The "P" in Practice

Field evidence on operationalising conflict sensitivity, WPS and YPS across the HDP Nexus

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Foreword

It is an honour to introduce this new report by WeWorld on peacebuilding, the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus, and the link with the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agendas.

The so-called Triple Nexus has emerged over the past decade as a key conceptual principle for international engagement in fragile and conflict-affected settings. It reflects the growing recognition that humanitarian relief, development cooperation, and peacebuilding are not isolated endeavours but interdependent pillars of crisis response. **The HDP Nexus seeks to move beyond institutional separation and short-term interventions by fostering collective outcomes that reduce needs, risks, and vulnerabilities over time, while strengthening national and local capacities for sustainable peace. In this evolving landscape, the UN Agendas on Women, Peace and Security and Youth, Peace and Security have become indispensable operational frameworks, emphasizing the transformative role of women and young people in conflict prevention, resolution, and recovery. Italy has positioned itself as an active proponent of these interconnected Agendas, as reflected in its 5th National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2025–2029) and the 1st National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security (2026–2029).**

At the global level, the HDP Nexus builds upon commitments articulated in the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and the "New Way of Working", later reinforced by the OECD Development Assistance Committee Recommendation on the Nexus (2019). The core premise is that humanitarian action must not only save lives but also lay the foundations for resilience and peace; development cooperation must be conflict-sensitive and risk-informed; and peacebuilding must address structural drivers of violence, including inequality, exclusion, and weak governance. In fact, we advocate that multi-dimensional UN peace operations should have a human rights civilian component, helping to mainstream human rights across all mission activities. This integrated logic resonates with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peaceful and inclusive societies, and underscores the need for joined-up strategies that operate across mandates and time horizons.

Peacebuilding, within the Nexus, is no longer conceived merely as post-conflict reconstruction but as a continuum encompassing prevention, mediation, stabilisation, reconciliation, and institutional reform. It draws normative legitimacy from the UN Charter, the twin Resolutions on sustaining peace adopted in 2016 (UN General Assembly Resolution 70/262 and UN Security Council Resolution 2282), and subsequent guidance on nationally owned, inclusive approaches. Similarly, the European Union, through its Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises, has embraced comprehensive strategies that align humanitarian, development, and security instruments.

The Women, Peace and Security Agenda, inaugurated by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and expanded through nine subsequent resolutions, constitutes one of the most significant innovations in international peace and security. It affirms that women are not merely victims of conflict but agents of change whose participation is essential to durable peace. The Agenda rests on four interrelated pillars: prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery. Its regional uptake has been substantial, with organisations such as the European Union adopting their own strategic approaches to WPS and more than half of UN member States developing National Action Plans to implement the commitments.

Complementing WPS, the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda was formally established by UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015), followed by resolutions 2419 (2018), 2535 (2020) and, most recently, 2807, adopted in December 2025. The Agenda recognizes young people as critical stakeholders in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, countering previously common narratives that portrayed youth primarily as a security threat. The YPS framework emphasises the pillars of participation, protection, prevention, partnerships, disengagement and reintegration, as well as the creation of enabling environments for civic engagement.

Both the WPS and YPS Agendas align conceptually with the HDP Nexus: they stress inclusivity, local ownership, and the need to address structural issues, thereby bridging immediate humanitarian concerns with long-term development and peace objectives.

Italy's policy engagement in this field is rooted in the country's broader foreign policy commitment to multilateralism, human rights, and human security. As an active member of the United Nations, the European Union, NATO, and the OSCE, Italy has consistently supported integrated approaches to crisis management and peace operations.

Paying special attention to the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus and to peacebuilding, Italy's commitment is particularly visible within the United Nations system. Italian representatives have repeatedly emphasised in their remarks to the General Assembly and in the Security Council that early investment in conflict and crisis prevention reduces long-term humanitarian and security costs. This reflects a strong alignment with the HDP Nexus logic, particularly in regions of strategic interest for Italy, such as sub-Saharan Africa and the wider Mediterranean.

Italy is an active supporter of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture, including the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF). Through voluntary contributions to the PBF, Italy has contributed to financing projects that address structural drivers of conflict, promoting youth employment, gender equality, good governance, and community-level reconciliation. Italian diplomacy has also supported efforts to strengthen the advisory and bridging role of the PBC between the Security Council, the General Assembly, and the Economic and Social Council, in order to enhance coherence across the humanitarian, development, and peace pillars of the UN system. This institutional coherence is a key operational dimension of the HDP Nexus.

In addition, **Italy has consistently advocated for enhanced coordination between UN agencies, funds, and programmes in crisis contexts. Italian policy positions underline the importance of integrated UN country teams, conflict-sensitive development programming, and the use of joint analysis and collective outcomes at the country level**. These elements mirror the "New Way of Working" policy and the Secretary-General's reform agenda aimed at strengthening the UN development system and fostering system-wide coherence.

Italy has also linked its development cooperation to peacebuilding objectives within UN frameworks, particularly through its contributions to multi-partner trust funds and pooled funding mechanisms that address fragile and conflict-affected contexts. The Italian Development Cooperation increasingly incorporates conflict sensitivity and risk analysis, aligning with UN calls for prevention-oriented approaches. At the policy level, Italy has supported discussions in the General Assembly on financing for peacebuilding, emphasizing the need for predictable and sustained funding in order to move beyond ad hoc and short-term project cycles.

Moreover, Italy's advocacy at the UN has stressed the importance of human rights as a foundation for sustainable peace, consistent with the HDP Nexus. By supporting the work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and promoting accountability, rule of law, and transitional justice, Italy contributes to addressing the structural grievances that often fuel cycles of violence. This human rights-based approach complements humanitarian relief and development assistance, reinforcing the systemic logic of the Nexus. Furthermore, Italy contributes to the UN Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS), thus financing projects combining a set of fundamental principles: protection and empowerment, people-centered, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented. The successful election of Italy as a member of the Human Rights Council for the 2026-2028 term can be seen as a natural continuation of this endeavour.

In addition, Italy actively supports initiatives aimed at promoting the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and youth in peace mediation, conflict prevention and post-conflict recovery, in line with the relevant UN Agendas. Examples include funding UN-led mediation efforts and contributing to UN Agencies and Bodies such as UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA and the newly constituted UN Youth Office. This, in turn, reinforces the normative bridge between the HDP Nexus and inclusive peacebuilding.

The consistency of Italy's engagement in support of the WPS and YPS Agendas is also shown by the periodic adoption and implementation of the National Action Plans, the current (5th) NAP on Women, Peace and Security for the period 2025–2029 explicitly situates WPS within the broader HDP Nexus and sustaining peace frameworks. The Plan recognizes that conflicts are increasingly protracted and multidimensional, requiring responses that simultaneously address humanitarian needs and developmental shortcomings.

The 5th Italian NAP articulates a comprehensive strategy structured around thematic priorities that include the systematic integration of gender perspectives in conflict prevention and mediation; the strengthening of women's meaningful participation in peace processes and decision-making; the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence; and the promotion of economic empowerment and access to services in fragile contexts. Importantly, the Plan underscores policy coherence between diplomatic action, development cooperation, defence policy, and humanitarian assistance. It calls for enhanced training of civilian and military personnel deployed in international missions, ensuring that gender expertise is embedded across operational levels.

In line with the HDP Nexus, the 5th NAP emphasises the importance of addressing root causes of conflict, such as gender inequality, discrimination, and socio-economic marginalization. Italian Development Cooperation, guided by Law No. 125/2014, integrates gender equality as a cross-cutting priority and promotes gender-responsive programming in fragile and crisis-affected countries. The Plan also highlights Italy's support for women-led civil society organisations, recognising their pivotal role in community resilience, mediation, and early warning. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are strengthened through dedicated indicators, periodic reporting, and multi-stakeholder consultations, reflecting an accountability-oriented approach.

Following the same vision, **the first Italian National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security (2026-2029) represents a significant step in aligning national policies with the YPS Agenda. It acknowledges that young people, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings, face structural barriers to participation, including unemployment, political exclusion, and limited access to education and civic space.** At the same time, youth are identified as innovators, peace advocates, and bridge-builders within their communities. The Plan outlines objectives aimed at enhancing youth participation in decision-making processes related to peace and security; supporting youth-led initiatives in prevention and mediation; protecting young people from violence, radicalisation, and exploitation; and fostering socio-economic inclusion as a cornerstone of peacebuilding.

In line with the preventive dimension of the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda, the Plan recognises that early and structured investment in youth inclusion contributes to reducing structural drivers of instability, including marginalisation, distrust in institutions, and socio-economic exclusion. In this sense, youth engagement is framed not only as a matter of participation, but as a strategic component of national and international prevention efforts.

The Italian approach is closely connected to the country's ties with the Mediterranean region, the Sahel, and the Western Balkans. The Plan envisages coordinated action among ministries, local authorities, civil society, and youth organisations, as well as synergies with development cooperation instruments. It stresses the need for data collection, disaggregated by age and gender, to inform evidence-based policies. Moreover, it situates youth engagement within the HDP Nexus by linking humanitarian assistance for crisis-affected youth with long-term investments in education, employment, and civic empowerment.

Furthermore, the Italian vision also emphasises the complementarity and interoperability between the Youth, Peace and Security and the Women, Peace and Security Agendas. Recognising that young women often face compounded forms of exclusion in fragile contexts, the two frameworks are designed to reinforce one another, promoting inclusive participation across generations and genders. This integrated perspective enhances policy coherence and strengthens prevention and peacebuilding strategies within the HDP Nexus. Italy promotes this view in the United Nations - with two dedicated events held in the margins of the Commission on the Status of Women between 2025 and 2026 – as well as in the European Union, NATO, and the OSCE, advocating for further integration of commitments.

