

BRIEFING NOTE No 197

Environmental peacebuilding as a climate–security priority for the EU – Examples from the Sahel

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Summary

The Central Sahel faces interlinked crises of conflict, climate change and fragility, but responses have been fragmented. Environmental peacebuilding offers opportunities to promote cooperation between conflicting groups through climate-sensitive and mutually beneficial projects around natural resources.

In this brief, we explore what the EU’s agenda means for environmental peacebuilding by sharing practical experiences from the Sahel and offering recommendations for the EU to promote climate-sensitive peacebuilding. Analysis shows that investing in environmental peacebuilding is crucial to safeguarding Europe’s security, development and economic interests.

We find that discussions at the EU policy level largely focus on the climate–security nexus, with environmental peacebuilding often implicitly understood but not explicitly named. Recent policy developments, particularly the EU’s 2023 Joint Communication on the Climate–Security Nexus, prioritise security and defence, reducing attention and funding for peace-focused activities outside the EU’s borders. This raises concerns among civil society about shrinking support for climate-sensitive peacebuilding actions.

While there is space for continued dialogue with EU policymakers and member state representatives, new entry points are urgently needed. For example, the Global Gateway’s 360-degree approach and the green transition could open up

venues for policy dialogue. The EU should remain sensitive to peacebuilding, promote cross-institutional coordination, and draw on peacebuilding expertise. It should also integrate climate action, fragility and peacebuilding into negotiations on the multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2028–2034.

Introduction

The Central Sahel is grappling with the compounded effects of protracted crises, violent conflict and climate change, all intensified by [environmental, institutional and social fragility](#). Despite growing recognition of the interconnections between conflict, climate change and environmental degradation in the region, [current responses remain fragmented](#), limiting efforts to effectively promote climate-sensitive environmental peacebuilding and conflict-responsive climate strategies.

Impacts of climate change are often described as a ‘threat multiplier’ or ‘conflict accelerant’, as the availability and quality of natural resources are significantly undermined by direct climate effects, [such as extreme heat and reduced rainfall](#). The Central Sahel confronts significant climate change threats, with a projected temperature rise from 2.0 to 4.3 °C by 2080 and increasingly frequent, severe weather extremes, putting in peril its [predominantly rain-fed agricultural sector](#), the livelihood base for 60–80% of its population.

Climate change is significantly disrupting agro-pastoralism and cattle herding, with shifting rainfall patterns altering herd migration schedules. Degraded soil and water resources, and diminished available agricultural land intensify competition over natural resources, particularly between herders and farmers, but also involving [other resource-dependent groups](#). This competition is further exacerbated by existing issues such as [land degradation from deforestation and poor farming practices](#), rapid population growth (with Niger’s population projected to increase by 140% by 2050), and [weak conflict resolution mechanisms for resource disputes](#).

However, research increasingly highlights that while environmental challenges are barriers to peace and resilience, they can also serve as entry points for mediation, dialogue and conflict resolution among and between communities. **‘Environmental peacebuilding’** has therefore emerged as a field focused on fostering peaceful intercommunity relations through a [climate-sensitive approach to peacebuilding](#) and is based on the assumption that conflicting

groups can be encouraged to [collaborate on environmental projects](#) with mutual benefits.

The European Union (EU) has sought to link climate change, peace and security, creating entry points for policy dialogue and targeted support. However, recent policy developments have highlighted how the approach of the EU is increasingly becoming more centred around (hard) security and defence, with a [focus on Europe itself](#) and severely diminishing policy attention and [funding for peace-focused activities](#).

According to the 2025 OECD States of Fragility report, **peace-related official development assistance (ODA) to the Sahel has dropped**. In 2023, only 10.4% of DAC members' ODA was allocated to peacebuilding, down from previous years, despite a record number of violent conflicts globally, which is a [mismatch between growing needs and declining peace financing](#). Moreover, while the international community has [increased development finance for climate-related objectives](#) in the last decade, **the majority of this funding has been directed toward countries [outside the identified fragile contexts](#)**.

This briefing note is the first of two notes.¹ It highlights the current EU policy landscape that peacebuilding organisations have to navigate, examining what it means to engage in environmental peacebuilding and bringing forward practical experiences from the ground, ending with some concrete steps on how to put environmental peacebuilding higher on the EU agenda.

