

Workshop on Strengthening the UN–EU Partnership in Peacebuilding and Prevention

EPLO Office, Cours Saint Michel 30B, 1040, Brussels

Wednesday, 24 September, 13:00 – 15:00

Summary note

Introduction

To generate innovative and practical ideas on how the UN and the EU can strengthen their collaboration in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and sustaining peace, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (DHF) and the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) co-organised a workshop with 23 EU, UN and civil society representatives based in Brussels and elsewhere in Europe. The workshop aimed to facilitate an exchange on what is needed to: ensure that UN and EU priorities and instruments are mutually reinforcing, while actively involving civil society actors; strengthen joint action in the field and enhance complementarity of missions; and mobilise and align resources more effectively for prevention and peacebuilding, including for local peacebuilders.

The session began with opening reflections from Guillem Riutord-Sampol, Head of Division for Peace, Security and Defence Partnerships at the EU External Action Service, on the history of EU-UN partnership and Rory Keane, Head of Office of the UN Liaison Office for Peace and Security (UNLOPS) in Brussels on the UN Peacebuilding Architecture (PBA).¹ Following opening remarks, participants exchanged reflections and ideas for advancing EU-UN partnership. The following outlines key takeaways and recommendations for strengthening collaboration moving forward.

Key takeaways

The EU and UN make for natural partners in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, playing different but complementary roles. In thinking about what is needed to advance the partnership between the two organisations, it would be critical to think about what is unique about each institution.

Mr. Riutord-Sampol noted in opening reflections that the partnership between the EU and the UN is rooted in long-standing collaboration and coordination on peacekeeping operations,

¹ Composed of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).

formalised in 2003 through the Joint Declaration on EU-UN Cooperation in Crisis Management. Since then, the organisations have continued to strengthen their strategic partnership, including on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The [EU Strategic Compass for Security and Defence](#), adopted in 2022, further indicates that a global rules-based order, with the UN at its core, is critical to ensure a stronger and more capable EU security and defence. The UN is therefore a key partner in its implementation.

In September 2025, the EU and the UN adopted new Joint Priorities on Peace and Security for 2025–2028, which outline the complementary roles of the two institutions and provide an architecture for their cooperation. The EU issued [Council Conclusions on upgrading the EU-UN strategic partnership and endorsing these new priorities](#). The priorities are structured around two clusters: field-based cooperation, and thematic and global cooperation (including on Women, Peace and Security, climate security, technology and mediation).

Discussions highlighted the UN's role as a regulating framework in an ever more multi-polar world. The UN, particularly through the Peacebuilding Commission, is able to bring different actors together to build consensus at the global policy level. As one of the biggest contributors to UN peacebuilding activities with presence at the country and regional level, the EU can play a role in ensuring that this consensus translates into impact at the country level.

UN peacekeeping remains an effective tool for conflict mitigation and prevention and is less driven by national security interests. The EU can at the same time support and catalyse UN peacekeeping through more targeted and strategic interventions. Participants also emphasised the EU's strong conflict and gender analysis as something that the Union should continue doing.

There was a discussion on the extent to which peacebuilding should be integrated into peacekeeping operations. While the EU Common Security and Defence Policy was seen by some as an important step to integrating peacebuilding into peacekeeping operations, others noted that the focus should rather be on how peacebuilding and peacekeeping can complement one another.

The EU can support efforts by the UN to advance the development of national prevention strategies, particularly through Member States developing their own prevention strategies.

Participants highlighted that prevention is understood differently by different actors, in different contexts—from preventing violence and deadly conflict, to advancing positive peace and social cohesion. Prevention may be seen in some contexts as an agenda driven by donor countries. In advocating for national prevention strategies, there is therefore a need to emphasise prevention as critical in all contexts. National prevention strategies should also be an opportunity to highlight what countries are doing well.

Discussions centred in particular on the development of national prevention strategies in Europe. Some participants emphasised that there have been early warning signals in European countries, as well as worrying trends of increased militarisation and securitisation. Others

highlighted that prevention needs in Europe are very different from prevention needs in contexts where deadly conflict is taking place.

Participants emphasised the importance of advocating for a principled approach to developing national prevention strategies, with certain norms and values, such as inclusion and collaboration, upheld. For example, civil society should be meaningfully included as an integral part of the design and implementation of these mechanisms. To advance national prevention strategies in Europe in particular, stronger collaboration between ministries of foreign affairs—which have advocated for national prevention strategies at the global level—and ministries of home/internal affairs would be critical. The EU and the UN have an important role to play in encouraging dialogue between governments and civil society. More thinking is also needed on how to link national prevention strategies to national preparedness strategies.

The EU and UN should further explore how they can collectively work to advance inclusive national ownership.

Participants highlighted that discussions on national ownership in peacebuilding tend to focus on governments. It is critical that we do not forget the role of local civil society groups and actors in advancing national peacebuilding efforts. In his address to the 2024 Civil Society Conference in Nairobi, UN Secretary-General António Guterres indicated the important role of civil society in advancing conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts by mobilising their governments. There is an opportunity to build on this recognition to strengthen UN and EU efforts to advance the role of civil society and local actors in national prevention and peacebuilding.

Both the EU and the UN have worked to engage civil society in their efforts to support conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The EU is ahead of the UN in this area, implementing feed-back mechanisms that bring processes back to civil society. For example, the EU regularly publishes calls for input from civil society in the development of regional or thematic policies, as in the public consultations on the recent Pact for the Mediterranean or the Civil Society Strategy. Another key example of collaborative EU policymaking is the Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN), co-managed by the European Commission, the European External Action Service and EPLO. The CSDN serves as a platform for dialogue and exchange on the development, implementation, and review of EU policies related to peace and security, allowing civil society to provide input throughout the entire policy cycle, rather than only at the development stage. Conversely, UN efforts to engage civil society tend to be one-way interactions, through for example civil society briefers in New York and Geneva who never learn about the outcome of their input. Participants underscored that the CSO-UN Dialogue on Peacebuilding has been a step in the right direction, but that there is a need to rethink the structure and modality of this initiative. For example, holding different kinds of meetings throughout the year at the country and regional levels rather than organising one symbolic meeting at the end of the year at a Headquarters location may be more inclusive and impactful.