Another notable feature is the emphasis on institutional coordination and inter-ministerial governance. Both the WPS and YPS Plans are embedded within broader human rights and foreign policy strategies, ensuring alignment with EU frameworks and UN commitments. The Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Rights (CIDU) plays a central coordinating role, while collaboration with players such as the Ministry of Defence, the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, and civil society organisations, fosters cross-sectoral coherence. This reflects an understanding that the HDP Nexus requires not only conceptual integration but also administrative and budgetary coordination.

Regionally, Italy's engagement is further shaped by European Union policies, including the EU Gender Action Plan III and the EU Youth Action Plan in EU External Action (2022–2027). By aligning National Action Plans with EU strategies, Italy contributes to a layered governance system in which global norms are operationalised through regional and national instruments. This multilevel approach enhances policy consistency and amplifies the impact of initiatives in fragile contexts.

In conclusion, the convergence of the HDP Nexus, peacebuilding, and the WPS and YPS Agendas marks a paradigm shift in international peace and security governance. It signals a move from reactive, fragmented interventions to proactive, inclusive, and systemic strategies aimed at sustaining peace. Italy's 5th National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2025–2029) and its 1st National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security (2026–2029) demonstrate a commitment to translating global normative frameworks into concrete national policies. By embedding gender equality and youth participation within integrated humanitarian, development, and peace strategies, Italy contributes to advancing a holistic vision of human security. The effectiveness of this approach will ultimately depend on sustained political will, adequate resources, and meaningful partnerships with civil society and local actors, providing a coherent and forward-looking model of implementation within the broader architecture of the HDP Nexus.

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Preface

In today's world—where fragility, conflict, displacement and deep structural inequalities intersect—peace is not an abstract aspiration but the essential foundation for any meaningful humanitarian, development or peacebuilding effort. Across the countries where we work, fragility takes many forms: political instability, economic volatility, social exclusion and widespread insecurity, all compounded by weak governance systems, climate-related shocks and rising social tensions. These challenges are not limited to low-income contexts. Even high-income countries face increasing political polarisation, widening inequalities and growing social fragmentation, demonstrating that fragility is a global reality requiring collective, sustained and people-centred action.

WeWorld's operational experience in more than 20 countries, including Italy, shows that sustainable peace involves far more than the absence of violence. It requires dignity, equitable access to services, inclusive governance and constructive social relationships. Central to this is the meaningful engagement of women and young people who—together with children—represent the majority of the population in the contexts where we operate and are disproportionately affected by crises. Their participation, as envisioned in the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agendas, is vital for strengthening resilience, social cohesion and long-term transformation. Indeed, this research forms part of WeWorld's wider strategic reflection on the active and transformative role of women and girls in crisis-affected settings.

The "P" in Practice: Field Evidence on Operationalising Conflict Sensitivity, WPS and YPS across the HDP Nexus draws together lessons from WeWorld's programmes in Benin, Lebanon, the Swahili Coast (Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique), Mozambique, Ukraine, and Italy, demonstrating how the "P" of the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus can be operationalised through context-sensitive interventions that strengthen relationships, build trust, and reduce risks of harm. WeWorld's Conflict Sensitivity Toolkit has guided adaptive planning, participatory analysis, and continuous monitoring, ensuring that interventions respond to emerging tensions while supporting locally owned solutions and capacities. **Across all contexts, WPS and YPS have been operationalised not as rhetorical commitments but as practical strategies: gender-transformative approaches under WPS empower women to exercise leadership, influence decision-making, and challenge restrictive social norms, while child and youth participation under YPS enables young people to contribute meaningfully to dialogue, mediation, and community governance, strengthening social cohesion and intergenerational trust.**

Operationalising WPS and YPS consistently across programmes demonstrates that women and young people are active agents of change rather than passive recipients. In Benin, the MEDIA-B project trained journalists in gender- and conflict-sensitive reporting while supporting women- and youth-led civil society organisations to lead dialogue, promote media literacy, and amplify the voice of both women and young people in civic life. In Lebanon, the Power of Youth project is creating inclusive spaces for inter-community dialogue, leadership development, and arts-based engagement, enabling young people—including refugees and marginalised youth—as well as women to shape local decisions and foster intergenerational understanding. In Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique along the Swahili Coast, the regional project Kujenga Amani Pamoja (KAP) empowered young women and men as peacebuilders through mediation, arts-based education, and civic engagement, bringing together communities, authorities, and elders to negotiate tensions and strengthen trust. In Mozambique, the Northern Crisis Recovery Project (NCRP) strengthened Peacebuilding Committees and volunteer networks, fostering leadership, creative engagement, and participation of both women and youth in community-led peace initiatives. In Italy, the Youth Participation Programme allowed girls, young women, and under-represented youth to develop civic skills, engage in municipal, national, and EU-level decision-making, and strengthen social cohesion, demonstrating that WPS and YPS issues are equally relevant in high-income contexts. In Ukraine, the Protect Kharkiv project integrated women, children, and young people into psychosocial support, WASH programming, and community-led peacebuilding, showing that WPS and YPS integration is effective even in active conflict settings.

While recognising achievements, this publication also interrogates our role as humanitarian and development actors in a changing operational landscape. Fragility, conflict, and limited institutional capacity compel us to reflect on do-no-harm principles, the sustainability of interventions, and risks of aid fatigue. We must consider how to enable communities to lead solutions, how to support locally owned and contextually relevant initiatives, and how to adapt when social, economic, and political dynamics shift. Partnerships are therefore fundamental: co-designed and co-led programmes with local actors—including women- and youth-led organisations—ensure legitimacy, continuity, and relevance. Multi-stakeholder platforms involving authorities, schools, media, and civil society bridge immediate humanitarian needs with long-term development and peacebuilding objectives, enabling women, children, and young people to exercise leadership and influence decisions in meaningful ways.

Operationalising the HDP Nexus demonstrates that humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding interventions are mutually reinforcing when coordinated coherently. **Immediate needs can be addressed while fostering structural transformation, including inclusive governance, equitable social norms, and strengthened institutional accountability.** For donors and partners, this evidence highlights the importance of multi-year, flexible funding, investment in local capacities, and inclusion of women and young people as decision-makers: these are critical levers for sustainable, impactful programming that genuinely responds to community priorities and agency.

Ultimately, peace is both a foundation and an outcome of effective programming. **Operationalising the "P" of the HDP Nexus requires deliberate design, inclusive participation, strong partnerships, locally owned solutions, and adaptive management informed by field evidence.** Women and young people are essential partners in shaping interventions that build trust, transform social norms, and strengthen institutions, while conflict-sensitive practices safeguard communities and reinforce resilience. Supporting programmes that embed integrated WPS and YPS approaches, locally led solutions, and robust partnerships is not only the most ethical approach but also the most effective path to measurable, sustainable impact.

It is our hope that this publication inspires reflection, strategic investment, and collaboration across the HDP Nexus, showing that operationalising peace through these principles is achievable and essential. At WeWorld we strongly believe that lessons from our field experience can guide future programming, support sustainable impact, and contribute meaningfully to the global conversation on operationalising peace in complex, fragile, and high-income contexts alike.

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> "Across the countries where we work, fragility takes many forms: political instability, economic volatility, social exclusion and widespread insecurity, all compounded by weak governance systems, climate-related shocks and rising social tensions. These challenges are not limited to low-income contexts. Even high-income countries face increasing political polarisation, widening inequalities and growing social fragmentation, demonstrating that fragility is a global reality requiring collective, sustained and people-centred action.

CHAPTER 0.
Introduction

0.1. Peace in a World of Fragility

Peace is an operational imperative across humanitarian, development, and social cohesion programming in contexts marked by fragility, displacement, and protracted crisis. Women, children, and young people — the most vulnerable groups targeted by these efforts — disproportionately experience unequal access to services, exclusion from decision-making, entrenched gender norms, weak governance, and competition over limited resources. These intersecting vulnerabilities shape the environments in which interventions are designed and delivered, from conflict-affected low- and middle-income countries to marginalised communities in high-income democracies.

Even in more stable, high-income contexts, challenges related to democratic participation, misinformation and erosion of the social fabric have implications for peace. Rising socioeconomic inequality and political polarisation can strain social norms, weaken trust in institutions and fuel perceptions that the system serves some groups over others, threatening long-term social cohesion and democratic legitimacy (European Sociological Review, 2025).

This publication seeks to contribute to the broader discussion on peace in fragile and conflict-affected settings, while also considering how the concept evolves in contexts where fragility manifests through social exclusion, political fragmentation and declining civic trust. Its objectives are to:

- **Advance understanding of peace within the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agendas, demonstrating how inclusive, community-based and context-sensitive interventions strengthen social cohesion and resilience.**

- **Illustrate operational approaches to the Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) Nexus, highlighting the role of gender-transformative and intergenerational strategies in fostering coexistence, equity and durable peace.**

- **Strengthen evidence and analytical knowledge, capturing how peacebuilding principles are embedded across programmes and interventions in complex contexts.**

- **Recognise women, youth, and children as central agents of change, capable of reshaping social relations and rebuilding trust in divided or fragmented communities.**

- **Promote a reflective, evidence-based understanding of conflict sensitivity and social cohesion, acknowledging power dynamics and potential risks associated with context-insensitive interventions.**

The urgency of embedding peace across humanitarian and development action is reinforced by global trends in violence and fragility. In 2024, the number of active state-based armed conflicts reached 61 — the highest since systematic recording began — with nearly 160,000 people killed in organised violence and sharp rises in attacks against civilians (Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 2025). Fragility is multi-dimensional, encompassing economic, political, societal and security vulnerabilities that undermine resilience and heighten risk (OECD, 2025).

