repercussions of the rising demand for **critical minerals** on conflict dynamics.
8. Develop the EU's implementation of the **Women Peace and Security agenda** not only through protection but through approaches that strengthen the agency of women in peace and security, ensuring gender mainstreaming from design to implementation of EU actions; promote the participation of women in the security sector.
9. Focus on support to peacebuilding and conflict prevention **actions in third countries while maintaining EU analytical tools**, methodologies, and mechanisms to support early warning systems and responses.
10. Innovate by **testing** new tools and **combining** them with existing effective tools, in **co-creation** with implementing partners, with stable and flexible funding mechanisms.
11. Innovate by **investing more directly in local civil society actors**, through flexible contracting and funding approaches, and local engagement by EU Delegations.
12. Innovate by leveraging **untapped technological tools**, from new technologies (AI, civic tech, drones) to the use of underused technology, taking into account what is best adapted to the local tech environment.