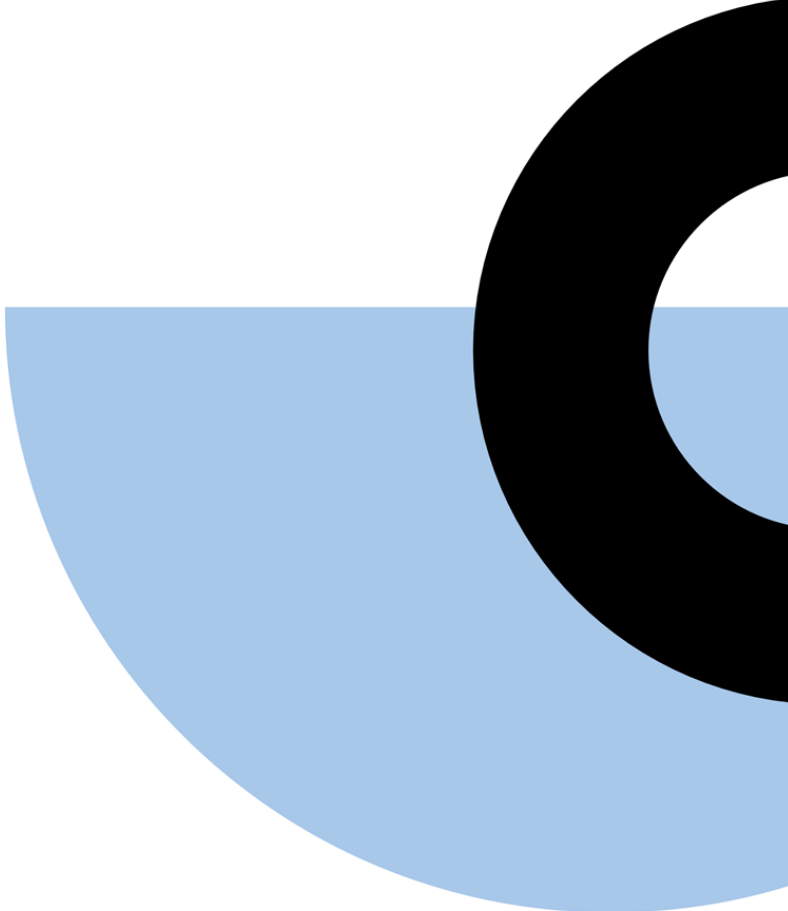




**Gender-responsive budgets for inclusive and sustainable
conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts: Good practices
for EU external action**

CSDN Discussion Paper

Zainab Monisola Olaitan and European Peacebuilding Liaison Office

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European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO)

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Background

EPLO commissioned this paper in 2024 in recognition of the growing importance of gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) for effective, inclusive and sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding (CPPB). The paper examines how the European Union (EU) can strengthen the gender-responsiveness of its funding for CPPB and ensure that its commitments to gender equality and Women, Peace and Security (WPS) are reflected in budgetary and programming decisions.

The EU has already established relevant commitments to gender mainstreaming and gender equality in its external action. The key challenge is increasingly one of implementation: ensuring that gender analysis informs programming and resource allocation, that gender equality objectives are reflected in budgets and results frameworks, and that expenditure and results are tracked and used to improve future programming.

GRB provides one approach to closing this gap. Whereas allocating a specific proportion of funding to women civil society organisations (CSOs) or to gender equality projects is important, GRB refers to a more comprehensive process of integrating a gender perspective throughout the budget cycle, from policy and programme design and resource allocation through implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Applied to CPPB, this requires gender analysis to inform conflict analysis and peacebuilding priorities and, in turn, to influence decisions about what is funded, through which funding modalities, for whom and with what expected results.

This Discussion Paper illustrates how GRB can be applied to EU-funded CPPB efforts, with a particular focus on initiatives supporting communities affected by violent conflict and civil society organisations working on peacebuilding and WPS. It draws on existing EU practice and national examples to identify lessons for EU external action. The paper is timely in the context of the upcoming renewal of the EU's long-term budget, its Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the period from 2028-2034, as well as the renewal of its Gender Action Plan (GAP) III.

What is gender-responsive budgeting

Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) is an approach to public financial management that integrates gender equality considerations into a given budget process. It is not a separate budget for women, nor does it necessarily mean increasing expenditure on programmes explicitly labelled as gender equality programmes. Instead, it examines how policies, programmes and resource allocations may affect different groups differently and uses this analysis to inform budgetary decisions.