> " Fragility is multi-dimensional, encompassing economic, political, societal and security vulnerabilities that undermine resilience and heighten risk.

These conflicts and fragility dynamics interact with climate shocks, displacement and governance challenges, contributing to long-term instability. The World Bank estimates that most of the world's extreme poor will live in fragile and conflict-affected settings by 2030 and that violent conflicts now exact economic losses equivalent to around 11.6% of global GDP, underscoring the scale of the development setback in both low- and middle-income contexts.

In recognition of these complex drivers, major international policy frameworks — particularly within the European Union (EU)[1] — emphasise integrated approaches that bridge humanitarian, development and peace actions. The EU's peace and governance policy promotes coherent action to mitigate security risks, prevent conflicts, sustain peace and support recovery, highlighting that sustainable development cannot be achieved without resilience and peacebuilding efforts integrated into all stages of engagement.

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1   The European Commission is currently preparing a new Communication on Humanitarian Aid, centred on humanitarian diplomacy and an integrated approach to fragility. According to Commissioner Lahbib, the Communication is expected to be released in the second quarter of 2026. For more information see https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_25_2901 and https://voiceeu.org/news/shaping-eu-humanitarian-leadership-in-a-time-of-crisis-voice-sets-priorities-for-the-upcoming-eu-humanitarian-communication

EU external action frameworks — anchored in the Global Strategy[2], the European Consensus on Development[3], and reinforced in recent Council conclusions[4] — operationalise the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus to respond to multidimensional fragility. This approach seeks to promote joint analysis and programming across humanitarian, development and peace actors, enabling complementary efforts that reduce vulnerability, strengthen risk management and address root causes of conflict and exclusion.

The EU experience also illustrates the value and challenges of nexus implementation: where systematic links between the three pillars exist, programmes can bolster resilience and support transitions out of conflict even before peace agreements are concluded. Conversely, in contexts with medium fragility — including some high-income settings — nexus approaches remain less systematic, revealing gaps in integrating humanitarian, development and peace priorities into cohesive strategies.

In both fragile and more stable contexts, peace enables people to live with dignity, access their rights and manage tensions without violence. It rests on:

- **Fair and responsive institutions that uphold rights, equity and inclusive civic participation.**
- **Inclusive participation in decision-making processes that shape local and national pathways to stability.**
- **Strong social relationships within and between communities that sustain cooperation under stress.**

Embedding these conditions requires deliberate efforts to reduce harm, strengthen social cohesion, and address structural inequalities. Central to this effort is the integration of the WPS and YPS agendas, recognising women and young people as key agents of analysis, leadership and long-term change. Aligning programmes with the HDP Nexus — and with policy frameworks that prioritise resilience and conflict sensitivity — strengthens impact and sustainability by ensuring that interventions are coherent, context-adaptive and attuned to the drivers of fragility, whether in low-income, middle-income or high-income contexts.

REPORT STRUCTURE

INTRODUCTION: This section outlines the report's theme, key concepts, and the methodology employed. We adopted a deductive approach, combining field implementation analysis through comparative grids with interviews of project participants, WeWorld staff, and external partners. The chapter concludes with practical guidance derived from operational insights and these external perspectives.

CHAPTER 1: Examines WeWorld's organisational approach to the HDP Nexus, with a focus on the "P" dimension and how we understand it and operationalise it in practice. The chapter provides a detailed overview of our *Conflict Sensitivity Toolkit* and explores our approach to implementing the WPS (Women, Peace and Security) and YPS (Youth, Peace and Security) agendas.

CHAPTER 2: Organised into country and programme factsheets. Using the outlined methodology, this chapter presents lessons learned in operationalising the "P" dimension of the Nexus, with a specific focus on WPS and YPS agendas. Concrete examples are drawn from Lebanon, Ukraine, the Swahili Coast, Mozambique, Benin, and Italy.

CHAPTER 3: Synthesises lessons learned from field experience, highlighting opportunities for scalability and offering recommendations tailored to different stakeholders. This chapter also incorporates reflections from external stakeholders, including EPLO and Search for Common Ground, situating our findings within broader international debates on operationalising the HDP Nexus, WPS, and YPS agendas.

0.2. Understanding Key Concepts

Peace, peacebuilding, social cohesion, conflict sensitivity, and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agendas are central to this report. These concepts are not only foundational to the way interventions are designed and implemented across fragile and stable contexts, but they also shape how the effectiveness of programmes is assessed. Given the complexity of modern crises — where violence can be direct, structural, or cultural, and fragility manifests in both low-income and high-income settings — a shared understanding of these terms is critical. They provide a framework for analysing the drivers of conflict, the opportunities for sustainable peace, and the roles of women, youth, and communities as agents of change.

By clarifying these concepts upfront, this report aims to equip readers with the analytical tools needed to navigate discussions on peace, social cohesion, conflict sensitivity, and the operationalisation of the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus. Understanding these terms helps to contextualise the findings, approaches, and examples presented throughout, including how WeWorld and other actors translate these principles into practice across diverse settings.

HDP NEXUS

The Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus — also called the Triple Nexus — is an increasingly influential approach to crisis response that **seeks to align humanitarian aid, long-term development and peacebuilding efforts so they work together rather than in isolation** (UNDP, 2025). It grew out of discussions at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, where the UN and international partners recognised that today's prolonged and complex crises demand more coordinated action that tackles both urgent needs and their root causes (ibid.).

Traditionally, humanitarian assistance focused on saving lives in the short term, development on structural change over the long term, and peacebuilding on addressing conflict drivers. The HDP Nexus brings these pillars into closer coherence **to reduce unmet needs, build resilience and address instability in a more sustainable way** (UNDP, 2024).

At its heart, the Nexus promotes collective outcomes developed through joint analysis, planning and action over multi-year timeframes, leveraging the comparative advantages of each sector to greater effect on the ground (INEE, 2024).

By integrating peacebuilding into humanitarian and development responses, the HDP Nexus aims to ensure that **relief efforts not only save lives but also address underlying conflict drivers and bolster local systems for long-term stability**. This includes strengthening governance, social cohesion and community resilience so that gains are not easily reversed (World Bank, 2019).

The approach also emphasises conflict sensitivity, risk-informed planning and coherence across actors, with organisations encouraged to move beyond silos in policy and practice (UNDP, 2025).

While implementation varies by country, the Nexus is increasingly being adopted both within UN systems and across national strategies to bridge the gaps between immediate relief, structural development and peace outcomes, helping societies transition from crisis to recovery and sustainable peace (ibid.).

PEACE

Peace is often understood in its simplest form as the absence of war or armed conflict (Cambridge University Press, 2025). Even today, when the number of armed conflicts is at its highest level since the end of the Cold War (OECD, 2025), this narrow definition feels increasingly inadequate. Beyond the battlefield, violence has become more fragmented and layered: non-state armed groups are expanding, organised crime operates across borders, homicide rates remain high in several regions, and violence against women persists both in and outside conflict-affected contexts. At the same time, funding for peacebuilding and conflict prevention in highly fragile settings has fallen to one of its lowest levels since 2004 (ibid.). The academic study of peace took shape as a distinct field in 1959, when Johan Galtung co-founded the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). Galtung's seminal contribution was the distinction between "Negative Peace" and "Positive Peace" (Galtung, 1969). Negative Peace refers to the absence of direct physical violence or war. Positive Peace, by contrast, is more ambitious: it implies the absence not only of direct violence but also of structural and cultural violence — the hidden systems of inequality, discrimination and exclusion that shape everyday life.

This distinction matters. If peace is defined solely as the absence of open conflict, it risks masking deeper injustices. The removal of discriminatory laws, for instance, does not automatically ensure gender equality in practice (Cambridge

University Press, 2025). **Measuring peace therefore becomes complex, as it requires looking beyond ceasefires to institutions, norms and lived realities.**

One of the most widely used tools for assessing peace today is the Global Peace Index (GPI), produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace. The GPI evaluates countries across three domains: societal safety and security, ongoing domestic and international conflict, and militarisation (IEP, 2025). The Global Peace Index 2025 Report shows that the world has become less peaceful over the past seventeen years, with the average country score deteriorating by 5.4 per cent since 2008 (ibid.). Its findings underline a central point: sustainable peace depends not only on reducing violence but also on strengthening Positive Peace — the attitudes, institutions and structures that sustain peaceful societies and enhance their capacity to withstand shocks.

PEACEBUILDING

Peacebuilding refers to deliberate efforts to prevent the outbreak, recurrence or escalation of violent conflict and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace (UN, 2025). The term gained prominence within the United Nations in the early 1990s, particularly through Boutros Boutros-Ghali's An Agenda for Peace (1992), which defined peacebuilding as action to consolidate peace and avoid relapse into conflict. It was further elaborated in the 2000 Brahimi Report as activities undertaken "on the far side of conflict" to rebuild the foundations of peace (UN, 2010). Earlier still, Johan Galtung had called for structures capable of addressing the "root causes" of violence and supporting local capacities for peaceful conflict resolution (Galtung, 1976).

Today, peacebuilding covers a broad range of measures implemented in the context of emerging, current, or post-conflict situations and which are explicitly guided and motivated by a primary commitment to the prevention of violent conflict and the promotion of a lasting and sustainable peace (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2008). The creation of the UN Peacebuilding Commission in 2005 institutionalised this ambition at the highest political level, with a mandate to coordinate post-conflict recovery strategies and sustain international attention and financing (DCAF, 2007).

Contemporary scholarship stresses that peacebuilding cannot be reduced to technical fixes. Knowledge of conflict dynamics and root causes is therefore essential: without a deep contextual understanding, interventions risk reinforcing the very tensions they seek to resolve (Barakat et al., 2020). For this reason,

peacebuilding and conflict sensitivity are complementary. While conflict sensitivity focuses on how interventions operate within a given context, peacebuilding goes further by explicitly seeking to address the underlying drivers of conflict (UNSDG, 2022).

