



GAP III Structured Dialogue Report

December 12, 2025

Background

As part of the EU's event on 12 December 2025 on Gender Equality in EU External Action: Reinforcing Commitments – Accelerating Implementation, a Structured Dialogue with GAP III stakeholders was organised in a hybrid format in Brussels at the Albert Borschette conference center and online.

The morning segment of the event focused on sharing and discussing the results of the intermediate evaluation of the GAP III focusing on the period 2021-2024. Content wise the evaluation focused on gender equality in the green and digital transitions and EU engagement with women's rights organisations in conflict-affected and fragile contexts. Stakeholders included Member State Representatives, EU officials, representatives from civil society organisations and international organisations.

The afternoon segment with EU officials and civil society and local authorities had a more forward-looking perspective. To facilitate interactive engagement, online sessions were organised in parallel to the in-person discussions, enabling participants in both formats to contribute meaningfully and share their perspectives.

In total, there were around 50 in-person and 60 online participants in the Structured Dialogue.

The Structured Dialogue focused on two themes:

1. Women, Peace and Security: Shaping the EU's External Action
2. On the Frontlines: Women's Rights Organizations as Human Rights Defenders

These themes had been selected based on an EU’s proposal with inputs from the GAP III Structured Dialogue Steering group. Furthermore, through the expression of interest form to attend the Structured Dialogue, all participants were asked which sub-topics they would like to discuss. This was done to ensure that the dialogue was relevant and focused on areas of interest to participants.

The discussions were moderated by CSO representatives, and preidentified rapporteurs gathered key discussion outcomes and recommendations which the EU welcomed for the remaining implementation period of GAP III as well as in the preparations of GAP IV. This report contains the key outcomes of the discussions and recommendations.

Highlights Box

<p>Participation</p> <p>Total participants: approx. 110</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50 in-person • 60 online 	<p>Timeline & Way Forward</p> <p>2021–2024: Intermediate evaluation period of GAP III</p> <p>2025–2027: Remaining GAP III implementation</p> <p>2026–2027: Consultations and design of GAP IV</p> <p>2028 onward: Expected launch of GAP IV</p>
<p>Key Themes Discussed</p> <p>Women, Peace and Security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women’s participation in peacebuilding • Strategic partnerships and funding • Barriers to participation and localisation • Political engagement and EU’s role • Youth engagement and innovation • Process improvements and communication <p>Women’s Rights Organisations as Human Rights Defenders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and protection mechanisms • Funding accessibility and burdens • Policy engagement and inclusion 	<p>Priority Recommendations for Immediate EU Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earmark Financing: Allocate specific funds for women’s organisations, as well as long-term financial support to CSOs and WROs in fragile settings, in future financial frameworks to ensure sustained support. • Inclusive Opportunities: Foster inclusive funding mechanisms and leadership roles in peace processes to empower women. • Protective Mechanisms: Establish security measures for women peacebuilders, including digital safety and mental health support for activists and WROs. • Simplified Requirements: Streamline compliance and reporting procedures for

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health and wellbeing 	<p>CSOs, especially those in high-risk environments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships and Diversification: Strengthen collaborations with women's funds and ensure diverse funding recipients to reach marginalised groups effectively. • Structured Dialogue: Enhance regular and meaningful dialogue between EU entities and women's groups, extending outreach to include diverse voices.
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Detailed outcomes of the Discussions and recommendations

1. Women, Peace and Security: Shaping the EU's External Action

The discussions on Women, Peace and Security centered around the following points:

- Women's Participation in Peacebuilding
- Strengthening Strategic Partnerships and Funding
- Barriers to Participation and Localization
- Political Engagement and EU's Role
- Youth Engagement and Innovation
- Process Improvements and Communication

Outcomes of the discussion on Women's Participation in Peacebuilding

- The session emphasized the urgent need to strengthen diverse women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in peacebuilding through capacity building, structural inclusion, and sustained political support.
- According to the participants, peacebuilding is already taking place in informal and community spaces led by women, including parallel peace processes, local mediation, and everyday conflict prevention mechanisms. These contributions are frequently excluded from formal recognition and resourcing.
- It was highlighted that rebuilding international momentum on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda requires coordinated efforts between civil society and states, supported by EU-led alliances between the Global North and South.
- Additionally, there was a focus on moving away from stereotypical thinking about women in conflict (including viewing women primarily as victims) and recognizing that women and men

take on different roles in conflicts. Engaging men as allies is crucial for sustaining gains and shifting narratives about gender roles in peacebuilding.