1. Understanding environmental peacebuilding

Central to the approaches of environmental peacebuilding is natural resource management (NRM), and in particular, [how natural resources can be managed more responsibly](#), thereby helping to prevent conflict recurrence, achieve sustainable peace and development, and foster social cohesion, mediation and dialogue (Interviews 2025).

Although the concept of environmental peacebuilding is not new, its [structured approach](#) as a field of practice and research has emerged more recently. Our research highlights that in the Sahel, communities have engaged in practices that align with **environmental peacebuilding for decades, even if they have not necessarily been labeled or perceived as such**. This may relate to the challenges of linking slow-onset climate change impacts with immediate political priorities (i.e. security and countering violent terrorism in the Central Sahel). Interviews with

peacebuilding organisations, as well as European agencies for international cooperation working on the ground have revealed that, until recently, they struggled to help the local population understand the link between climate change and conflict. This is, however, changing as communities are increasingly affected by extreme weather events, such as the 2024 floods in Mali. These events are sparking broader discussions about the concrete impacts of recent climatic hazards and fostering a growing awareness of the link between climate change and conflicts (Interviews 2025).

The potential of NRM as a pathway to peace, resilience, and social cohesion is gaining more prominence at the policy-level too. The UN has recently published a 'tip sheet' recognising that environmental peacebuilding includes broader interventions than climate, peace and security approaches, which principally refer to **climate-related risks affecting peace and the need for conflict-sensitive climate action**. While climate, peace and security actions mostly focus on climate-informed peacebuilding and peace-positive climate action, environmental peacebuilding includes "[interventions involving natural resource management, conservation, and land use, serving as entry points to foster cohesion and resilience](#)".

At the European policy level, discussions primarily focus on the climate-security nexus, as well as the concepts and practices of climate adaptation and resilience² (Interviews 2025). The concept of **environmental peacebuilding is implicitly understood under the umbrella of the climate-security nexus**. While the term as such is never used in the text, the 2023 Joint Communication on the climate-security nexus and its 2025 Progress report mention how "natural resources can also offer opportunities for mediation". The following sections delve more into the climate-security nexus agenda of the EU and its external action on climate and security.

2. The climate-security nexus in a shifting EU policy landscape

2.1 The EU's climate-security nexus

The EU's external action on climate and security is guided by the **2023 Joint Communication on the Climate-Security Nexus**, which adopts a comprehensive approach to the impact of climate change and environmental degradation on peace, security and defence. The 2023 Joint Communication builds on earlier frameworks, including the [2020 Climate Change and Defence Roadmap](#) and the [2021 Integrated Approach](#) on Climate and Security. But it should also be

considered closely with strategic documents like the [EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy](#) and the [European Green Deal](#), which recognised climate change as a driver of instability, although it does not explicitly frame climate change as a conflict driver.

Structured around four pillars (evidence-based policy making, operationalisation, capabilities and partnerships),³ the 2023 Joint Communication presents operational actions that different EU services and agencies, (such as the Directorate-General (DG) for International Partnerships (DG INTPA), the DG for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), the European External Action Service (EEAS), the DG for Environment (DG ENV), the DG for Climate Action (DG CLIMA), the European Defense Agency), as well as EU delegations and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions can take.

At the policy level, the implementation of the Joint Communication is overseen by different EU services, mostly led by the EEAS, but that include the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI), DG INTPA, DG ECHO and lately DG CLIMA and DG ENV. At the moment, it is not clear if the newly established DG for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf (DG MENA) will have dedicated climate units or components as well (Interviews 2025).

In February 2025, the European Commission published the Progress Report on the implementation of the 2023 Joint Communication in which it underlines that [“natural resources can also offer opportunities for mediation and become entry points to initiate cooperation and resolve conflict”](#). Despite describing what is understood as "environmental peacebuilding," neither the Joint Communication nor the Progress Report explicitly mention the term. Interviews with policy makers revealed **limited uptake of the term in international policy circles and at the local level**, where the term is hardly applied. Some nuance is needed: an international expert on climate security noted **greater uptake of the term in the Horn of Africa** compared to the Sahel (Interviews 2025).

Whether or not explicitly framed under the environmental peacebuilding label, there are already examples of actions and initiatives supported by the EU that reflect the underlying principles of environmental peacebuilding, such as [cross-border water management projects](#) (see box 1 for other examples).