Peacebuilding is also the third pillar of the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus, reflecting the understanding that, without peace, development gains cannot be sustained and humanitarian needs will persist (Plesner, 2025). In this sense, peacebuilding is not an add-on to crisis response but a long-term, political and inclusive process. It is about reshaping relationships, institutions and power structures so that societies can manage tensions without returning to violence.

SOCIAL COHESION

Social cohesion refers to the quality of relationships, trust and shared norms that bind people together within a society (UNDP, 2020). It is widely recognised as both a foundation for sustainable peace and a key outcome of effective peacebuilding interventions (UNICEF, 2022). At its core, social cohesion is about how groups with different identities, histories and interests manage to coexist, cooperate and resolve tensions without resorting to violence (UNDP, 2020).

Two interconnected dimensions are commonly identified. Vertical social cohesion refers to the relationship between state and society — the degree to which institutions are trusted, inclusive and responsive, and citizens feel represented and protected. Horizontal social cohesion, by contrast, concerns relationships between groups at community level, including the bonds and bridges that sustain trust across ethnic, religious, political or social divides (UNICEF, 2016). Both dimensions are essential. A society may enjoy strong community ties yet lack confidence in state institutions, or vice versa; sustainable stability requires progress on both fronts.

In post-conflict contexts, rebuilding social cohesion is particularly challenging. Peace agreements may end open hostilities, yet grievances, trauma and injustice often remain unresolved. States sometimes prioritise short-term stability over full accountability, leaving certain harms unaddressed and trust fragile (Centre for Civilians in Conflict, 2024). Research consistently highlights the restoration of social trust as one of the most urgent tasks for fragile and conflict-affected settings (GSDRC, 2016). Civil society organisations can play a vital role by facilitating dialogue, promoting inclusion and challenging impunity (ibid.).

Social cohesion does not mean erasing differences. On the contrary, it entails recognising diversity while ensuring that inequalities do not translate into exclusion or structural injustice (ibid.). When access to opportunities, public services or political voice is captured by particular groups, cohesion can quickly erode and tensions intensify (UNDP, 2020). Conversely, policies that promote equity, fair representation and inclusive governance can strengthen resilience and reduce the risk of renewed conflict — positioning social cohesion not as a secondary objective but as a cornerstone of sustainable peace.

CONFLICT SENSITIVITY

Conflict sensitivity refers to the ability of an organisation to understand the context in which it operates, anticipate how its actions interact with that context, and act on that understanding to maximise positive impacts while minimising harm (IOM, 2023). It starts from a simple but powerful recognition: humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities are never neutral. They inevitably shape — and are shaped by — existing peace and conflict dynamics (UNSDG, 2022).

The concept builds on Mary Anderson's "Do No Harm" principle, which argues that aid can either support peace or exacerbate conflict depending on how it is delivered (Schmeidl et al., 2023). While Do No Harm is widely regarded as the minimum standard, conflict sensitivity emphasises not only the avoidance of unintended negative consequences but also the strengthening of interventions' positive contributions to sustaining peace (ibid.).

Fragile contexts are fluid and fast-changing. Drivers of tension can shift rapidly, and projects may produce unforeseen distribution or legitimisation effects — for example, by favouring certain groups or reinforcing particular authorities (Helvetas, 2023). For this reason, conflict sensitivity requires continuous conflict analysis, reflexivity and adaptation, rather than linear or rigid planning approaches (Woomer, 2018). It is not conflict avoidance. Rights-based programmes, for instance, may generate tensions when supporting communities to claim their rights; the aim is to anticipate such risks and manage them constructively and non-violently (Helvetas, 2023).

Communication is central to this effort. Transparent and inclusive communication can prevent misunderstandings and mitigate tensions, while harmful misinformation, disinformation and hate speech have increasingly undermined trust in humanitarian actors and put both aid workers and civilians at risk (Centre for Civilians in Conflict, 2024). Being conflict sensitive

therefore also means being attentive to language, narratives and the broader information environment.

Importantly, conflict sensitivity is now understood as a cross-cutting approach embedded across programming cycles — from design to monitoring and evaluation — rather than a stand-alone tool (Schmeidl et al., 2023). It is context-specific, two-way and action-oriented (IOM, 2025). While it cannot guarantee that harm will never occur, it provides a structured and reflective framework for engaging responsibly in fragile settings (UNSDG, 2022).

WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY (WPS) AGENDA

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda was formally established on 31 October 2000 with the unanimous adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. **For the first time, the Security Council recognised that women are not only disproportionately affected by conflict, but are also critical agents in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding** (UNSC, 2000). The resolution calls for the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence and for their full, equal and meaningful participation in all peace and security processes (Security Council Report, 2024).

The agenda builds on earlier international commitments, including the Beijing Declaration and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and rests on a transformative premise: sustainable peace is inseparable from gender equality (Parashar, 2019). It acknowledges that women, men, girls and boys experience conflict differently, and that integrating a gender perspective — beginning with conflict analysis — leads to more effective and lasting peace efforts (UN, 2016). Increasingly, this has evolved into a call for a gender-transformative approach, one that does not merely include women within existing structures, but seeks to challenge and reshape the power relations, norms and inequalities that fuel insecurity.

Anchored in its four foundational pillars—**Participation, Prevention, Protection, and Relief and Recovery**—the WPS agenda has continued to expand; since 2000, nine additional Security Council resolutions have deepened the WPS framework, including Resolution 2493 (2019), which urges states to ensure full implementation and create enabling environments for women peacebuilders and civil society actors (Security Council Report, 2024).

To operationalise these commitments, many countries have adopted National Action Plans (NAPs) outlining priorities, responsibilities and monitoring mechanisms for implementing Resolution 1325 at national level. While NAPs demonstrate political intent, their effectiveness depends on sustained funding, institutional backing and accountability (Zakarian, 2025).

Now that twenty-five years have passed since the adoption of Resolution 1325, women remain significantly underrepresented in formal peace negotiations (UN Secretary-General, 2023), despite compelling evidence that their participation strengthens the durability of peace agreements: accords are 20 per cent more likely to last at least two years and 35 per cent more likely to endure for fifteen years when women are meaningfully involved (Berghof Foundation, 2025). The WPS Agenda therefore remains both a normative framework and an unfinished project — calling not only for inclusion but for structural transformation in how peace and security are conceived and practised (Zakarian, 2025).

YOUTH, PEACE, AND SECURITY (YPS) AGENDA

The Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda is a landmark global framework that recognises the vital role young people play in preventing conflict and building peace. It was born on 9 December 2015, when the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2250, the first resolution ever fully dedicated to young women and men as positive agents in peace and security (UNSC, 2015). **Until then, there had been no comprehensive international mechanism that addressed the specific needs, contributions and potential of youth in peace processes** (UNFPA, 2018).

Resolution 2250 emerged from sustained advocacy by civil society and youth networks, which stressed that young people are too often portrayed as a threat, when in fact most are peacebuilders working within and beyond their communities (ibid.). The resolution urges Member States and UN entities to create pathways for meaningful youth participation in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, mediation and decision-making, and to address the conditions that drive some young people towards violence, including exclusion, inequality and lack of opportunities (UN Secretary-General, 2024).

The YPS framework is structured around five complementary pillars: Participation, Protection, Prevention, Partnership, and Disengagement & Reintegration (UNFPA, 2018). These guide programming and policy by encouraging youth inclusion,

safeguarding young people in volatile settings, and investing in their leadership and peace capacities.

The Security Council has since adopted follow-up resolutions — 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020) — which further institutionalise the YPS Agenda. Resolution 2535 introduced regular reporting on implementation, asking the UN Secretary-General to provide a biennial assessment to the Council (Security Council Report, 2024).

The YPS Agenda is also aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Goals 16 (inclusive governance and justice) and 10 (reduced inequalities), offering a powerful tool for integrated, youth-inclusive peacebuilding that truly "leaves no one behind" (UNFPA et al., 2021).

0.3.   Positioning within the Broader Debate

THE STATE OF THE WPS AND YPS AGENDAS AMIDST CRISES

by Marie Lena Groenewald, Victoria Jimenez Baigorri, Carlotta Venza, EPLO

About EPLO

The European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) EPLO is the largest European network of civil society organisations, think tanks and networks committed to promoting peace and preventing violent conflict. Supported by a Secretariat in Brussels, EPLO brings together a broad diversity of experiences across peacebuilding, conflict prevention, mediation and adjacent fields. It serves as a platform for connecting experts and practitioners with one another, as well as with policymakers. From local to global levels, EPLO Member Organisations bring specialised knowledge across a wide range of thematic areas and a geographic reach to nearly all countries in the world. Founded in 2001 by 16 organisations, EPLO has grown to represent more than 50 members and has established itself as a trusted interlocutor within European and international policy spaces. The below segment represents EPLO's experience and expertise on the WPS and YPS agendas at EU and multilateral level.

WPS [5]

2025 marked the 25th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and therefore offered an important moment to reflect on past commitments and reimagine the future of the WPS agenda in a rapidly evolving global context. Against the backdrop of heightened geopolitical tensions, an increase in fragility, global rearmament, the erosion of democratic norms, shrinking civic space,

critical funding cuts and increasing attacks on women's rights and the rights of marginalised groups, the **need to reaffirm and strengthen the WPS agenda** has never been more urgent.