- There was emphasis put on the role of grassroots civil society organisations, including Women's Rights organisations and women-led groups, and the strategic role of women's funds to provide flexible, multi-year funding that strengthens peacebuilding capacities. Women's funds enable rapid responses to crises and long-term resilience by amplifying marginalized voices in decision-making spaces. Direct funding through women's funds is also proven to reach marginalized groups better than large-scale grants via UN or international agencies.
- Particular attention was called to the funding barriers young peacebuilders face, particularly the requirement to have prior experience managing €50,000 projects to access funding.
- The discussion called for the need to recognize informal and Track II peacebuilding as core components of peace processes. Peacebuilding is often carried out by women in the informal space – women in parallel peace processes, at water points, or at crossing community points. Those informal processes are often dismissed, or not taken into account. Meaningful participation of women mediators remains low, especially in Track 3 peace mediation, demanding renewed EU financial and political commitments.
- Participants stressed the need to go beyond participation numbers: Whose voices are heard and whose lived realities remain invisible? They called the EU's external action to be transformative and to not aim at integrating women into existing structures but actually to challenge structures themselves.
- Participants stressed how unequal representation also comes from the lack of possibility to participate due the failure to issue visas for activists.
- The session agreed on the worsening of the situation brought by anti-rights movements.
- The digital space is increasingly a source of abuse against women rights activists. Measures to protect activists there are vital to the wellbeing of activists.

Recommendations

- Earmark financing for women's rights organizations in the upcoming Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF).
- Create funding opportunities without prohibitive experience thresholds to include new and young voices.

- Adopt participatory grantmaking approaches, particularly for women-led and youth-led organisations, to reduce concentration of resources among a limited number of established organisations.
- Invest in leadership development, mentoring, and civic education, including intergenerational dialogue, to strengthen women's and young women's capacity to engage meaningfully.
- Make gender-responsive budgets compulsory for all EU and MS funds. Feminist funding must be sustainable.
- Recognise and integrate informal peace processes led by women into official peacebuilding frameworks.
- Guarantee women's access to leadership and decision-making positions to shape policy and legal reforms.
- The EU should take actions to ensure visas for activists. Focal points in EU delegations should play a role in this facilitation.
- Improving the visibility and accessibility of EU gender focal points (contacts, missions, proactive communication) and strengthening the capacities of delegations and gender focal points, including dedicated positions.
- Promote parity for women in peace negotiations, strengthen existing networks of women mediators because when women participate the outcomes are better.
- Establish quick protection mechanisms for women human rights defenders and facilitate the access to visas for them.
- Create and sustain safe spaces for women to speak freely and participate without fear of retaliation.
- Actively counter anti-rights movements by using EU diplomatic leverage and public communication.
- Move beyond inclusion-focused approaches by actively challenging institutional and structural barriers that perpetuate tokenism, gatekeeping, and unequal power relations.
- Ensure intersectional implementation of the WPS agenda, explicitly including minorities, persons with disabilities, non-binary and queer people, and other marginalised groups in all stages of peacebuilding.
- Position the EU as a political guarantor of meaningful participation, ensuring that women's civil society organisations are consistently included in high-level political dialogue—not only technical consultations—across bilateral, multilateral, and global engagements.

Outcomes of the discussion on Strengthening Strategic Partnerships and Funding

- The discussion emphasised that current partnership models are insufficient, as women's civil society organisations are too often treated as participants or implementers rather than equal partners in peacebuilding.
- Participants agreed that fragmented coordination among donors and institutions leads to duplication, consultation fatigue, inefficiencies, and weakened coalitions, undermining the effectiveness of peacebuilding partnerships.
- It was acknowledged that funding cuts and shrinking civic space are severely constraining organisations' ability to engage in partnerships, coordination, and coalition-building, as many actors are focused on organisational survival.
- It was recognised that short-term, output-driven funding mechanisms undermine sustainability, movement building, and long-term peacebuilding impact, particularly for grassroots and women-led organisations.
- Participants further emphasised the strategic role of women's funds in peacebuilding, noting their capacity to provide rapid response, context-sensitive support, and multi-year, multi-level funding that better reaches marginalised groups.
- The discussion identified gatekeeping and concentration of funding among a limited number of established organisations as a major barrier to equitable partnerships.
- Participants stressed that localisation remains insufficiently realised, as funding mechanisms and partnership structures often bypass grassroots and informal actors.
- Participants called for reflections on how to be strategic to ensure that the "human" element of security is also considered as well as human rights organisations. Showcasing the cost-effectiveness of investing in human rights organisations for peace as a better alternative than investing in war. There is a need for CSOs to drive that conversation and cooperate/strategise together to frame the conversation in this way.
- It was noted that INGOs and international actors often fail to learn from grassroots organisations, limiting the effectiveness and relevance of partnership.
- Participants agreed that accessible funding processes remain a challenge, particularly for informal groups, local actors, and organisations operating in red-listed or politically sensitive contexts.
- The discussion highlighted how joining forces with other activists is essential. Breaking down sector silos, inviting synergies into the work of climate colleagues, integrating WPS perspectives is an example.