GRB can be applied throughout the budget cycle: gender analysis and assessment of needs; policy and programme formulation; resource allocation; implementation;

monitoring and reporting; and evaluation and accountability. It therefore provides a mechanism for connecting political commitments to gender equality with decisions about public resources.

A central starting point is gender analysis. This should identify relevant gender inequalities, roles, power relations, access to and control over resources in a given context, and the different ways in which policies and programmes in this context may affect women, men, girls and boys in all their diversity. In conflict-affected contexts, gender analysis should be undertaken alongside and connected to conflict analysis in recognition of that conflict affects people differently and can reinforce or alter existing inequalities.

GRB should therefore be understood as a process rather than a single budgetary tool. Different tools can support its implementation, including gender impact assessments, gender-responsive budget statements, expenditure tracking, gender-related indicators, gender-disaggregated data, gender-responsive procurement, participatory budgeting and gender-responsive public financial management assessments.

The distinction between GRB and gender expenditure tracking is particularly important for EU external action. The OECD-DAC gender equality policy marker and the EU's G1/G2 classifications are useful tools for classifying and monitoring the extent to which actions contribute to gender equality. They do not, however, by themselves constitute a process of GRB. A gender marker can indicate the intended policy objective of an intervention; GRB requires that gender equality considerations also influence the design, allocation, implementation and assessment of resources. The effectiveness of gender mainstreaming cannot be assessed based on the volume or proportion of expenditure classified as contributing to gender equality alone. The quality of the gender analysis, the resources allocated to the identified priorities, implementation, participation of relevant stakeholders and the results achieved also need to be considered.

Why GRB matters for conflict prevention and peacebuilding

Conflict prevention and peacebuilding are not gender-neutral processes. Conflict affects people differently according to gender, age, social position, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status and other factors. At the same time, conflict and peace processes can reshape gender roles and access or barriers to power, decision-making and access to financial resources.

Gender-responsive budgeting provides a way of translating this analysis into resource decisions¹. If gender analysis identifies specific barriers to women's meaningful

¹ Olaitan, ZM. 2024. The role of gender budgeting in mainstreaming women in peacebuilding in Africa. In Gender-responsive budgeting in Africa, edited by TA Ojo, Palgrave Macmillan; Olaitan, Z.M., & Isike, CA.

participation in peace processes, for example, these findings should inform programme design and resource allocation. This may include funding for women's rights and peacebuilding organisations, measures addressing barriers to participation, support for local peace infrastructures, protection and support for women human rights defenders, or activities addressing gendered drivers of conflict.

Similarly, where conflict analysis identifies conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), appropriate resources may be required for prevention, survivor-centred services, accountability and community-based prevention. The relevant budgetary response should be determined by the context and the objectives of the intervention rather than by a presumption that all gender-responsive peacebuilding consists of funding services for women and girls.

A gender-responsive approach to CPPB also recognises women and girls as rights holders, political actors, peacebuilders and decision-makers, rather than only as victims of conflict. Supporting their meaningful participation and leadership can strengthen the inclusiveness and legitimacy of peace processes and peacebuilding efforts. This includes recognising the diversity of women's experiences and avoiding assumptions that women constitute a single, homogeneous group.

The WPS agenda provides an important policy framework for this approach. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions call for women's meaningful participation and leadership in peace and security processes and for gender perspectives to be integrated into conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. The EU has adopted this framework in Council Conclusions on WPS in 2018, with its accompanying Strategic Approach on WPS, and the WPS Action Plan to implement the framework. EU funding decisions are one of the mechanisms through which these political commitments can be translated into practice.

The funding dimension is particularly important for local women's rights organisations, women peacebuilders and other civil society actors operating in fragile and conflict-affected contexts (FCAC). These organisations often have knowledge, relationships and access that are critical to locally owned peacebuilding. However, gender mainstreaming should not be reduced to funding women-led organisations alone: the wider allocation of resources across CPPB portfolios also needs to respond to the gendered dimensions of conflict and peace.

GRB can therefore contribute to closing the gap between WPS policy commitments and their implementation, by making the gender equality dimensions of peacebuilding priorities visible in programming and resource decisions and by strengthening accountability for the achieved results.

GRB in EU external action

The EU has established a substantial policy framework for integrating gender equality into external action. This framework provides a strong basis for applying GRB to conflict prevention and peacebuilding, but the link between gender equality commitments, budgetary decisions and results needs to be strengthened.