The EU has repeatedly affirmed its commitment to WPS, including through the 2018 Council Conclusions on WPS and the accompanying *EU Strategic Approach to WPS* and its WPS Action Plan, which covers the period 2020 to 2027. The EU then reinforced this support in its 2022 Council Conclusions on WPS. These documents frame the EU's policy on WPS, alongside the 2020 Gender Action Plan III (GAP III), which serves as the main vehicle for implementing and evaluating gender equality objectives in the EU's external action. Both the Action Plan on WPS and GAP III are due for renewal in 2027.

However, with the shift in global priorities toward deterrence and defence, gender equality and human security risk being sidelined. The **alarming global rollback on gender equality objectives** not only jeopardises the implementation of current commitments but also risks undermining core WPS principles.

Digital threats such as online gender-based violence and cyber-harassment targeting women activists and human rights defenders, especially in conflict-affected contexts, and **climate-related risks**, increased resource scarcity, displacement, and the intensified exposure and challenges faced by women and girls in fragile settings, further intensify the rollback.

In response to these threats, the **EU must reinforce and adapt its approach** to ensure a continued focus on gender equality in conflict-affected contexts, and to uphold WPS implementation as a cornerstone of its external action. At a time when multilateralism is being challenged, the EU's role in fostering a safer, more peaceful world has never been more central. A principled approach to WPS is not only a moral obligation but a prerequisite for lasting global peace and security.

As the EU reflects on its global role and prepares for the **next phase of its external action programming and renews its core gender equality policies**, it is important to stress that the EU's WPS agenda is a central political and normative framework for rethinking security through prevention, accountability, and participation, not a technical exercise.

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5   This overview draws on contents from the EPLO Statement 'Reaffirming and safeguarding the EU's approach to Women, Peace and Security' (September 2025) and the EPLO CSDN meeting report 'The EU's role in a shifting global order: Promoting peace through a strong Women, Peace and Security agenda' (October 2025).

The EU can take a variety of adaptation strategies to actively reaffirm its commitment to the agenda and safeguard WPS as a priority. These strategies include:

1. **Strengthening localisation and fostering partnerships** by prioritising locally-led, community-based partnerships and institutionalising consultations, engaging men and boys and promoting positive masculinities, and adhering to the prevention of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) and survivor-centred approaches.

2. **Breaking the institutional and policy siloes on WPS** by ensuring WPS is discussed across EU external action, maintaining ambitious EU WPS frameworks and gender equality targets beyond 2027, and supporting and drawing on Member States' diverse approaches.

3. **Increasing quality funding and improving modalities** by ensuring that increased investments in security do not undermine WPS implementation, prioritising direct, flexible, accessible, core and long-term funding mechanisms to women-led and inclusive peacebuilding actors, allocating specific funding through EU external action instruments, and encouraging Member States to fully finance and strengthen implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs).

4. **Implementing a flexible and inclusive agenda** by ensuring context-specificity, historical awareness and adaptability, recognising diverse needs, adapting implementation to emerging digital and climate threats and strengthening the prevention aspect of WPS.

Civil society also plays a crucial role in shaping the future of the WPS agenda, and continues to support International Organisations (IOs) and nation states in carrying out their commitments. Their advocacy and expertise is a cornerstone in connecting policymakers both on a national and international level with the local realities of the WPS agenda. In a context of global rearmament, the work of CSOs also helps reframing predominant security narratives by challenging the notion that greater armament equates to greater security and highlighting the value of the prevention pillar of the WPS agenda. CSOs can further promote inclusive participation to ensure women, youth, and local actors, especially from conflict-affected areas, are meaningfully included in peace and security processes. Through their programming, CSOs can foster solidarity and use creative, context-sensitive approaches to shift gender norms and expand women's visibility in public life. CSOs can also focus on strengthening local leadership themselves through collectively built, inclusive, cross-sector and cross-national WPS movements. Such movements can help overcome silos and competition. Consortium models help share administrative functions and allow CSOs to engage communities first which

in turn enables them to identify trusted local organisations and priorities, co-designing programmes with both emerging and established WROs. CSOs will also increasingly need to treat digital safety as a core issue for gender equality and peacebuilding and promote nonviolence online.

With several key policy documents up for renewal and the negotiations for the next EU budget - the 'MFF' - for the period 2028-2034 ongoing, current priorities for a successful implementation of the WPS agenda include ensuring the EU commits to ambitious targets for gender equality in its external action moving forward. The Commission had dropped all specific targets (for areas like gender equality, climate, and human development) in its proposal for a Global Europe instrument for external action in summer 2025. There is thus a lot at stake in the negotiations when it comes to how gender equality and women's rights will be funded as of 2028. The next GAP will also play an important role in shaping up spending targets for external action to contribute to gender equality and women's rights. Similarly, the renewed Action Plan for WPS will set out the tone for how serious and ambitious member states continue to work on WPS implementation. As these policies and regulations are being renewed or newly created, the EU and its member states need to continue their commitments through binding targets and ambitious objectives. With an increased focus on strategic partnerships, all EU external action, including e.g. Global Gateway initiatives need to be based on thorough gender-responsive analysis.

Moving into 2026, it will be essential for the EU to **champion a political, transformative WPS agenda rooted in prevention, accountability, and equality**. This requires integrating protection, participation, and rights across all dimensions of external action, ensuring that women's leadership is not an afterthought but a foundation of peacebuilding at local, national, and international levels.

YPS

The Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda has experienced significant evolution since its inception in 2015 with UNSC Resolution 2250. This resolution marked a watershed moment, recognising young people as essential partners in peace processes and calling for their meaningful participation across decision-making levels. Since then, further UNSC commitments, including Resolutions 2419 (2018), 2535 (2020), and more recently 2807 (2025), have reaffirmed and elaborated the agenda, pushing Member States to further mainstream youth roles in peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

Following these global commitments, the European Union has progressively institutionalised YPS through several key developments. The EU Council adopted important Council Conclusions, most notably on the role of young people in building a secure, cohesive and harmonious society in Europe (2018) and on youth in external action (2020). These political commitments by EU Member States laid the groundwork for more comprehensive action and demonstrated growing recognition of youth engagement in peace and security.

This momentum culminated in a critical milestone in 2022, designated as the European Year of Youth by President von der Leyen, when the EU developed the Youth Action Plan in EU external action for 2022-2027. This plan operationalises previous commitments through three concrete pillars: engaging youth voices in policy and decision-making, empowering young people through education and funding, and connecting young people for networking and exchange.

Building on this foundation, March 2025 saw High Representative/Vice-President Kaja Kallas host the first EU Youth Policy Dialogue on EU Foreign Policy in Brussels, where young people emphasised several priorities. These included the need for inclusive youth dialogues involving diverse backgrounds beyond those with international relations experience, stronger international cooperation on climate action, and dedicated platforms ensuring long-term youth engagement rather than token representation (e.g. through the establishment of Youth Practitioners Boards within EU Delegations especially in conflict-affected regions to build trust with local communities).

Alongside this initiative and to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the agenda, 2025 also saw the Second EU Youth, Peace and Security Conference, which built up from the 2018 EU YPS Conference and brought together young peacebuilders, activists, and experts from across the globe to develop a Team Europe Approach to YPS. This conference and the surrounding YPS week served, on one hand, to assess implementation and, on the other, to drive collaboration to move it forward.

The event culminated in the adoption of the Joint Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security that actors can now utilise to continue wider work on Youth, Peace and Security both in Europe and beyond. Within Europe, only Finland has, for the moment, a National Action Plan (NAP) on YPS, with the first being adopted in 2021 and the second in 2025. This plan sets an example of committed action to YPS, also by supporting peers via a Community of Practice on national action, that other Member States can follow.

Civil society is crucial to advancing this agenda both internationally and nationally. Italian civil society organisations, for instance, signed a manifesto on YPS in 2024, calling on the

government and laying the groundwork for the establishment of the first Italian National Action Plan. Civil society provides contextual knowledge and access to diverse youth voices and networks often absent from formal spaces. It connects young people with formal policy structures and monitors the agenda's implementation, revealing gaps between policy commitments and operational reality.

During the anniversary year, young peacebuilders and youth civil society organisations have contributed, in line with commitments in the Pact for the Future, to the consultations for the Second Independent Progress Study on YPS. The year 2025 served as a reflection year on achievements and challenges ahead. Youth aim to be recognised as equal partners in peace processes, not just beneficiaries, but their participation often becomes tokenistic. Even though important successes have taken place, persistent implementation challenges remain.

The YPS agenda provides an entry point to influence policy and governments, equipping young people with the tools to advance reform. Nevertheless, to achieve this objective, flexible and accessible funding is essential, particularly for grassroots youth-led organisations. Similarly, strong accountability mechanisms are needed to ensure that youth inputs are implemented. It is important that engagement is consistent and intersectional, considering gender, ethnicity and other identities that shape people's experiences of conflict and their contributions to peace.

The European Union can position itself to champion YPS globally and address these challenges, establishing meaningful youth participation mechanisms and partnering with young people. With this purpose, the YPS focal points in EU Delegations, as well as the different youth advisory structures already in place, such as the Youth Sounding Boards or the Youth Dialogue Platform, should be reinforced. Through its network of delegations and partnerships, the EU can in fact ensure youth perspectives shape peace processes through direct financial support for youth-led initiatives, intergenerational mentorship and capacity-building programmes, and active youth roles in policymaking at all levels.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONFLICT SENSITIVITY IN FRAGILE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS

by Search for Common Ground

About Search for Common Ground

Founded in 1982, Search for Common Ground (Search) is the world's largest dedicated peacebuilding organisation. We work to transform violent conflict into peace, building healthy, safe and just societies in the process. We work in the world's most challenging contexts and develop lasting solutions that are based on the needs of communities. Over the last 40 years, we have developed our understanding of what peace looks like, being able to quantify our impact and design more effective programming, working on the frontlines of today's most consequential conflicts. Active in 29 countries across Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the United States and thanks to more than 500 employees, 90% of whom are local to the countries where we work, we are building a future where collaboration in the face of conflict is the norm; where our differences stimulate social progress, rather than precipitate violence.