- Emphasis needs to continue to be put on having better coordination and better information-sharing in order to make the sector more efficient but also build better coalitions.

Recommendations

- Continue advocating for reinvigorated international coalition-building and EU engagement around WPS agendas to enhance funding and political support for women mediators.
- Establish structured and mandatory inclusion of WCSOs as equal partners at all stages of peacebuilding initiatives, including design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation - not just ad hoc consultations.
- Strengthen coordination mechanisms among EU institutions, Member States, UN Women, OSCE, and bilateral donors to align funding criteria and to reduce duplication and consultation fatigue.
- Engage with EU officials to ensure dedicated financial commitments to women's rights organizations in upcoming MFF and financing regulations.
- Provide sustained, flexible, and multi-year funding for women-led peacebuilding organisations, moving away from short-term, project-based financing that undermines long-term impact and resilience.
- The EU should co-design actions on the ground with women's rights groups, creating an inclusive and participatory support process, improving accountability and relevance.
- Strengthening partnerships with regional bodies and ensuring sustainable, flexible financing for women's groups are essential to WPS implementation.
- The EU should diversify funding recipients and address gatekeeping, ensuring that EU and donor funding reaches a broader range of local and grassroots women-led organisations. Meaningful participation means redistribution of funds.
- Expand participatory grantmaking approaches for women-led and youth-led organisations to rebalance power in funding relationships and strengthen local ownership.
- Facilitate cross-country and regional learning exchanges on WPS priorities to support joint advocacy agendas, peer learning, and stronger regional coalitions.
- Strengthen and scale partnerships with women's funds, recognising their comparative advantage in reaching marginalised groups, enabling rapid response, and supporting multi-level peacebuilding efforts.
- Simplify and democratise funding application processes, including sharing calls through informal channels (facebook), providing multilingual materials, and adapting requirements to local realities and capacities.

Outcomes of the discussion on Barriers to Participation and Localization

- Participants recognised that, in the current context, it is hard to talk about partnership building when organisations are focused on surviving. NGOs are forced to rely on isolation in order to sustain themselves which goes against movement building.
- Participants also identified lack of political will and recognition of women peacebuilders and women's civil society organisations (WCSOs) as the primary barrier to meaningful participation, despite existing legal frameworks and policy commitments.
- It was recognised that women's participation is frequently tokenistic, with WCSOs invited late, selectively, or for visibility purposes, rather than engaged as equal partners shaping priorities and decisions.
- The discussion highlighted practical barriers to participation, notably restrictive visa procedures, which prevent activists and community representatives from accessing international and regional decision-making spaces.
- Participants stressed again the role played by funding restrictions, such as high prior-project thresholds, in excluding youth and grassroots actors from meaningful participation.
- Participants identified lack of political will and recognition of women peacebuilders and women's civil society organisations (WCSOs) as the primary barrier to meaningful participation, despite existing legal frameworks and policy commitments.
- Participants stressed that localisation remains weak, as peacebuilding agendas are often not translated into local languages, not communicated in accessible ways, and not adapted to local realities, limiting women's ability to engage meaningfully.
- It was noted that even in cases when women are elected in parliaments or political positions, the institutional barriers and economical challenges the country faced prevent them from fully advocating for peace and gender equality.
- It was noted that grassroots women are often disconnected from national and regional advocacy, and are not always aware of messages or policies advanced in their name, weakening ownership and accountability.
- It was emphasised that online spaces are increasingly hostile, with women peacebuilders and human rights defenders facing digital harassment and abuse, which discourages participation and undermines wellbeing.
- The discussion highlighted insufficient intersectionality, noting that WPS initiatives often fail to adequately include minorities, persons with disabilities, non-binary people, and other marginalised groups.

- Participants agreed that local evidence and grassroots knowledge are insufficiently valued and integrated into programme design and policy implementation, limiting the effectiveness of localisation efforts
- Participants highlighted how faith-based women's organizations play a unique and effective role in peacebuilding, thanks to their ability to build trust with local communities. They are strategic actors in peacebuilding processes and should not be overlooked in programming.