However, a conflict-sensitive approach seems to be lacking in **other key EU climate policies and related initiatives**. For example, the European Green Deal promotes resilience-building initiatives, including sustainable agriculture or

developing sustainable transports and infrastructures. However, a well-intentioned green project can inadvertently worsen local tensions if it creates new competition over land or resources without considering the existing social dynamics. [The key opportunity is to make this approach systematic](#): the Green Deal could become a powerful tool for peace if its climate projects were intentionally designed to not only meet environmental goals but also to constructively manage conflicts and turn them into opportunities for cooperation. Yet, the EU Green Deal has been [losing political momentum](#), as the narrative has shifted from a focus on green transformation to prioritising competitiveness and regulatory simplification over its original ecological ambition.

The same goes for the EU's efforts to secure resources for the green transition, which, without conflict-sensitive strategies in place, risk perpetuating harmful practices. A key example is the Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA), which was adopted in 2024, but does not explicitly address conflict sensitivity in its text. However, many of the natural resources needed for the green transition to be successful are located in areas that are already suffering from the environmental, social and economic consequences of extractive activities, which are both a driver and a symptom of fragility and conflict. [With extractive activity expected to accelerate significantly over the next 15 years](#), the risk of deeper ecological and socio-economic impacts will only grow.

Box 1. Some examples of EU actions

EU-funded initiatives most directly focused on environmental peacebuilding are supported by FPI, notably through its strategic partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Now in its second phase (2022–2026), the partnership aims, among other things, to develop analyses at the policy level that integrate both climate and conflict dynamics, and implements actions to mitigate climate-related security risks. Initially piloted in Sudan and Nepal, [projects now span across African regions](#), with a focus on borderlands. The partnership is widely seen as effective by EU and UNEP representatives since its launch in 2017 (Interviews 2025).

There are other examples showing a growing intersection of the EU's work on climate change and peacebuilding, beyond FPI. One of them is the support to disaster risk reduction mechanisms, where the EU, among other things, helps

communities to (re)build resilience to natural hazards and food security, which is where the intersection is particularly evident. Further, the Environment and Sustainable Natural Resources Unit of DG INTPA has increasingly integrated attention for people-centred approaches into its work, evolving from a more narrow ecological and environmental focus to one that recognises the centrality of people. In fragile ecosystems such as the Central Sahel, Central Africa and parts of Southern and Eastern Africa, biodiversity hotspots often overlap with zones of conflict and insecurity, underlining the necessity to prioritise a human dimension to environmental protection and sustainable development.

DG INTPA has provided technical assistance to EU delegations to improve the integration of climate and environmental goals into broader development and peacebuilding strategies. Cross-departmental coordination, including under the Joint Communication on Climate-Security Nexus, is ongoing to more effectively link environment and climate programming to peace and security objectives – a key step towards supporting biodiversity, climate adaptation, peacebuilding and livelihoods – and achieving long-term impact.

Sources: European Union 2021; Interviews 2025; ECDPM and Search for Common Ground event of 19 June 2025 "[Climate, peace and security in the Sahel: What role for the EU?](#)".

2.2 Shifting EU priorities and their impact on conflict-sensitive peacebuilding

Evolving geopolitical and geoeconomic priorities are leading the EU to [increasingly focus on strategic investments](#) – notably through the Global Gateway initiative – to [ensure its competitiveness](#), alongside a stronger focus on security, defence and migration. While the green transition still remains central, the new geoeconomic interests are shedding a **much brighter light on energy security and access to critical raw materials**. This highlights the growing importance of the climate-energy-security nexus in the EU's external engagement and the impact of these critical transitions as well as the possible spill-over effects of cascading climate risks, including on the EU.