SEARCH AND CONFLICT SENSITIVITY

As an organisation focused on transforming conflict, Search has long prioritised conflict sensitivity in both our own implementation and in support of partners across sectors. We recognise it as a foundational condition for effective, relevant and sustainable interventions in fragile, unstable and constantly evolving contexts.

This prioritisation reflects Search's understanding that every external intervention interacts with conflict dynamics, whether intentionally or not, and that such interaction can either inadvertently cause harm or, if well thought through, increase an intervention's positive impact. This is as true for peacebuilding as it is for humanitarian, development, human rights, and other interventions.

FROM PRINCIPLES TO PRACTICE

Integrated responses to humanitarian, development, and peace needs

Since 2012, the volatile security context in the Sahel region has resulted in an unprecedented humanitarian crisis and intersected with longstanding socio-economic, environmental and governance challenges. In response to the intersecting needs, Search joined a four-year (2020-2024) humanitarian, development and peace "Triple Nexus" programme known as Resilience and Social Cohesion in the Sahel, supported by the European Union. As the peacebuilding partner of the consortium, one of Search's contributions was to support humanitarian and development partners with conflict analysis and conflict sensitive implementation.

This included conducting in-depth conflict analysis and more rapid and regular "conflict scans" to keep track of volatile dynamics in the intervention zones. We also developed technical support tools and provided accompaniment and guidance on understanding and integrating the logic of conflict sensitivity and on applying it in practice. Search proposed additional dedicated peacebuilding interventions where these were most useful. Analysis and recommendations were made available to external stakeholders when safe to do so, for example, via published reports.

This approach makes it possible to identify peace-promoting opportunities in project activities. For example, conflict analysis identified that the project's installation of water points was a potential area of tension between sedentary community members and mobile herders, especially as climate change increases weather unpredictability and resource scarcity. However, we also identified how these water points could be an opportunity for collaboration: using social cohesion activities and dialogue structures to improve the governance, access and management of water points, with a particular view to longer term resilience amid climate change impacts.

Over the four years of implementation, consortium partners gradually integrated conflict sensitivity more deeply in their organisational norms and practices, with ripple effects far beyond the programme itself.

Conflict-sensitive engagement in fragile and transition contexts

Funded by the Dutch government, the Just Future Alliance programme (2021-2025) was implemented in six fragile and conflict-affected contexts: Afghanistan, South Sudan, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali and Niger. The programme aimed to promote inclusive decision-making on sensitive issues in often-unstable and politically tense environments. Given this context, with the associated risks of inadvertently reinforcing existing power imbalances or tensions, conflict sensitivity was recognised from the outset as essential for both safety and effectiveness. This involved building a shared understanding of conflict sensitivity from the beginning and across the full alliance comprising several international organisations and many national partners. Search supported the integration of conflict sensitivity through consortium-wide discussions and trainings, the use of conflict sensitivity checklists, and the establishment of monitoring mechanisms that went beyond initial baseline analyses.

This was particularly important in several countries which saw dramatic political shifts over the course of the programme. With the positioning and perceptions of authorities, target groups, community leaders, and civil society actors shifting rapidly, alliance members were encouraged to collectively assess potential impacts on local dynamics at least once a year. This enabled adaptation as contexts evolved. Likewise, partners relied on regular engagement with communities and beneficiaries to gather feedback on ongoing activities. This approach helped the partners adjust intervention strategies in response to changing political conditions. It enabled programmes to identify policy openings, even under restrictive or militarised regimes, and to avoid polarising approaches in favour of consensual entry points.

Search emphasises conflict sensitivity as a mindset. In Niger, for example, the Just Future alliance continued conducting extensive capacity building workshops at the local level into the final year of the programme. The goal was clear: to move beyond a technical, tool-centred approach and instead foster a real culture of conflict sensitivity, rooted in deep contextual understanding and shared awareness of the potential effects of every action. These sessions helped participants strengthen their contextual analysis skills, critically reflect on their interventions' impact, and adopt more responsible behaviours aligned with on-the-ground realities.

In the end, this proved to be one of the programme's most notable successes: even in contexts where tool usage wasn't particularly intensive, teams that had been trained and sensitised still understood the importance of taking necessary precautions to avoid negatively impacting local tensions.

Similarly, programme implementation in Mali highlighted the importance of leadership buy-in. Within our partner organisations we saw that where leadership was personally committed, conflict sensitivity was integrated more coherently and had greater impact. In contrast, in organisations where the topic was neglected by senior staff, and where trained personnel lacked real decision-making power, it remained largely theoretical.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Conflict sensitivity must be treated as a mindset, not a checklist.** Taking cross-cutting themes into consideration is often perceived as a box-ticking exercise. Although tools such as checklists, monitoring guides, and early warning systems are useful, their effectiveness depends on teams internalising conflict sensitivity as a way of thinking and acting. This is especially true given the high staff turnover which is common in fragile contexts.

- **Baseline analyses are not enough.** In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, ongoing monitoring and adaptation are essential given rapid political and social change.

- **Local knowledge is indispensable.** Global frameworks must be adapted to local political sensitivities, cultural norms, power relations and community perceptions.

- **Empowered local organisations are the key to sustainability.** Encouraging partners to act as co-designers rather than passive implementers supports meaningful revisions and embeds conflict-sensitive practices beyond the lifecycle of a single project.

- **Leadership buy-in is a prerequisite for reflection and adaptation.** Where organisational leadership is personally committed, conflict sensitivity is integrated more coherently and has greater impact.

INCLUSIVE PEACE PROCESSES AND MEDIATION

SEARCH AND MEDIATION

From our first days supporting backchannel dialogue and confidence- and collaboration-building measures during the height of the Cold War, Search has invested in inclusive dialogue and mediation as critical tools in resolving protracted conflicts. Our mediation efforts are inclusive by design, with a strong gender and youth lens, and our work stems from the conviction, driven by experience, that durable, people-centred peace requires the meaningful inclusion of diverse actors and the anchoring of mediation in local legitimacy. In contexts such as Sudan, Israel-Palestine, Syria and Yemen, Search has helped position civil society leaders, particularly women and young people, as key contributors to peace negotiations through platforms that connect local actors with national and international political and peace processes.

FROM PRINCIPLES TO PRACTICE

Building peace from the inside: supporting insider mediation

In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, formal institutions and external actors may lack legitimacy or access to resolve local disputes. To bridge these gaps, Search has supported Insider Mediators (IMs), locally legitimate actors including religious authorities, traditional leaders, women and youth, who are embedded within their communities. Through community dialogues, mediation is led by the communities themselves with Search playing a facilitative and capacity-building role. The embedded nature of IMs enables them to support Early Warning and Early Response mechanisms, drawing on their cultural fluency and community trust.

Across more than 20 fragile and conflict-affected contexts, IMs supported by Search have contributed to the peaceful resolution of local disputes and strengthened social cohesion and community resilience. In Niger, youth and women IMs contributed to a five-fold increase in rates of local conflict resolution compared to previous institutionally-led efforts. In Lebanon, IMs directly reduced tensions in overcrowded shelters during a period of active displacement and crisis by equipping local volunteers with tools such as Psychological First Aid and nonviolent communication.

In Yemen, where over 43% of the local conflicts are related to water scarcity, competition over access to water is a main driver of conflict. In one particular city, tensions over access to one well had been ongoing for 15 years when armed violence broke out between two neighbouring villages. As part of a three-year

project called Promoting Women's Inclusion in Peacebuilding in Yemen, Search trained 556 community representatives on nonviolent conflict transformation and facilitated participatory dialogue sessions. As a result, the two villages, led by women peacebuilders, eventually agreed to stop the violence, established a system for sharing the well and sourced funds to construct a second well. Today, the two villages not only have equal access to water but also have the skills and experience to find collaborative solutions to common problems.

Broadening the tent: working with women to shape peace processes

When women are meaningfully included, peace agreements are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years, showing a direct link between gender inclusion and sustainable peace. Our work systematically elevates women as mediators and peace actors, not merely participants. This includes training women as IMs, supporting women-led advocacy platforms and facilitating access to political spaces.

Over the years, Search has provided flexible funding and technical assistance to women-led organisations, including through a Rapid Response Fund (RRF) for local Women, Peace and Security actors in over 70 countries. Utilising this RRF, Search facilitated the participation of a diverse delegation of Sudanese women in high-level ceasefire negotiations in Geneva in 2024. Through thorough preparation of the delegation and carefully designed engagement with the mediation team, in parallel to the formal negotiations, the delegates presented gender-responsive recommendations to feed directly into the formal process. The delegation successfully elevated conflict-related sexual violence as a priority issue for the talks and provided grounded insights that informed the reopening of a critical border crossing for aid delivery.

Another success story of the RRF comes from Guatemala, where discrimination and exclusion of Indigenous women in electoral and political spaces are rife. During Guatemala's crucial 2023 general elections, a women-led forum for political dialogue quickly leveraged funding from the RRF to enhance the political participation and leadership of Indigenous women. The participation was so successful that following their accreditation by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal to observe and accompany the general elections in both the first and second rounds in 2023 and 2024, they were also invited to observe the Judicial elections in 2024/2025.

Experiences across contexts showed that women's participation is most effective when it is persistent, politically-focused and transparent. Using a step-by-step approach with careful consideration of all parties' concerns, fears and boundaries helped increase women's involvement in Syria's constitutional

process, for example. A key takeaway from Afghan negotiations, on the other hand, was the need to build trust with broad sections of society so that concerns raised were shared by the population at large. Likewise, the peacebuilders found that for all constituencies to feel represented it was important to establish feedback loops between women at the negotiating table and communities.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Local legitimacy is essential.** Mediation is most effective when led by trusted actors embedded within communities and connected to broader peace infrastructures.