Recommendations

- Demonstrate political will by ensuring mandatory and structured inclusion of WRO/CSOs in all stages of peacebuilding and WPS processes, moving beyond ad hoc consultations toward equal partnership.
- Reduce practical barriers to participation, particularly by facilitating visa procedures for women peacebuilders and community representatives, with EU delegations playing an active role in support and facilitation.
- Strengthen localisation by translating WPS agendas into local languages and engaging women through accessible, culturally relevant communication methods, including one-on-one and community-based approaches.
- Support sustained community-based programmes that enable women to engage with and lead peacebuilding efforts at local level, recognising women as long-term actors beyond moments of crisis or conflict.
- Address gatekeeping and power imbalances by diversifying participation and funding beyond established actors, ensuring grassroots and informal women-led organisations can access decision-making spaces.
- Create safe physical and digital spaces for women to participate freely in peacebuilding and advocacy without fear of retaliation, harassment, or violence.
- Integrate intersectional approaches into localisation efforts, ensuring the meaningful inclusion of minorities, persons with disabilities, non-binary people, and other marginalised groups across all WPS activities.
- Consult and learn from queer organisations and WROs in countries where women's rights have been under attack for longer and who can teach the rest of the field valuable lessons.
- Ensure local evidence informs policy and programming, by systematically incorporating grassroots-generated data, analyses, and early warning insights into EU action plans and peacebuilding initiatives.

- Reinforce local ownership of the WPS agenda, with international actors, including the EU, governments, and INGOs, playing a facilitating and supporting role rather than substituting or overshadowing local peace efforts.
- Maintain engagement despite shrinking civic space, by backing women peacebuilders politically and financially in contexts where participation is contested or politicised.

Outcomes of the discussion on Youth Engagement and Innovation

- Participants recognised that youth engagement is essential to sustainable peacebuilding, particularly through early investment in civic education, leadership development, and mental health support for young women and girls.
- The discussion highlighted that young women face structural and cultural barriers to participation, including gender stereotypes, limited confidence to self-promote, lack of role models, and insufficient access to mentoring and networks.
- It was noted that capacity building for young women must go beyond technical skills, and include communication, leadership, community responsibility, and intergenerational dialogue to foster long-term engagement.
- Participants emphasised the importance of networking and mentoring to create bonds, solidarity, and collective responsibility among women, including younger generations, to strengthen community-based peacebuilding.
- The discussion identified digital and social media tools as underutilised spaces for facilitating participation in decision-making, particularly for young women and youth who may be excluded from formal processes.
- Participants stressed that youth engagement is most effective when rooted in local contexts, working through grassroots organisations, community-based structures, and local peace communities.
- It was recognised that young women and youth-led organisations face specific funding barriers, and that traditional funding and participation models often fail to accommodate their realities and capacities.
- The discussion highlighted the need to strengthen communication between grassroots women and broader advocacy efforts, as young women are often disconnected from national or regional peace and WPS agendas pursued in their name.

Recommendations

- Invest in leadership development, mentoring, and capacity-building programmes for young women, including training on communication, leadership, civic engagement, and community responsibility.
- Integrate civic education, mental health support, and social cohesion activities into youth-focused peacebuilding initiatives, including programmes that foster dialogue between young people, families, and communities.
- Expand participatory grantmaking and funding mechanisms that are accessible to youth-led and young women-led organisations, reducing administrative and eligibility barriers that limit youth participation.
- Strengthen the use of digital and social media tools to facilitate inclusive, online participation of young women in peacebuilding and decision-making processes, particularly where physical access is limited.
- Create safe physical and digital spaces for young women's participation, enabling them to express themselves freely, innovate, and engage in peacebuilding without fear of intimidation or backlash.
- Ensure youth engagement initiatives are locally rooted and context-specific, working through grassroots organisations and community-based women's structures to enhance relevance and ownership.
- Improve communication and feedback loops between grassroots youth and national or regional advocacy efforts, ensuring young women are informed, represented, and able to influence agendas pursued in their name.
- Invest in youth-led peacebuilding to combat rising social issues like drug abuse and gender-based violence at community levels.
- Include youth voices aligning with the WPS agenda's future-oriented vision and broadens coalition-building.

Outcomes of the discussion on Process Improvements and Communication

- Participants noted that communication between EU institutions, Member States, and civil society remains fragmented, with insufficient feedback loops on how civil society inputs are used in policy formulation and implementation.

- The discussion highlighted that peacebuilding and WPS processes are often perceived as opaque, with limited transparency regarding decision-making timelines, priorities, and follow-up actions, reducing trust and meaningful engagement.
- It was recognised that consultations are frequently ad hoc and time-bound, rather than embedded in sustained, predictable processes that allow women peacebuilders to plan, prepare, and engage strategically.
- Participants stressed that information is not always shared in accessible or timely ways, including lack of translation, overly technical language, and limited dissemination beyond established networks, which excludes grassroots and local actors.
- The discussion underscored a disconnect between high-level policy discussions and local realities, as messages developed at international or regional level are not consistently communicated back to communities or validated with grassroots actors.
- It was noted that insufficient coordination among donors and implementing actors leads to duplication, consultation fatigue, and inefficiencies, particularly for under-resourced women's organisations.
- Participants highlighted that digital communication channels are increasingly central to coordination and advocacy, yet uneven access, digital risks, and lack of safeguards limit their effective and safe use.
- The discussion recognised that monitoring, learning, and accountability mechanisms are weak, with limited reporting back to civil society on progress, challenges, and course correction in WPS implementation.
- It was recognised that faith-based and grassroots organizations need holistic support, including psychosocial care, to sustain peacebuilding roles effectively.