Some interviewees considered this shift as an **opportunity to better understand the role of (climate-sensitive) peacebuilding**, particularly how it can play a stronger role in contexts where tensions may emerge around mining, resource

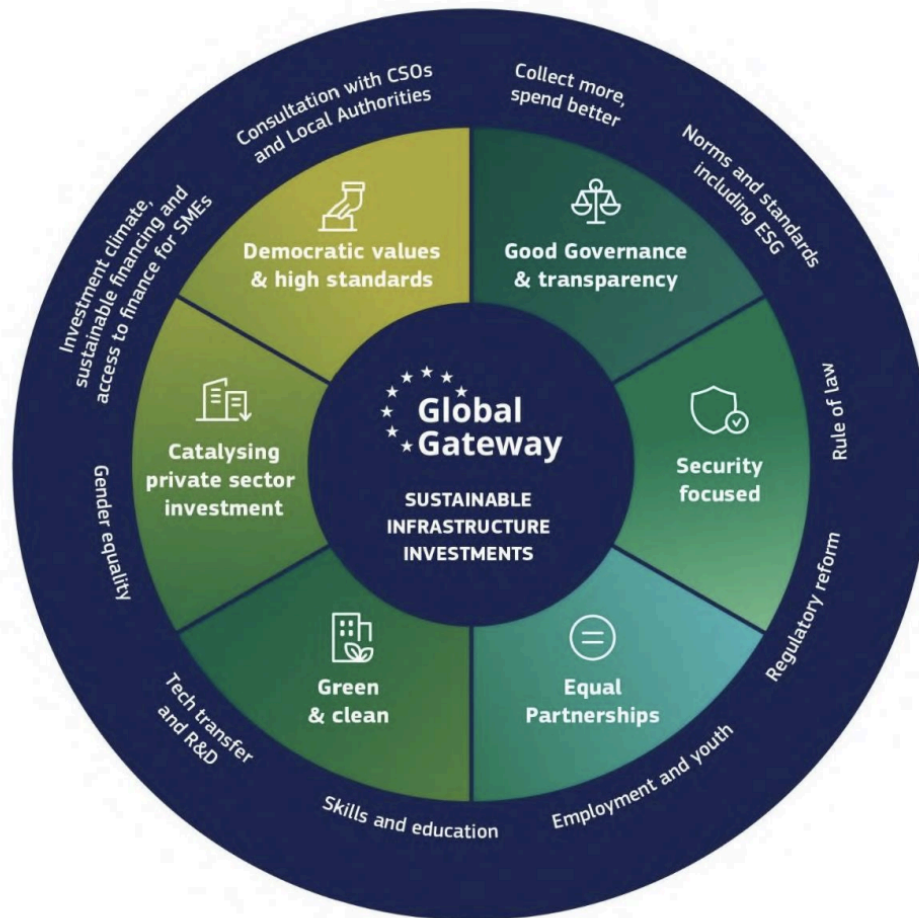
extraction and the expansion of green energy (Interviews 2025). However, they were also conscious about the fact that the EU's emphasis on its own resilience, further reflected in the [2025 Joint Communication on the European Preparedness Union Strategy](#), **risks narrowing the space (and interest) to implement (climate-sensitive) peacebuilding actions through the EU's external action.**

This is partially reflected in the 2023 Joint Communication, which gives comparatively little attention to the peacebuilding component.⁴ The Joint Communication sees [climate change as a security threat](#), which has led to responses focusing on defence, risk control and the traditional security paradigm, with little focus on peacebuilding approaches that tackle the deeper causes of conflict exacerbated by climate impacts. Interviews with civil society organisations (CSOs) have expressed their **criticism about the focus and prioritisation of security and defence** under the 2023 Joint Communication, noting that the preparation and publication of this Communication were carried out in a tight timeline, allowing minimal consultation with CSOs (Interviews 2025). At the same time, the [2025 Climate and Security Trend Analysis](#), released as part of the Joint Communication on the Climate-Security Nexus, outlines five key pathways through which climate change might heighten security risks for Europe: natural resource governance, migration and livelihoods, the energy transition, environmental degradation and global governance. The importance of peacebuilding and conflict mediation is underscored in all these five pathways.

Yet, amid shifting priorities and proposed budget cuts in development cooperation at both EU and member state levels, there is **growing concern that the window created by the climate-security nexus Joint Communication is closing**, with donors turning their focus inward and deprioritising external (conflict-sensitive) peacebuilding efforts (Interviews 2025). Civil society has also expressed concerns that **outreach and engagement across various components of the European Commission**, at least in direct relations to the EU's policy framework, **has proven challenging**, in particular for several smaller peacebuilding organisations (Interviews 2025). Nevertheless, interviewees from both civil society and EU institutions still noted the opportunity that the 2023 Joint Communication offers to integrate and maintain wider considerations of peace and security related to climate change. **There is a space for continued dialogue with EU policy makers as well as EU member state representatives**, allowing stakeholders to share concerns, exchange lessons and explore joint solutions. However, there is also an urgent need to **identify new entry points.**