- **Flexibility is key to sustainable and inclusive peacebuilding.** Rapid, adaptable funding and approaches allow diverse peace actors to respond to political openings and moments of risk in volatile contexts.

- **Early and sustained investment matters.** Women's effectiveness in mediation depends on preparation, capacity building and long-term engagement rather than ad hoc inclusion.

- **Meaningful inclusion requires moving beyond tokenism**; moving from participation (being present), to inclusion (being heard) and influencing outcomes (having recommendations institutionalised in agreements).

- **Women's participation in high-level talks is most effective when it is politically-focused and transparent.** This includes aligning input with political limitations and ensuring involvement of and feedback to local communities.

Mirko Cecchi/WeWorld

0.4.   Methodology

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This publication seeks to contribute to the broader discussion on Peace within fragile and conflict-affected settings, while also considering how the concept evolves in more stable contexts where the challenges to Peace take on a different character. Its objectives are to:

- **Advance understanding of Peace in the WPS and YPS agendas**, demonstrating how inclusive, community-based, and context-sensitive interventions can strengthen social cohesion and resilience.

- **Illustrate operational approaches to the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus**, highlighting the role of gender-transformative and intergenerational strategies in fostering coexistence, equity, and durable peace.

- **Strengthen evidence and analytical knowledge**, capturing how peacebuilding principles are embedded across programmes and interventions in complex contexts.

- **Recognise women, youth, and children as central agents of change**, capable of reshaping social relations and rebuilding trust in divided communities.

- **Promote a reflective, evidence-based understanding of conflict sensitivity and social cohesion**, acknowledging power dynamics and potential risks associated with context-insensitive interventions.

These objectives guided the research design and analytical approach, ensuring that the study generates insights relevant to practitioners, policymakers, and the broader humanitarian–development–peace community.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND APPROACH

This study addresses the main question: *"How is the 'P' of the HDP Nexus operationalised, with attention to Conflict Sensitivity, Governance, WPS, and YPS?"*

A **qualitative, comparative approach** was adopted, oriented towards **learning from practice**. Data were triangulated across **direct field experiences, project/programme evaluations** (including participant perspectives), and **internal and external interviews**, capturing both operational realities and reflective insights on successes, challenges, and unintended effects.

> ⓘ **The Role of the Research Committee**
>
> A Research Committee with expertise in peacebuilding/conflict sensitivity, programme implementation, research/data analysis, and partnership engagement oversaw tool design, sampling, analysis, and final validation.

SOURCES AND TOOLS

- **Project Factsheet Template/Capitalisation Grid:** Developed from the literature and adapted to operational needs, this tool enabled structured consolidation of lessons learned for each project. It included **comparable tags** (Conflict Sensitivity, Social Cohesion, Peacebuilding, Gender, Youth/Children, Intergenerational, Do No Harm) and a **traffic-light system** to indicate achievements and challenges.

- **Internal Interview Guide:** Structured interviews with staff explored definitions of peace, Nexus-related work, actors/partners, conflict drivers, risks of disengagement, WPS/YPS integration, scaling, and organisational value-add.

- **External Interview Guide:** Interviews with partners and local actors investigated tensions, power dynamics, opportunities for youth and women, trust dynamics, risks, and perceptions of interventions, with informed consent and voluntary participation.

SUMMARY OF TOOLS

TOOL	PURPOSE	EXPECTED OUTPUT
Project Factsheet Template	Extract outcomes, risks, Nexus dynamics, and comparable tags per project	Multi-country comparative matrix
Internal Interview Guide	Capture staff insights and strategic reflection	Thematic transcripts + insights on Nexus/WPS/YPS/CS
External Interview Guide	Gather perspectives from partners, authorities, CSOs, youth, and women	Evidence on trust, cohesion, and unintended risks

SAMPLING AND CONTEXTS

The study covered **Benin, Lebanon, Swahili Coast (Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique), Mozambique, Ukraine, and Italy**, selected to represent diverse **crisis types, Nexus stages, and multi-sectoral portfolios** (humanitarian–development–cohesion/peace). In each context, internal and external interviews were conducted, and project factsheets completed using the grid, ensuring a **comprehensive view of operational practices, challenges, and local perceptions**.

ANALYTICAL PROCESS

- **PHASE 1 – Structuring:** Development and internal testing of the grid, calibration of tags/criteria, and preparation of interview guides covering Conflict Sensitivity, Governance, and WPS/YPS.

- **PHASE 2 – Data Collection:** Administration of semi-structured interviews (remote/in-person), completion of project factsheets, and collection of MEAL materials and evaluations.

- **PHASE 3 – Thematic Coding:** Inductive-deductive analysis using a priori codes (Conflict Sensitivity, WPS, YPS, governance, actors/partnerships, Do No Harm risks, early warning/adaptive management) and emergent codes (e.g., retention of youth/women facilitators, multi-actor platforms).

- **PHASE 4 – Triangulation and Validation:** Comparison of internal/external interviews and project factsheets to verify consistency, highlight divergences, and synthesise cross-country patterns.

- **PHASE 5 – Feedback/Learning:** Consolidation of evidence into "operational pathways" for Peace within the Nexus, and development of recommendations to inform practice and policy. This phase also strengthens analytical insights for reflective learning on conflict sensitivity, social cohesion, and peacebuilding.

LIMITATIONS AND MITIGATIONS

Self-Analysis Bias: Mitigated through external interviews and multi-source triangulation, including questions on tensions generated and lessons learned.

Generalisability: Given the heterogeneous cases, results are transferable as **operational principles** rather than statistically representative. The comparative grid and tags support replicability and cross-learning.

Political Sensitivity: Terminology such as "peacebuilding" was adapted in some contexts (cohesion/inclusion/access) to preserve operational space and protect participants.

ETHICS, CONSENT, AND SAFEGUARDS

External interviews were conducted with **informed consent, voluntary participation, and the option for anonymity and withdrawal**. Data were used solely for learning and improvement purposes.

Mirko Cecchi/WeWorld

CHAPTER 1.

WeWorld's Understanding and Operationalisation of Peace

1.1. Why Peace Emerges as an Operational Imperative for WeWorld

WeWorld is a multi-sectoral international organisation working across humanitarian response, development cooperation, and social cohesion and peacebuilding in more than 20 countries, including contexts marked by fragility, displacement, and protracted crises. In many of these settings, women, children, and young people make up the clear majority of the population — a demographic reality that sharply contrasts with high-income countries, where ageing populations predominate. This demographic structure is not merely a backdrop: it shapes both the nature of crises and the pathways to resilience. The communities we work with experience the daily effects of conflict drivers such as unequal access to rights and services, harmful gender norms, exclusion from decision-making, weak governance, and tensions over scarce resources.

In the current global context, the relevance of peacebuilding is increasing rather than diminishing. Rising geopolitical tensions, shrinking civic space, repression of social movements, and growing public fatigue with international aid are reshaping the environments in which humanitarian and development actors operate. At the same time, many societies are experiencing deeper social fragmentation and individualisation, weakening the collective bonds that allow communities to manage disputes constructively. In this context, disengagement by institutions, donors, or communities themselves poses a significant risk. Without sustained investment in trust, participation, and inclusive governance, existing inequalities and grievances are more likely to harden into long-term instability.

For WeWorld, peace is therefore not a standalone sector or thematic add-on but a strategic orientation that informs all programming. Conflict drivers shape both humanitarian needs and development barriers, meaning that peace-responsive approaches are essential to reducing harm, strengthening trust, and enabling the non-violent management of tensions. This orientation explicitly embeds the principles of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agendas across sectors, reflecting the organisation's mandate to shift power towards those most affected by inequality.

Communities across WeWorld's operational contexts face overlapping pressures, including protracted crises, institutional fragility, social fragmentation, and entrenched inequalities. These dynamics manifest differently in low- and middle-income countries, in emergency settings, and increasingly in marginalised communities within high-income countries, including Italy and across the European Union. Gender inequality, youth ex-clusion, governance failures, competition over limited resources, and tensions linked to displacement form the backdrop against which every intervention unfolds.

Because WeWorld's core constituencies are women, children, and young people, we are continuously exposed to how conflict dynamics shape everyday life. Access to services, safety, mobility, participation, and dignity are all influenced by these dynamics. Across different contexts, tensions linked to identity, resources, gender norms, and mistrust of institutions frequently spill into the spaces where education, protection, livelihoods, and humanitarian assistance are delivered. These tensions can heighten risks, undermine access, and fragment communities. At the same time, when they are addressed thoughtfully and inclusively, they reveal opportunities for cooperation, agency, and social cohesion.

> " In many of these settings, women, children, and young people make up the clear majority of the population — a demographic reality that sharply contrasts with high-income countries, where ageing populations predominate. This demographic structure is not merely a backdrop: it shapes both the nature of crises and the pathways to resilience.

1.2.   How We Understand Peace

WeWorld understands peace not simply as the absence of violent conflict, but as the practical condition that enables communities to live with dignity, access their rights and services, navigate tensions without resorting to violence, and to reach their full potential. Peace is socially grounded: it relies on positive relationships, fair and accountable institutions, and inclusive participation, which together create conditions for stability, resilience, and human flourishing.

Achieving and sustaining peace requires deliberate action. Peacebuilding is the process and set of interventions aimed at strengthening relationships, governance, and inclusion to produce peaceful outcomes. It encompasses the design and adaptation of programmes, policies, and partnerships to reduce harm, reinforce social cohesion, and address structural inequalities.