Recommendations

- Establish structured, predictable dialogue mechanisms between EU institutions, Member States, and women peacebuilders, ensuring regular engagement, follow-up, and clarity on how inputs influence decisions.
- Improve transparency in peacebuilding and WPS processes, including clear communication on priorities, timelines, decision-making pathways, and outcomes of consultations.
- Strengthen feedback loops to civil society, systematically reporting back on how recommendations and evidence provided by women peacebuilders are taken forward or, where not possible, explaining why.

- Ensure information is accessible and inclusive, by translating calls and key documents, simplifying language, and disseminating information beyond established networks to reach grassroots and local actors.
- Bridge the gap between policy and practice by validating high-level strategies with local women peacebuilders and communicating outcomes back to communities to reinforce ownership and accountability.
- Enhance coordination among donors and EU actors, reducing duplication and consultation fatigue, and aligning processes to minimise administrative burdens on women's organisations.
- Invest in safe and inclusive digital communication tools, including safeguards against online harassment and support for secure participation of women peacebuilders in digital spaces.
- Strengthen monitoring, learning, and accountability frameworks, ensuring civil society is informed of progress, challenges, and lessons learned in the implementation of WPS commitments.

2. Women Rights Organisations as Human Rights Defenders

The discussions on Women Rights Organisations as Human Rights Defenders centered around the following points (sub-topics):

- Support Mechanisms for Women's Rights Organizations
- Funding Accessibility and Administrative Burdens
- Engagement and Inclusion in EU Policy and Programming
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Support

Support Mechanisms for Women's Rights Organizations: Protection, well-being, and holistic support

- Participants emphasised that women's rights organisations (WROs) and women human rights defenders (WHRDs) operate under increasing physical, digital, legal, and psychological threats, while existing support and protection mechanisms remain insufficient and unevenly accessible
- The discussion highlighted that well-being, mental health, and psychosocial support are core protection needs, not optional add-ons, and should be systematically integrated into funding and support frameworks for WROs and WHRDs.

- Participants highlighted the need for tailored protection mechanisms, including legal assistance, risk assessments (knowing what can be published or not), contingency planning, and safeguards such as no co-branding, especially in politically sensitive or hostile environments.
- The discussion identified growing digital gender-based violence, including trolling and doxing, as a major threat to WHRDs, with current protection mechanisms lagging behind the scale and severity of the problem.
- Participants stressed that support mechanisms often fail to adequately reach the most marginalised groups, including LGBTI organisations, unregistered CSOs, and organisations in underfunded regions. This is due to the fact that women and WROs should not be treated as a homogenous group without addressing intersectionality.

Funding modalities, accessibility, and dialogue with local actors

- Participants stressed the strategic role of women's funds as trusted intermediaries with contextual knowledge, enabling flexible, rapid, and inclusive funding to reach grassroots and high-risk actors that EU mechanisms often cannot reach directly.
- It was recognised that short-term, project-based funding undermines sustainability, contributes to burnout and staff turnover, and weakens long-term movement-building and organisational resilience.
- It was especially mentioned the question of flexible, simplified financial support, co-designed with local actors, and focused on conflict and repressive contexts.
- The discussion underscored that bureaucratic funding requirements, due diligence procedures, and reporting obligations disproportionately exclude local and high-risk WROs, particularly unregistered organisations and those operating outside capital cities or in conflict settings.
- Participants agreed that support should be understood holistically, as a means of organisational survival for WROs, not just emergency aid, as the challenges faced by activists on the ground in conflict or repressive contexts goes largely beyond financial issues.
- Supporting the meaningful inclusion of women in (MENA) decision-making spaces was addressed as a critical step where the EU could play an important role.
- Participants emphasised the importance of dialogue with actors on the ground, the need to increase the level of interactions between EUDs and local actors and create locally-led training opportunities for EU staff. A survey found that most North and West African women's groups have had no contact with their EU delegations.