But other avenues for policy dialogue were also flagged. The Global Gateway, a strategic initiative launched by the European Commission in 2021 to promote infrastructure development in partner countries and “win-win” partnerships,⁵ and in particular its 360-degree approach (see Figure 1) could open avenues. The 360-degree approach includes the 6 key principles of the Global Gateway, including: green and clean, equal partnerships, democratic values and high standards, good governance and transparency, security-focused and catalysing the private sector – see inner green circle of Figure 1. The 360-degree approach aims to look beyond physical infrastructure and also to strengthen the broader “enabling environment” for sustainable development (the outer blue circle of Figure 1), which includes employment and youth, gender equality and regulatory frameworks. Yet, [critical questions remain about how inclusive the Global Gateway approach will be](#) or how existing initiatives (such as the push to promote conflict sensitivity and the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus) will be integrated under the 360-degree approach. Other entry points could be offered by the intention to promote ‘green and lean’ initiatives under the Global Gateway, which will include green energy investments that will need to be conflict sensitive and based on just resource governance, especially when extraction of critical raw materials is involved. As mentioned, existing initiatives geared towards promoting a green transition have not been found to pay much attention to conflict-sensitivity.

Figure 1. 360-degree approach of the Global Gateway



Source: HellenicAid, MFA, [Power point presentation](#).

To conclude, while the EU’s increasing emphasis on its geostrategic interests risks further marginalising conflict-sensitive and peacebuilding approaches, the EU’s existing instruments (such as the Global Gateway and broader green transition agenda) hold the potential to better integrate environmental peacebuilding, provided they adopt inclusive, locally grounded, and conflict-aware strategies. Translating this potential into practice requires drawing on the experience of those already working at the intersection of climate, conflict, and peace on the ground. The following section explores how European organisations are already working at this intersection.

3. Learning from the ground

3.1. The ongoing work of (European) organisations in the Sahel

Several (European) organisations working across the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors are actively engaged in the Sahel and **increasingly recognising the linkages between climate change and conflict**. Impacts of climate change alter agro-pastoralism and herding practices, change traditional transhumance migration routes and reduce access to and/or availability of shared natural resources (like land or water), leading to heightened tensions between and within communities. Many organisations are adopting strategies and roadmaps that increasingly highlight the need for conflict-sensitive approaches to climate resilience, sending the message that **addressing climate change impacts on conflict is no longer optional but essential**.

Some examples of climate-sensitive strategies that promote the peaceful management of natural resources and strengthen social cohesion include the development of toolkits for conflict-sensitive natural resource management;⁶ initiatives that facilitate dialogues between diverse ethnic and religious groups to build trust, promote understanding and prevent violence; and nature-based solutions to restore degraded landscapes (Interviews 2025). These initiatives **frequently prioritise the engagement of women and youth**, empowering them as agents of change through leadership training and capacity building. This is because NRM practices are not immune to social norms and traditionally have been fertile ground for gender inequalities, especially for access to and control over natural resources (see box 2). Young people, especially young women, often face age-related exclusion and inequalities. When compounded by climate and security crises, these issues can lead to [increased marginalisation, unemployment, rural-urban migration and even involvement in criminal activities](#).

Box 2. Women's underrepresentation in decision-making processes related to natural resource management

Women account for over 70% of West Africa's agricultural workforce, playing vital roles across the entire value chain, from production to processing and marketing. They are integral to farming, collecting fodder, caring for small ruminants and sick animals, processing milk and marketing dairy products. Additionally, they manage crop production and perform household care labour, which often depends on natural resources like wood and water for tasks such as cooking and cleaning. In contrast, men are primarily responsible for herding cattle, making decisions related to herding practices and maintaining cash crops. They are also traditionally the head of the household and owners of the agricultural land.

Despite the increasing recognition of their critical roles, women remain significantly underrepresented in decision-making processes related to peacebuilding, climate adaptation and natural resource management. Even when they participate in these processes, they rarely hold leading roles and often remain silent. This underrepresentation is even more pronounced for young women, who face both gender-based discrimination (such as limited access to land, credit and insurance) and age-related constraints. Interviews with local officials and agricultural stakeholders highlight this imbalance, despite the community-level recognition of women's expertise in managing natural resources.