GAP III states that the Commission will “step up its support for gender-responsive budgeting via programmes to support public finance management” and that a gender-responsive strategy, in theory, must be included in all new public expenditure and financial accountability (PEFA) evaluation reports². PEFA is a public financial management (PFM) diagnostic framework, and the PEFA GRB module is a tool for assessing gender responsiveness of PFM systems³. The EU supports the PEFA programme and its GRB module. GAP III explicitly promotes gender-responsive budgeting under Objective 3 in the Staff Working Document accompanying the Plan⁴, which focuses on integrating gender budgeting into EU-supported PFM reforms in partner countries. This is an important element of the EU's support for gender-responsive public finance. However, Objective 3 primarily concerns support to partner-country PFM systems and does not establish a specific framework for applying GRB to the EU's own allocation and management of resources for WPS and conflict prevention and peacebuilding. This leaves scope to strengthen the link between the EU's WPS commitments, gender analysis and its own programming and resource-allocation processes. This means GAP III does not establish how GRB will be used to implement the EU's commitments to the WPS agenda.

Under the EU's current external financing architecture, the NDICI–Global Europe Regulation requires at least 85% of new actions to have gender equality as a principal or significant objective, with at least 5% having gender equality and women's and girls' rights and empowerment as a principal objective⁵. The EU Gender Action Plan III (GAP III) reinforces gender mainstreaming across EU external action and identifies WPS as one of its key areas of engagement.

The 85% and 5% targets are important indicators of the EU's commitment to gender equality, but they should not be understood as a substitute for GRB. The OECD-DAC gender equality policy marker provides a classification of the policy objectives of an intervention. For actions marked G1 or G2, the EU's approach also requires gender analysis and gender-related results and indicators. The challenge is to ensure that these

² European Commission, Gender Action Plan III

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2184

³ <https://www.pefa.org/gender>

⁴ European Commission, Joint Staff Working Document ‘Objectives and Indicators to frame the implementation of the Gender Action Plan III (2021-25)’ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52020SC0284>

⁵ Regulation (EU) 2021/947 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 June 2021 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/947/oj/eng>

requirements influence substantive programme decisions and are not treated primarily as a classification or reporting exercise.

There is evidence of progress. According to the Commission's reporting, 89.5% of EU-funded and DG INTPA-managed international cooperation and development assistance under NDICI–Global Europe during 2021–2024 was directed towards promoting gender equality and women's empowerment⁶. This demonstrates that a gender equality lens is mainstreamed into a large share of EU external action. The policy challenge is therefore increasingly about the quality and effectiveness of this mainstreaming, including whether gender equality objectives affect resource allocation and whether this expenditure delivers meaningful results.

■ GRB across the EU programming cycle

GRB can be strengthened at several stages of the EU external-action cycle:

1. **Analysis and programming:** Gender analysis should be systematically integrated into country, regional and thematic programming and linked to conflict analysis where programmes address conflict prevention, peacebuilding or other fragile and conflict-affected contexts.
2. **Programme and action design:** Gender equality objectives identified through analysis should be reflected in action documents, theories of change, budgets, activities, indicators and expected results. Gender considerations should influence the substance of interventions rather than being added after the main programme design has been completed.
3. **Resource allocation:** Programme budgets should make it possible to identify whether sufficient resources have been allocated to address the gender inequalities and risks identified during analysis. This does not necessarily require a separate budget line for gender, but it requires a clear link between identified gender objectives and resources.
4. **Contracting and implementation:** Calls for proposals, grant agreements and implementation arrangements can include appropriate gender equality objectives, indicators and requirements. Funding modalities should also be assessed from a gender equality perspective, including whether administrative and financial requirements create barriers for local women's rights organisations and peacebuilding CSOs.
5. **Monitoring and reporting:** Gender-related indicators should be integrated into programme monitoring where relevant and feasible, including gender-

⁶ European Commission Directorate-General International Partnerships, Annual activity report 2024 - International Partnerships
https://commission.europa.eu/publications/annual-activity-report-2024-international-partnerships_en

disaggregated data and qualitative information on changes in participation, access, power relations and decision-making. Monitoring should assess not only whether activities reached women and men, but whether interventions contributed to the intended gender-equality results.

6. Evaluation and learning; Evaluations should assess whether gender analysis informed programme design and whether resources contributed to gender equality outcomes. Lessons should feed back into future programming and allocation decisions.