Recommendations

- The EU must establish flexible, inclusive, and locally grounded support mechanisms that prioritize sustained and unconditional aid for women's rights groups in conflict and repression contexts. Such mechanisms should not only be financial
- Integrate well-being, mental health, and psychosocial support as standard, funded components of EU grants for WROs and WHRDs, recognising these as core protection measures.
- Scale up long-term, multi-year core funding for WROs to support organisational sustainability, staff retention, and movement-building, moving away from short-term, crisis-only funding models.
- Simplify due diligence, application, monitoring, and reporting requirements for WROs operating in high-risk or shrinking civic space contexts, using context-based and proportionate approaches.
- Channel increased funding through women's funds as strategic partners, recognising their capacity to provide flexible, rapid, and context-sensitive support, including to unregistered and high-risk organisations.
- Strengthen protection mechanisms for WHRDs, including legal support, risk assessments, contingency planning, and options such as no co-branding to mitigate visibility-related risks.
- Invest in protection against digital gender-based violence, including support for case-building, response to trolling and doxing, and safeguarding of digital spaces used by WHRDs.
- Ensure inclusive funding that reaches the most marginalised, including LGBTI organisations, unregistered CSOs, and organisations in underfunded regions, applying intersectional approaches in funding strategies
- Adopt co-creation approaches in grant-making, involving WROs in the design of calls for proposals, indicators, and allocation decisions to ensure funding responds to real needs.
- Create a structured process of dialogue between EUDs and local women's organisations on the ground, facilitated by regional women's funds as well as training for EUD staff led by local WRO.
- Establish structured consultation and feedback cycles, including face-to-face engagement where possible, and systematically report back to WROs on how their inputs influence policies and funding decisions.

- Invest in detailed mapping of women’s organizations for strategic regional and global networking to amplify collective impact.
- Support the meaningful inclusion of women-led organizations from different regions of the world in decision-making spaces, including those from the MENA region.
- Demonstrate strong political leadership and policy coherence, ensuring alignment across EU instruments (GAP, CLIPs, MIPs, HR action plans) and issuing clear guidance to EU Delegations on consulting, funding, and protecting WROs.

Funding Accessibility and Administrative Burdens

- Participants consistently highlighted that EU and donor funding mechanisms remain largely inaccessible to grassroots and local women’s organisations, particularly those that are small, unregistered, or operating in conflict-affected and shrinking civic space contexts.
- The discussion underscored that administrative, compliance, and due diligence requirements are disproportionately burdensome, diverting limited human and financial resources away from core peacebuilding and protection work.
- Participants noted that short-term, project-based funding cycles undermine sustainability, contribute to staff burnout, and weaken long-term peacebuilding, movement-building, and organisational resilience.
- It was recognised that risk-averse funding practices exclude high-risk actors, including women human rights defenders and organisations operating in politically sensitive environments, despite these actors being central to peacebuilding and WPS implementation.
- The discussion highlighted that current funding models privilege INGOs and well-established organisations, reinforcing power imbalances and limiting direct support to locally legitimate women’s organisations.
- Participants stressed that women’s funds play a critical intermediary role, enabling flexible, rapid, and context-sensitive funding that can reach actors excluded from standard EU funding channels.
- It was mentioned that long-term, flexible operational financing with simplified procedures is critical to sustain women rights activism, especially in fragile or conflict-affected regions.
- It was noted that reporting and monitoring requirements are often overly rigid and extractive, with insufficient recognition of qualitative outcomes, informal peacebuilding work, and the realities of operating in crisis and conflict settings.

- The discussion identified a misalignment between funding timelines and the realities of peacebuilding, where trust-building, mediation, protection, and social norm change require sustained and adaptive engagement.
- Availability of funding is also shrinking significantly, with a 3-million-euro decrease reported in the Western Balkans alone due to US and EU Member States cuts in support budget.
- It was stressed how important multi-annual grants are for sustained impact and flexibility and that this should be reflected in subgranting programmes.
- Observations were made on the reporting requirements on impact. What is being asked from small organisations both in terms of reporting but also in terms of impact (changing social norms in 18 months) is unrealistic.
- It was also mentioned that the complex, highly competitive application process of the EU limits access and is particularly inadequate in situations like in Gaza where local actors are overwhelmed by the amount of challenges they already face.

Recommendations

- Simplify application, due diligence, and reporting requirements for women's organisations, applying proportionate, context-sensitive approaches that reflect organisational size, risk exposure, and operating environment.
- Expand long-term, multi-year core funding for women's organisations engaged in peacebuilding and WPS implementation, moving away from short-term, project-based funding models.
- Increase direct funding to grassroots and local women's organisations, reducing over-reliance on INGOs and recognising local legitimacy, trust, and lived experience as key added value.
- Scale up partnerships with women's funds as strategic intermediaries capable of providing flexible, rapid, and inclusive funding to high-risk, unregistered, and marginalised actors.
- Adopt risk-tolerant and protection-sensitive funding approaches, including options such as flexible visibility requirements and no co-branding, to ensure funding reaches women human rights defenders in sensitive contexts.
- Align funding timelines with peacebuilding realities, allowing adaptive programming, flexible reallocation of resources, and extensions where trust-building and conflict dynamics require sustained engagement.