Sources: McOmber 2020; Salzinger and Desmidt 2023; UNDP 2024; Interviews 2025.

Organisations working across the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors are adopting a range of promising practices while seeking to strengthen their positioning on emerging priorities and enhance collaboration. The following sections outline key examples and insights from these efforts.

3.2 Collaborating with local actors: a common approach among organisations

Organisations in the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors across the region are increasingly adopting climate-sensitive approaches. A common thread among them is the **strong emphasis on fostering close**

collaboration with local and national authorities, which is seen as essential for legitimising interventions and ensuring that external support complements, rather than replaces, existing local structures. A robust community-based approach and empowering local actors to identify their own solutions and to take ownership of initiatives is crucial, as local actors (including teachers, religious and ethnic leaders, local authorities, etc.) are those who remain engaged during difficult times (Interviews 2025). The box below discusses several examples in more detail (box 3).

Box 3. Some examples of what (European) organisations are doing

The Danish Refugee Council

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) is increasingly recognising the nexus between climate change, conflict and displacement. While mostly focusing on supporting vulnerable people, in particular refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), DRC has been working on peacebuilding, mediation in conflict, climate change and natural resource management in the Central Sahel. In Mali, for example, they have recently implemented a project on economic recovery and protection, which included peacebuilding and the impact of climate change. In their peacebuilding activities, they have used community mechanisms to prevent, manage and reduce conflict. **Involving local authorities is seen as a key aspect of their work**, as it lends legitimacy to the organisation's work and demonstrates that they are not there to replace existing structures but to support and collaborate with local actors, which in turn can foster a more cooperative environment (Interviews, February 2025).

The Belgian Agency for international cooperation (Enabel)

In the Central Sahel, Enabel's main entry point for environmental peacebuilding has been primarily food security, support to agriculture and livestock and support to (economic) livelihoods. In its work on agriculture and pastoralism, Enabel has **integrated attention to natural resource management and governance**, also for example the management and governance of natural areas and natural parks (Interview, March 2025). Enabel has also deployed a number of activities and actions relating to land tenure security, as well as to the improvement of climate-sensitive territorial planning and territorial governance.

Search for Common Ground

In 2021, Search for Common Ground adopted a dedicated [Sahel Strategy for 2020–2028](#), which lays out Search’s 10-year strategy for its engagement in the West African Sahel, particularly in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. Search for Common Ground has facilitated dialogues between different ethnic and religious groups to build trust, promote understanding and prevent violence. In the Mopti region, in Mali – a region historically marked by deep communal tensions between Fulani herders and Dogon farmers intensified by climate change – Search for Common Ground’s local team established a two-year community dialogue, bringing together Fulani and Dogon leaders, men and women, to explore the link between climate stress and conflict, and to identify and agree on a shared, locally owned solution. It has also valued women and youth engagement, empowering women and young people to become peacebuilders and agents of change in their communities by providing leadership training, supporting youth-led initiatives and creating platforms for youth voices to be heard.

Sources: Interviews 2025.

3.3 Building comparative expertise

While some organisations have historically focused on farmer-herder conflicts and/or land disputes, **others are trying to craft their own niche**, focusing for example on providing access to shared land plots and water systems for gardening and agriculture to both displaced populations and host communities (sometimes intentionally empowering women to manage these resources); strengthening livelihoods and building resilience to food and nutrition insecurity; or shifting towards regional strategies aimed at promoting the integrated, sustainable management of natural resources to counter the effects of climate change and bolster resilience across the Sahel.

Shifting priorities among European actors and others, alongside growing resource scarcity, are pushing issues like the **extraction of critical raw materials and mining to the forefront of natural resources and conflict management** in the Sahel. For example, in countries like Burkina Faso, mining-related disputes – especially those involving land – are increasingly surpassing farmer-herder tensions, calling for conflict-sensitive approaches and peacebuilding initiatives

(Interviews 2025). In response, organisations are placing greater emphasis on developing **climate-resilient infrastructures**.²

3.4 Bolstering collaboration

Collaboration and coordination among actors working on the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors are **increasingly recognised as crucial**, especially given limited resources and decreasing funding opportunities. In particular, there is a **growing emphasis on more effective collaboration between actors operating in the same regions and on similar topics**. There are instances of (timid) conversations to establish broader coordination mechanisms with (European) actors operating in the region to avoid duplication and ensure synergies. However, a persistent challenge remains the **limited integration of peacebuilding actors** within existing humanitarian and development coordination platforms in some areas (Interviews 2025).