■ **EU public financial management support**

The EU can also promote GRB indirectly by supporting gender-responsive public financial management in partner countries. This is particularly relevant where EU cooperation supports public financial management reform or budget support.

As mentioned above, the Commission, as a PEFA partner, endorsed the gender-responsive public financial management (GRPFM) supplementary framework. This provides an opportunity to connect EU external financing with broader reforms in partner-country budget institutions and processes.

■ **Civil society participation**

Participation of civil society is another important element of effective GRB. In conflict-affected contexts, consultation should involve relevant local women's rights organisations, women peacebuilders and other groups with knowledge of gender inequality and conflict dynamics, including CSOs that represent groups with multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

Consultations should take place early enough to influence priorities and resource decisions rather than only during implementation or evaluation. EU funding processes should also consider whether funding modalities allow local organisations to participate meaningfully and access resources directly or through appropriate intermediary arrangements.

■ **Global Gateway and investment**

The expansion of EU external investment also makes GRB relevant beyond traditional development cooperation. Global Gateway investments can affect access to employment, infrastructure, services, land, resources and economic opportunities differently for women and men. In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, investment decisions can also interact with existing inequalities and conflict dynamics.

Gender and conflict analysis should therefore inform relevant investment programming and risk assessment, and monitoring should assess whether investments contribute to or reinforce existing inequalities. Gender mainstreaming should not be limited to social-sector programmes but should also apply to economic infrastructure and investment.

■ **The 2028–2034 MFF: an opportunity to strengthen the system**

The development of the EU's 2028–2034 MFF creates an important opportunity to strengthen the links between gender equality policy, expenditure and results. For external action, this provides an opportunity to move beyond measuring whether an action carries a gender marker towards a stronger system that connects gender analysis, objectives, resources, implementation and results.

The next generation of EU external financing should therefore ensure that gender equality is integrated into the programming and performance architecture of the regulation that will follow the NDICI-Global Europe instrument and that the specific gender dimensions of conflict prevention and peacebuilding are visible within this framework.

The development of the next GAP after 2027 provides an additional opportunity to strengthen the policy link between gender equality, WPS and EU financing. The next GAP should reinforce the connection between political commitments and the budgetary and programming mechanisms through which these commitments are implemented.

| **Barriers to effective GRB**

The existence of gender-mainstreaming commitments and gender-related expenditure targets does not by itself guarantee GRB. The main challenge is to ensure that gender equality considerations influence actual budgetary and programming decisions and that implementation and results are monitored.

Several recurring barriers are particularly relevant to EU external action.

- First, gender analysis is not always sufficiently connected to resource allocation. A programme may identify gender inequalities in its analysis without translating these findings into appropriate objectives, activities, indicators or resources. Strengthening the link between analysis and budgeting is therefore essential.
- Second, gender markers can become a compliance exercise. Quantitative targets such as the 85% and 5% objectives are important for accountability, but they do not on their own demonstrate the quality of gender mainstreaming or the results achieved. Quality assurance should therefore examine the substance behind the classification.

- Third, gender-responsive programming requires appropriate data and expertise. Weak sex-disaggregated or gender-sensitive data, limited capacity among staff and implementing partners, and insufficient coordination can make it difficult to design, implement and monitor gender-responsive programmes.
- Fourth, gender equality can lose visibility during implementation. Even where gender considerations are reflected in programming documents, changes in political priorities, implementation arrangements or available resources can weaken their implementation. Monitoring and evaluation should therefore examine whether gender commitments remain reflected in implementation and expenditure.
- Fifth, funding modalities can create structural barriers for local organisations. Small and locally rooted women's rights and peacebuilding organisations may face disproportionate administrative, financial and reporting requirements. If EU funding is intended to support locally led and inclusive peacebuilding efforts, the accessibility and flexibility of funding mechanisms should be considered as part of their gender-responsiveness (see recommendations below).
- Sixth, gender equality and conflict sensitivity are not always sufficiently connected. In conflict-affected contexts, interventions can unintentionally alter power relations, exacerbate tensions or reinforce inequalities. Gender-responsive budgeting for CPPB should therefore be grounded in both gender analysis and conflict analysis, and ideally an integrated gender-responsive conflict analysis.
- Finally, political commitment needs to be matched by institutional responsibility and accountability. Effective GRB requires clear responsibilities for programme managers, gender specialists, finance and budget staff, EU Delegations and headquarters, as well as mechanisms for monitoring and learning.