- Reduce reporting burdens and diversify evidence requirements, recognising qualitative outcomes, narrative reporting, and context-specific indicators rather than rigid, output-driven metrics.
- Increase the involvement of women's organisations in the design of funding instruments, including calls for proposals, eligibility criteria, and reporting frameworks, to ensure accessibility and relevance.
- Issue clear guidance to EU Delegations and implementing partners on proportionate risk management, administrative flexibility, and accessibility standards for WPS and peacebuilding funding.
- Create smaller funding schemes to enable small grassroots and youth organisations to apply for funding under 10 000€.
- Expand the consultations to a wider group of WROs, and not only to WROs which have more access to funding and which are sitting in capitals. Make sure that groups outside of capitals, from marginalised communities, and with more informal structures have access to EU funding and to the EU consultative process. For this, there should also be funding allocated to outreach, to mobility, to accessibility of consultative spaces (mobility, for people with disabilities, etc.)

Engagement and Inclusion in EU Policy and Programming

- Participants highlighted that women peacebuilders' engagement in EU policy and programming remains inconsistent and uneven, with participation often dependent on personal networks or ad hoc consultations rather than systematic inclusion.
- The discussion underscored that grassroots and local women's organisations are frequently excluded from meaningful engagement, particularly in the design, implementation, and monitoring of EU policies and programmes, despite being directly affected by them.
- It was noted that consultations are often extractive, with women peacebuilders providing input without clarity on how their contributions inform decisions or are reflected in final policies and programming choices.
- Participants stressed that representation is not always inclusive, with marginalised groups, such as LGBTI organisations, rural women, young women, and organisations from underfunded or remote regions, less likely to be invited or able to engage.
- The discussion highlighted a disconnect between EU-level policy frameworks (e.g. GAP III, WPS commitments) and country-level implementation, where women's organisations are insufficiently involved in translating commitments into local action.

- Participants noted that EU programming timelines and formats often limit meaningful participation, as short notice, technical language, and inflexible processes constrain the ability of grassroots actors to engage substantively.
- Kosovo's experience was mentioned as a particular good practice where the national Gender Equality Action Plan (CLIP) was co-developed with local women's groups. It was noted however that follow-up monitoring and adaptation to political changes remain weak.
- It was recognised that local knowledge and lived experience are undervalued in EU policy and programming, with continued reliance on formal expertise and written inputs over contextual, experiential evidence.
- There was an observation that several projects funded by EU Delegations are not explicitly tied to CLIPs, which may suggest a lack of strategic integration.
- The discussion identified limited accountability mechanisms to ensure that inclusion commitments are upheld across EU Delegations and instruments, resulting in variable practice and credibility gaps.
- The participants also questioned the data collected for the EU to report on the gender equality situation in partner countries. They highlighted the importance that data gaps are reflected and that what is reported reflects the situation women and especially WHRDs see on the ground.
- During the discussion, women's sounding boards were mentioned as a structured consultation mechanism that systematically gathers WROs and WHRDs to provide key feedback and analysis to the EU Delegations in terms of the CLIPs, GAP indicators, etc. There have been discussions to have this process driven by EUDs but they have little capacity to do it although they have the will. It is important to resource the EUDs to have a stand-alone GFP.

Recommendations

- Institutionalise systematic and inclusive engagement mechanisms for women peacebuilders across all stages of EU policy and programming, including design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation
- Ensure inclusive representation in consultations, with targeted outreach and resourcing to enable participation of marginalised groups, including LGBTI organisations, young women, rural actors, and organisations in underfunded regions
- Institutionalise a process of regular structured reviews of CLIPs linked to gender-sensitive conflict analyses would be necessary to ensure relevance in unstable contexts.

- Clear EU guidelines mandating EU delegations to earmark funds explicitly for CLIP and Women Peace and Security (WPS) agendas in new financial frameworks.
- Consultations should also be open discussions, lived experiences should be considered. Small organisations might not have written inputs, reports to inform EU policies in written, but they have reflections, lived experiences that should be taken seriously.
- Align the CLIPs with EU policy commitments, requiring EU Delegations to engage women peacebuilders in translating GAP III and WPS frameworks into national and local programming.
- Prioritise the direct inclusion of grassroots and local women’s organisations already engaged in peacebuilding and women’s rights, recognising their legitimacy, contextual knowledge, and role as key stakeholders rather than optional consultees.
- Improve accessibility of engagement processes, including adequate notice, simplified language, translation, and flexible formats that enable meaningful participation by grassroots actors
- Consider the severe operational constraints in conflict zones like Gaza and adopt flexible, trust-based cooperation to make gender action frameworks effective.
- Ensure that M&E are not based only on indicators, especially quantitative ones, but designed as a feminist M&E rooted in lived experiences, human stories, etc.
- Resource EU Delegations to institutionalise women’s sounding boards by establishing structured consultation platforms with WROs and WHRDs to inform CLIPs, GAP indicators, and gender priorities, and ensure EU Delegations have the necessary capacity, including stand-alone GFPs, to coordinate these mechanisms effectively.
- Clear EU guidelines mandating EU delegations to earmark funds explicitly for CLIP and Women Peace and Security (WPS) agendas in new financial frameworks to answer the need of co-creating CLIPS.
- Strengthen feedback and accountability mechanisms, systematically informing participants how their inputs have been used and explaining decisions where recommendations are not taken forward

Mental Health and Wellbeing Support

- It was noted that there is a romantic view of activists and their resilience that does not fit the extremely complex reality of their work, suffering and sacrifices.