There is also a need to think about how participation in global policy spaces and fora translate into inclusive national ownership at the country level. Not all organisations and peacebuilders are interested in participating in global policy advocacy spaces. While important to create

meaningful spaces of engagement for those actors who do want to engage at this level, it is also important to identify best practices for ensuring that the needs and perspectives of those that do not want to engage in global policy spaces are not forgotten.

More is needed to explore, through concrete examples and best practices, how the two institutions can work together at the country level to advance inclusive national ownership. For example, an EU-UNDP project in Mauritania could be highlighted as a positive example with lessons shared on how the EU and the UN have worked together to support national actors, including through engagement with civil society.

The 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR) and its implementation provides an opportunity to further enhance coordination and cooperation between the EU and UN.

In his opening remarks, Rory Keane underscored that the 2025 PBAR is aiming for an outcome that is both ambitious and pragmatic, as there is an understanding that there is a need to be realistic in what can be achieved in the current environment. It is important to link the PBAR with other ongoing processes, such as the Review on the future of all forms of UN peace operations, the UN80 reform initiative and implementation of the Pact for the Future.

Mr. Keane further emphasised three areas for the PBC—which serves as a platform to advise and support Member States, at their request, on conflict prevention, resolution and recovery—to advance prevention and peacebuilding at the country level:

- Strengthen its role as a bridge or convenor between different organisations and entities, including International Financial Institutions (IFIs), the EU and the private sector;
- Be more representative of the entire polity;
- Enhance its support to countries by sharing best practices, examples of initiatives that can be catalytic, etc.

Keane also highlighted that 65% of the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF)—the UN's principal instrument to invest in prevention and peacebuilding—is funded by EU Member States and the EU. European buy-in in terms of how these funds are used is therefore critical, and much more could be done to ensure that the PBF and the EU's Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) learn from and complement one another in advancing conflict prevention and peacebuilding and to de-risk peace positive partnerships.

Subsequent discussions highlighted:

- The need to address the stigma associated with being on the PBC agenda. EU Member States reaching out to the PBC to discuss prevention in their own contexts could go a long way to destigmatise the PBC.
- The importance of rethinking the working methods of the PBC, from including civil society briefers who then leave before discussions, to more exchanges and dialogues between civil society and Member States. The PBC could also employ technology to connect to different communities on a more regular basis. Participants highlighted the

idea previously presented of having an advisory group to the PBC (e.g. the NY peacebuilding group) and the importance of mitigating potential issues of gatekeeping by organisations present in NY.

- The critical role that Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs) play in identifying and strengthening complementarity between initiatives supported by different actors at the country level in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. The EU is planning to increase support to the PDA function going forward.
- The importance of strengthening the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) within the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), in its role to support the Peacebuilding Commission with strategic advice and policy guidance; to ensure coherence across the UN system in efforts to sustain peace; to manage the Peacebuilding Fund; and facilitate coordination with the EU on conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

The UN and the EU should work together to advance peacebuilding funding and financing, including by exploring innovative financing opportunities and strengthening the funding and financing of local peace actors.

Participants emphasised the importance of funding going directly to civil society and local peacebuilding actors, while also recognising the limitations of relying solely on the PBF and the rather limited funding of thematic programmes implemented by FPI to fund local peacebuilding actors. Both the EU and the UN should explore other avenues to advance inclusion and inclusive national ownership, including involving local actors in the decision-making process of how funds are used and applying specific criteria/markers on gender, age, etc. The UN, EU and civil society should explore how to engage with those donors who are more willing to engage with civil society, perhaps having conversations at capital level. The idea of using the annual meeting of the top 20 PBF donors to discuss lessons learned on funding local civil society was also raised. Other forms of innovative funding and financing are needed to ensure that local actors are funded and to correct imbalances between local and international CSO influence.

The discussion touched upon the increased attention on the role of the private sector in funding and financing peacebuilding, in line with the Pact for the Future and the UN Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace resolutions. Making investments in contexts experiencing conflict is still seen as high risk by the private sector. Participants discussed the potential role of the PBF in encouraging peace positive private sector engagement by taking on some of that risk. Participants also raised that while making investments in countries of conflict or for peace could be seen as risky by multinational corporations and investors, at the community level, it is often in the interest of private sector actors to work with community members and create a more stable business environment.

Despite the turn to private investment, there is still limited knowledge on how to approach the private sector and the role of multi-lateral actors in advancing this engagement. Private sector actors are interested in more holistic partnerships, where funding or financing could be one dimension alongside other forms of collaboration. Investing and Partnering with Youth for

Peace, housed at the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, is currently exploring what these kinds of partnerships between private sector and young peacebuilders could look like.

Recommendations

- EPLO members should engage European countries to take on and develop their own national prevention strategies. This would help destigmatise national prevention strategies in conflict-affected states.
- The UN and Member States should explore ways to fund a Secretariat to support the CSO-UN Dialogue on Peacebuilding and follow up.
- The EU should explore how to leverage its access to the PBC to ensure that there is more meaningful engagement with civil society in PBC meetings, including through dialogues and exchange.
- In strengthening the working methods of the PBC, the body should engage with civil society and local actors to better understand how the PBC could support impact at the country and regional level.