Good practices of GRB in conflict prevention and peacebuilding

Despite the challenges for effective GRB, there are good practices to draw on. The Senegal National Action Plan 2020-2024⁷ for implementing the UN WPS agenda recognised the importance of budgeting as a strategy to ensure adequate resources are allocated for achieving the agenda's goals. It explicitly recognised that implementation depends on adequate mobilisation of state and partner resources and called for WPS priorities to be reflected in national investment planning and budgeting.

The NAP noted that

“the level to which the national institutional stakeholders appropriate the R1325 NAP2's action and activities will determine how successful the implementation will be. On the one hand, this will depend on the mobilisation of resources from the State of Senegal in parallel with those anticipated from technical and financial partners. Importantly, the

⁷ WPS National Action Plan Senegal 2020-2024. <https://wpsfocalpointsnetwork.org/senegal>

Consolidated Investment Budget (BCI) and the Three-Year Public Investment Program (PTIP) both need to account for this State contribution”.⁸

To realise this objective, certain budget initiatives were specifically directed towards the WPS agenda and broader peacebuilding work. The NAP also emerged from an assessment of the previous NAP and sought to translate WPS commitments into concrete strategies and actions.

Similarly, the Sierra Leone second National Action Plan for WPS (SiLNAP II) is another example of GRB, institutional responsibility and accountability. It linked WPS implementation to budgeting and included financial allocations as part of its implementation framework. The NAP illustrates how WPS commitments can be connected to budget scrutiny, institutional responsibility and measurable resource allocations. It assigns responsibilities across government, includes financial allocations and indicators related to WPS and gender equality, and links implementation to monitoring and coordination. It envisages institutional coordination, budget scrutiny, indicators relating to allocations for gender equality/WPS, and resources for WPS-related training for diverse community stakeholders. The Sierra Leonean Parliament passed the resolution proposed by the President of the Female Parliamentary Caucus on the WPS agenda in 2019 with the objective to enhance the implementation of the Agenda in the country. Recognising the different challenges that impede its full implementation, the Sierra Leonean Members of Parliament (MPs) urged central political actors including the Government, Local Councils, Ministry of Defence, Attorney General's Department, Minister of Justice, and Minister of Finance to establish an Inter-Ministerial Committee on gender equality, women's empowerment and the WPS agenda, to ensure these issues receive high-level attention and are coordinated across all critical departments. Specifically, the Ministry of Finance was mandated to collaborate with the Gender Directorate of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) to conduct a gender audit of the budget to be submitted to Parliament. By utilising the authority of the Finance Committee and relevant sectoral committees, the two ministries thoroughly scrutinised the national budget to evaluate the current allocations for gender equality, particularly for the implementation of the SiLNAP II.⁹ One of the indicators of SiLNAP II is the allocation for gender equality and WPS in the existing National Budget, the percentage allocated, and the adequacy of the allocation. This comprehensive joint effort in Sierra Leone demonstrates the strategic use of budgeting to advance gender equality broadly, with particular emphasis on peace and security. SiLNAP II does not only outline measures to be taken, but also includes a budget specifically tailored towards WPS programmes.

⁸ The Republic of Senegal National Action Plan for the Implementation of Resolution 1325 and Following of the United National Security Council for the Senegal 2020-2024. Unofficial Translation, funded by ARC DP 160100212 (CI Laura Shepherd). https://oursecurefuture.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/Senegal%20NAP%202020-2024_french_ENG%20translation%20Google%20Translate.pdf

⁹ The Sierra Leone National Action Plan (SiLNAP) II for the full implementation of United Nations Security Resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) 2019-2023. <https://oursecurefuture.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/Sierra-Leone-2019-2023.pdf>

The Sierra Leone example illustrates three elements that are relevant for EU external action: political ownership at a high level, institutional coordination between gender and finance authorities, and the translation of WPS commitments into identifiable budget allocations and monitoring indicators. For the EU, the equivalent challenge is to ensure that WPS and gender equality commitments are reflected not only in policy documents but also in programming, financing and performance frameworks. Both examples show that WPS commitments become more implementable when they are connected to budget processes, institutional responsibilities and measurable allocations.