- The discussion underscored that women peacebuilders face compounded mental health risks due to digital harassment, threats, doxing, and public attacks, with limited access to adequate psychosocial or trauma-informed support.
- Participants consistently emphasised that mental health, psychosocial wellbeing, and burnout are critical challenges for women peacebuilders, women's rights organisations (WROs), and women human rights defenders (WHRDs), given sustained exposure to conflict, violence, political pressure, and insecurity.
- The discussion highlighted that mental health and wellbeing are inseparable from protection, as psychological stress, trauma, and exhaustion directly affect safety, decision-making, and the ability of women peacebuilders to continue their work.
- Participants noted that wellbeing support is often treated as optional or secondary, rather than as a core component of peacebuilding, protection, and organisational sustainability.
- It was recognised that short-term, project-based funding exacerbates burnout, as constant fundraising, reporting pressures, and job insecurity undermine staff wellbeing and organisational resilience.
- Participants stressed that safe spaces for reflection, peer support, and collective care are scarce and under-resourced, despite being essential for resilience, learning, and movement sustainability.
- It was noted that wellbeing needs are highly context-specific, yet existing support mechanisms are often rigid and not adapted to local realities, cultural norms, or security constraints.
- The discussion highlighted that mental health needs are particularly acute for activists operating in shrinking civic space and high-risk environments, where fear, isolation, and political pressure are persistent.
- An initiative was presented called the "Elevate Men" seminar. It is a mental health initiative engaging men to understand gender equality as a shared benefit, reducing backlash and violence against women. It includes mindfulness, anger management, and mental health awareness to foster peaceful coexistence. Mental health spaces for both women and men are crucial, as trauma and abuse among defenders impede their effectiveness. This is directly linked to the broader need for psychosocial support embedded in feminist peacebuilding.

Recommendations

- Recognise mental health and psychosocial wellbeing as core components of protection and peacebuilding, integrating them systematically into EU WPS, human rights, and peacebuilding.
- Provide long-term, predictable funding that reduces burnout linked to short-term contracts, funding insecurity, and constant reporting cycles.
- Support trauma-informed and context-sensitive wellbeing approaches, allowing organisations to define the types of mental health and psychosocial support that are culturally appropriate and responsive to local realities
- Make wellbeing and psychosocial support eligible and standard budget lines in EU and donor funding for women peacebuilders, WROs, and WHRDs, rather than optional or ad hoc add-ons.
- Invest in protection-linked psychosocial support, particularly for women peacebuilders facing digital violence, threats, and intimidation, including confidential and rapid-access services.
- Resource safe spaces for peer support, reflection, and collective care, including cross-border and movement-wide spaces that prioritise wellbeing over deliverables and competition.
- Reduce administrative and reporting pressures that contribute to stress and burnout, especially for small and high-risk organisations, through proportionate and flexible funding requirements.
- Encourage EU Delegations and implementing partners to adopt wellbeing-sensitive practices, including realistic timelines, respectful engagement, and awareness of the psychological impacts of participation and consultation.
- Increment initiatives targeting men to raise their awareness about mental health and wellbeing and reduce violence against women.

Cross-cutting Priority Recommendations

The following recommendations emerged consistently across multiple thematic discussions and should be considered priority areas for EU action across GAP III implementation and the preparation of GAP IV:

1. Guarantee meaningful and safe participation

Ensure structured inclusion of women's civil society organisations at all stages of peacebuilding and policy processes, and create safe physical and digital spaces for

participation free from harassment or retaliation.

2. Facilitate mobility and access to decision-making spaces

Establish clear procedures and focal points within EU delegations to support visa access for women peacebuilders, human rights defenders, and community representatives.

3. Provide long-term, flexible, and participatory funding

Expand multi-year core funding, participatory grantmaking, and simplified funding mechanisms that reach grassroots, youth-led, and marginalised organisations.

4. Advance localisation and intersectional inclusion

Ensure WPS and gender equality initiatives are locally owned, accessible in local languages, and inclusive of minorities, persons with disabilities, rural actors, youth, and LGBTI communities.

5. Integrate protection and wellbeing into all support mechanisms

Include mental health, psychosocial support, and digital protection as standard components of funding and programming for women peacebuilders and human rights defenders.