Vice-versa, interviewees also expressed a perceived necessity for **peacebuilding organisations to go beyond their traditional 'entry points'** and engage with new interlocutors to amplify their expertise, and make the case for the integration of peacebuilding across sectors such as investments, green transitions, etc. (Interviews 2025).

4. Conclusions and ways forward

Environmental peacebuilding interventions are crucial to ensure conflicts revolving around the management of natural resources are peacefully solved, and with resources becoming increasingly scarce (like water) or in demand (like critical raw materials), new conflicts are likely to emerge, calling for peacebuilding activities to be implemented.

At the same time, declining donor support is affecting the operations of some organisations active in the Sahel. Several European donors (i.e. France, Norway, Sweden and more recently the Netherlands) have withdrawn or scaled back, while major donors like the [EU and USAID have reduced or suspended development aid](#). However, key EU strategic initiatives, in particular the Green Deal, are increasingly framing climate ambitions through an economic and geopolitical lens. This is evident, for example, in the push for critical raw materials extraction which often requires access to resources located in fragile and conflict-prone areas. **Without conflict-sensitive strategies, efforts launched**

under these EU strategies risk perpetuating existing tensions and ultimately undermining the EU's strategic objectives. Investing in environmental peacebuilding ensures that EU engagements are conflict and climate-sensitive, build "mutual resilience", and contribute to sustainable outcomes, thereby safeguarding the EU's broader economic, development, and security interests in a volatile global landscape. In this context, there is a case to be made for European policymakers and actors to invest in efforts to promote climate-sensitive peacebuilding and international cooperation.

A number of concrete steps that can be taken include:

- **European policymakers should safeguard policy space to discuss peacebuilding as a key vector for continued engagement under the climate – security nexus work, in ongoing and upcoming policy processes, and seeking linkages between EU internal and external policy objectives.** While the EU's shift toward hard security is understandable from a European perspective, it should not come completely at the expense of continued support for peacebuilding. As mentioned before, the five key pathways identified in the Climate and Security Trend Analysis, in which climate change might heighten security risks for Europe, all offer key avenues for continued peacebuilding. The recent EU Preparedness Union Strategy highlights the strong links between climate, environment and security, stressing the need to embed 'mutual resilience' in EU economic and development policies. Sustained dialogue with peacebuilders, with experience from a diverse set of contexts, around these issues will therefore be essential. This requires committed EU engagement and an approach focused on harnessing expertise and cross-sectoral mutual learning and exchange, bridging security, economic and environment sectors. Another opportunity will emerge with the expected Communication on Fragility (in 2026), which is supposed to build on the Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises, should harness collaboration across the HDP nexus and include climate resilience and climate sensitivity given the centrality of negative climate change impacts and environmental degradation in fragility.
- **At the policy level, there is a need to bridge cross-sectoral perspectives on how to ensure climate and conflict sensitivity approaches to peacebuilding in EU external action.** Addressing climate change across sectors demands strong cross-institutional coordination. Some EU institutions have closer ties to peacebuilding actors than others,

particularly in areas like natural resource management. However, this is less true in fields such as displacement, urbanisation, environmental degradation or the energy transition, where conflict-sensitive approaches remain limited. **EU interlocutors can help bridge these gaps**, promoting collaboration that includes peacebuilding perspectives.