From gender equality commitments to gender-responsive peacebuilding finance

The EU has already established many of the elements required for more gender-responsive external action: political commitments to gender equality and WPS; gender mainstreaming requirements; the OECD-DAC gender equality policy marker; expenditure and performance monitoring; gender expertise and focal points; and support for gender-responsive public financial management in partner countries. The remaining challenge is to implement those significantly in practice and connect these elements into a coherent budgetary and programming process. For CPPB, this means ensuring that gender and conflict analysis informs programming priorities; that identified gender equality objectives influence resource allocation; that funding modalities allow relevant local actors to participate and access resources; and that monitoring and evaluation assess both expenditure and results.

This approach also requires moving beyond a narrow understanding of gender-responsive funding as funding specifically labelled "gender". A peacebuilding programme can be gender-responsive even where gender equality is not its sole objective, provided that gender analysis has meaningfully influenced the intervention and resources have been allocated to address relevant gender dimensions of the conflict and peacebuilding context.

Conversely, an intervention can be classified as contributing to gender equality without necessarily delivering transformative results. The quality of the analysis, the adequacy of the resources allocated, the participation of relevant actors, the implementation process and the results achieved therefore matter as much as the initial classification of expenditure.

The current international geopolitical environment increases the importance of ensuring that existing EU commitments to gender equality and WPS are reflected in resource allocation. Shrinking civic space, pressure on gender equality and increasing demands on external financing make the quality, accessibility and strategic targeting of EU funding particularly important. For the EU, strengthening GRB in CPPB is consequently about making the existing gender-mainstreaming, WPS, conflict-sensitivity and performance frameworks work together more effectively.

Key recommendations

1. Apply GRB systematically across the EU programming cycle

- Develop practical EU guidance on applying GRB to conflict prevention, peacebuilding and WPS programming by building on existing gender-mainstreaming and PFM guidance.
- Integrate gender and conflict analysis into programming, action design and resource allocation from the outset.
- Ensure that identified gender equality objectives are reflected in budgets, activities, indicators, implementation and evaluation, in addition to gender marking.

2. Strengthen the link between EU policy commitments and funding

- Ensure that gender equality remains a clear and measurable priority in NDICI–Global Europe and its successor, including ambitious targets for actions with gender equality as a principal or significant objective.
- Link the next external financing framework explicitly to GAP and WPS commitments, ensuring coherence between policy priorities and spending decisions.
- Use the 2028–2034 MFF to strengthen gender-disaggregated expenditure and results tracking and move beyond the gender marker as the main measure of gender-responsiveness.

3. Strengthen implementation, accountability and institutional capacity

- Establish clear responsibilities, guidance and adequate capacity within EU institutions and Delegations to integrate GRB into programming and budget decisions.
- Develop indicators that assess not only whether resources are classified as gender-responsive, but whether they contribute to gender equality and inclusive peacebuilding outcomes.
- Conduct periodic reviews of the application and effectiveness of GRB in CPPB, with meaningful civil society participation.

4. Ensure resources reach local actors and priorities

- Consult women's rights, women-led, feminist and locally led peacebuilding organisations early enough to influence programming and resource allocation.
- Provide appropriate access to predictable, flexible, core and multi-year funding for locally led CSOs working on WPS and peacebuilding, incl. through smaller grants accessible to local CSOs, and consortiums, where appropriate.
- Where identified through gender and conflict analysis, ensure resources address priorities such as women's meaningful participation, organisational capacity and safety, and support for survivors of CRSV.

Annex I: List of abbreviations

BCI	Consolidated Investment Budget
CPPB	Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding
CRSV	Conflict-related sexual violence
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSDN	Civil Society Dialogue Network
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EC	European Commission
EEAS	European External Action Service
EFSD+	European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus
EPLO	European Peacebuilding Liaison Office
EU	European Union
EUD	EU Delegation
FCAC	Fragile and conflict affected contexts
FPI	Service for Foreign Policy Instruments
G1/G2	Gender Equality Policy Marker classifications
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GBV	Gender-based violence
GRB	Gender-responsive budgeting
HDP	Humanitarian-Development-Peace
HRD	Human Rights Defender
ICC	International Criminal Court
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
MFF	Multiannual Indicative Programme
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MP	Member of Parliament
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PEFA	Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability
PFM	Public Financial Management
PTIP	Three-Year Public Investment Programme (Senegal)
SiLNAP II	Sierra Leone Second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health rights
TJ	Transitional Justice
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WRO	Women's Rights Organisation
YPS	Youth, Peace and Security