- **At the operational level, EU actors on the ground, notably EU delegations, should continue harnessing effective collaboration and partnerships with peace actors**, to ensure that context and conflict analysis, but also programming take into account the existing expertise on climate-sensitive peacebuilding. At the operational level, there is a wealth of expertise and knowledge that local and international peacebuilding organisations actors can offer the EU to make the implementation of the Joint Communication across the EU's actions on the ground a success. This expertise and access on the ground is not just limited to mediation around natural resources, but also around environmental crime and justice, the possible implications of the energy transition and the mining sector. Ensuring diverse partnerships and engaging with a broad range of actors is also critical for EU actions to ensure sustainable outcomes. Locally-led initiatives and co-design are vital for identifying solutions that reflect local realities and build on existing governance structures and best practices. **But bottom-up approaches must be complemented with efforts to reinforce and sustain space for institutional dialogue, locally grounded policy design and implementation focused on sustainability.** Without **institutionalisation and scalability**, even the most successful community-level efforts risk remaining isolated and lacking ownership. This is especially crucial given the limited financial resources available in this space.
- **Secure closer involvement in MFF discussions to highlight the need for conflict and climate-sensitive approaches.** Upcoming negotiations on the [future of the next EU multiannual financial framework \(MFF\)](#) will include discussions on the design of future instruments to promote the EU's external engagement. While the Global Gateway will remain a key priority, the 360° approach, as well as the understanding that investments need to be both climate-resilient and security-focused, are gaining more traction – even if there will be less funding for peace, (soft) security and resilience-related initiatives. Despite their key roles in designing and implementing EU engagement in fragile settings, **FPI and parts of the EEAS are too far removed from current discussions on the Global Gateway and its flagship projects.** This should be rectified to make sure the experience

of these EU institutions is better leveraged. DG INTPA, FPI and the EEAS have made significant strides to mainstream conflict sensitivity, conflict analysis and the HDP nexus in ongoing programmes. Further incorporating and strengthening the linkages with climate action, climate resilience and assessing the linkages between the environment, climate change and peace should build on those efforts.

- **EU policymakers should closely consider the funding gap for fragile settings affected by conflict but also climate change, and consider how the EU can deliver on its stated commitments.** Figures clearly show that [fragile settings affected by climate change continue to face the biggest hurdles to access climate adaptation finance](#). The current context of shifting priorities and withdrawal of key actors such as the US means there will be a great demand for EU funding and leadership. **While tough choices will need to be made, the EU cannot hide from making them.**

Beyond shaping policy and approaches, such as the upcoming Fragility Communication, the [EU must ensure its financial instruments continue to integrate climate action, fragility, conflict prevention and peacebuilding](#). This requires dedicated allocations in the next MFF and would align with the Joint Communication's call to treat climate and environmental investments as investments in peace and security.

In addition to the EU budget, the EU should also consider how to fulfil its endorsement of the COP28 *Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace*, which calls for increased funding for climate resilience in conflict-affected and fragile settings. **COP30 will be a key moment to demonstrate concrete progress on this commitment.**

The EU operates in an increasingly complex geopolitical landscape –marked by conflicts and wars, pressure to increase its defence spending and military posture, and a growing emphasis on industrial competitiveness amid global power rivalries. However, research and analysis show that investing in environmental peacebuilding pays off and remains strategically important. As the EU recalibrates its external engagement, it is vital not to lose sight of the stabilising role that conflict- and climate-sensitive initiatives can play, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected regions. Environmental peacebuilding can support mutual resilience, prevent conflict, and promote inclusive and sustainable development. These are key priorities, not just for partner countries and local

communities, but also to safeguard Europe's long-term security, development, and economic interests.

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Endnotes

1. The second briefing note will be published towards November 2025.
2. According to the UN, "climate change adaptation refers to actions that help reduce vulnerability to the current or expected impacts of climate change", while "climate resilience is the capacity of a community or environment to anticipate and manage climate impacts, minimise their damage, and recover and transform as needed after the initial shock." Source: UNDP 2023.
3. The four pillars are: 1) Strengthening planning and decision-making by enhancing evidence-based analysis on the climate-security nexus to inform better planning and implementation; 2) Operationalising responses by integrating climate and security considerations into EU external actions, including regional and national conflict analyses; 3) Enhancing climate adaptation and mitigation by improving member states' civilian and military operations to reduce costs and carbon footprints while maintaining operational effectiveness; and 4) Reinforcing international partnerships by collaborating

with multilateral organisations and partners like NATO to align with the EU's climate and environment agenda.

4. Peacebuilding is mentioned five times in the Joint Communication text, compared to 'Defence' being mentioned 60 times.

5. More information is available at:

https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en

6. For example, Search for Common Ground has developed a [toolkit](#) to prevent, respond and design interventions to manage conflict related to cross-border pastoralism.

7. This topic will be explored further in ECDPM's second policy brief (to be published).

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