Certain concepts are essential preconditions for peace. Social cohesion refers to the quality of relationships within and between communities, enabling constructive engagement, collective action, and collaborative problem-solving. Conflict sensitivity ensures programmes are designed and delivered in ways that avoid exacerbating tensions and, wherever possible, contribute to building trust, collaboration, and stronger social cohesion. **Together, these elements form the foundation of our understanding of peace, which can be described along five interrelated dimensions:**

> " Achieving and sustaining peace requires deliberate action. Peacebuilding is the process and set of interventions aimed at strengthening relationships, governance, and inclusion to produce peaceful outcomes. It encompasses the design and adaptation of programmes, policies, and partnerships to reduce harm, reinforce social cohesion, and address structural inequalities.

1. PEACE IN DAILY LIFE

Peace is deeply people-centred and visible in everyday interactions and systems. It is evident when people can move safely through their neighbourhoods, when humanitarian assistance is delivered fairly, when displaced and host communities can coexist and access services equitably, and when women and young people can participate meaningfully in decision-making. Chronic socio-economic pressures, political uncertainty, and displacement-related tensions erode trust and heighten perceptions of injustice, making peace inseparable from the integrity and inclusiveness of social systems. Where rights and services are perceived as fair, transparent, and accessible, communities are better able to coexist with dignity, even amid crises. **This dimension highlights the practical, lived experience of peace and underscores the importance of embedding fairness, safety, and accessibility in daily life.**

2. PEACE AS THE QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS

Peace is fundamentally relational. Social cohesion depends on the quality of relationships:

- **Between host and displaced communities**, as demonstrated by ongoing projects in Lebanon;

- **Between young people and authorities or security actors**, as evidenced by the regional project in Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique (the Swahili Coast), as well as in Italy;

- **Between women and local governance structures**, as shown by experiences in Ukraine, along the Swahili Coast, and in Italy;

- **Between informal community leaders and formal institutions**, as reflected in work in Benin and in Italy;

- **Between humanitarian actors and service users**, as highlighted by our survey in Ukraine and our experience in Mozambique.

When these relationships are characterised by mistrust, exclusion, or inequality, conflict drivers intensify. **When they are grounded in respect, dialogue, and transparency, communities can manage tensions constructively.** This relational perspective underpins WeWorld's investment in dialogue mechanisms, intergroup platforms, inclusive participation spaces, community mediation, and trust-building practices. These interventions are central to the organisation's peacebuilding approach, not optional enhancements, and they strengthen social cohesion as a foundation for all other dimensions of peace.

3. PEACE AS GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIVENESS

Peace also depends on the presence of fair, accountable, and responsive institutions. **Weak governance, limited accountability, inequitable service provision, and opaque communication are primary sources of tension and mistrust.** Strengthening governance, supporting transparent decision-making, and creating inclusive interfaces between communities and institutions are therefore essential to sustainable peace.

This dimension encompasses both formal and informal governance structures, highlighting the importance of collaboration between citizens, community leaders, and institutional actors to ensure decisions and services are delivered equitably.

4. PEACE AS STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION

Peace requires systemic change. Persistent and politically sensitive conflict drivers—including entrenched gendered power disparities, youth exclusion, unresponsive institutions, and inequitable access to services—cannot be addressed solely through programmes targeting immediate needs. They demand shifts in social norms, power relations, and institutional behaviour. **Women's and youth-led initiatives, intergenerational dialogues, and gender-transformative methodologies act as strategic levers, enabling more inclusive governance and equitable social structures.** These approaches are not merely participatory tools but pathways to lasting structural transformation, reinforcing other dimensions of peace over the long term.

5. PEACE AS A FOUNDATION FOR RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Finally, peace underpins the effectiveness of humanitarian and development interventions. Assistance delivered amid mistrust can exacerbate tensions; development initiatives that ignore grievances risk reinforcing inequalities. Protection efforts cannot succeed where harmful norms or unresponsive institutions persist. When communities maintain functioning relationships with institutions, have transparent and inclusive participation mechanisms, and strengthened capacities for mediation and dialogue, they are better equipped to manage shocks, negotiate change, and achieve long-term stability. **Peace is integrated across sectors, not treated as an optional add-on — it is the foundation for resilience, sustainability, and the success of humanitarian, development, and protection work.**

1.3. How We Operationalise Peace

WeWorld translates its vision of peace into practice through five interlocking approaches that embed peacebuilding, social cohesion, and conflict sensitivity across humanitarian, development, and protection work. These pillars operationalise the same principles that define our understanding of peace, ensuring programmes strengthen relationships, governance, and inclusion while addressing structural inequalities.

1. PEACE IN DAILY LIFE: DELIVERING ASSISTANCE THAT UPHOLDS DIGNITY

Operationalising peace begins with ensuring communities experience fairness, safety, and accessibility in their daily interactions with services and institutions.

- **Needs-based and inclusive delivery:** Humanitarian assistance, education, and services are accessible to all, including displaced and marginalised groups.

- **Community feedback:** Channels monitor grievances, inform adaptations, and ensure assistance meets real needs.

- **Equitable participation:** Women, youth, and vulnerable groups have meaningful opportunities to influence decision-making.

This pillar mirrors the lived, practical experience of peace, emphasising dignity, fairness, and safety in every programme interaction.

2. PEACE AS THE QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS: CONFLICT SENSITIVITY IN PRACTICE

Operationalising relational peace requires continuous attention to social dynamics.

- **Localised and evolving analysis:** Stakeholder and conflict analyses are conducted regularly, incorporating perspectives from women, youth, and other groups.

- **Do-no-harm delivery:** Programme activities, targeting, and communication are designed to avoid exacerbating tensions. Community feedback channels function as early-warning mechanisms.

- **Adaptation and learning:** Changes in sequencing, facilitation, or activities are documented, supporting transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement.

- Conflict sensitivity enables programmes to operationalise peacebuilding even where "peace" language is politically sensitive, framing work around social cohesion, community wellbeing, and inclusive service access.

3. PEACE AS GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIVENESS: LOCAL LEADERSHIP AS THE ARCHITECTURE OF PEACE

Sustainable peace emerges from strengthened local governance and community leadership.

- **Co-analysis and co-design:** Local actors help define objectives, risks, and monitoring frameworks, moving beyond participation to genuine influence.

- **Capacity strengthening:** Civil society and local institutions are supported in monitoring, safeguarding, quality assurance, finance, and proposal design, ensuring initiatives endure beyond single project cycles.

- **Sub-grants with accompaniment:** Youth- and women-led groups receive funding and mentoring to implement locally relevant initiatives addressing tensions through dialogue, mediation, GBV awareness, and arts-based approaches.

This approach respects context, expands reach, and strengthens local agency, while WeWorld provides a stabilising framework that supports locally led initiatives.

4. PEACE AS STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION: CONVENING PLATFORMS WHERE PEACE TAKES SHAPE

Systemic change is reinforced by structured spaces bringing together actors who do not normally interact.

- **Shared diagnosis:** Joint analysis aligns priorities, messaging, and programming timelines.

- **Dialogue builds trust:** Youth-authority and intergroup dialogues establish routines for communication, incident management, and grievance reporting.

- **Coordination as habit:** Roundtables evolve into standing mechanisms for conflict-sensitivity support, planning, and mediation.

- **Gender-transformative and intergenerational justice:** Peace platforms intentionally address unequal power relations across gender and age groups, ensuring that women, men, youth, and diverse identities meaningfully shape analysis, decisions, and mediation processes.

WeWorld's cross-sectoral presence and credibility enable it to convene as a neutral broker, facilitating dialogue, collaboration, and trust-building across diverse stakeholders.

5. PEACE AS A FOUNDATION FOR RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY: MAKING THE NEXUS REAL

Peace underpins the effectiveness of humanitarian and development work, ensuring interventions reinforce rather than destabilise communities.

- **Humanitarian → Peace:** Fairer targeting, protection integration, and inclusive communication reduce grievances and improve safety.

- **Development → Peace:** Governance improvements, service delivery, education, and livelihoods address structural conflict drivers.

- **Peacebuilding → Humanitarian & Development:** Dialogue, mediation, and trust-building enhance accountability, early warning, and programme effectiveness.

By embedding these five pillars, WeWorld operationalises peace as a stabilising force, ensuring assistance supports long-term community resilience, inclusion, and constructive change.

OUR CONFLICT SENSITIVITY OPERATIONAL TOOLKIT

In 2022, **WeWorld**, in collaboration with the **Peaceful Change Initiative (PCI)**, produced a Conflict Sensitivity Toolkit funded by the **Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS)**. The toolkit offers practical methods, tools and case studies to help staff integrate conflict sensitivity across the entire project cycle, from design and implementation to monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL). Initially developed in Libya, it is now being rolled out globally across the organisation.

The resource reflects WeWorld's commitment to embedding conflict sensitivity as a core organisational culture rather than treating it as a set of standalone tools. Using an action-research approach and expert support, the toolkit promotes shared learning and open knowledge, aiming to strengthen programmes that support constructive conflict resolution and safeguard the dignity and safety of affected populations.

Designed for all organisational levels and applicable to any organisation working in crisis contexts, the toolkit can be used in full or in selected modules depending on need. It provides hands-on guidance to ensure decisions and actions are informed by conflict-sensitive analysis throughout all stages of programming.

The toolkit is structured into five modules:
1. **Conflict sensitivity strategy design and review**
2. **Conflict-sensitive programme identification and design**
3. **Conflict sensitivity for support functions**
4. **Conflict-sensitive implementation**
5. **Monitoring and evaluating conflict sensitivity**

Overall, the toolkit aims to help organisations embed conflict sensitivity across strategic, operational and functional processes. It also supports the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus by encouraging actors to identify opportunities to positively influence conflict dynamics and foster more peaceful societies.

1.4. How We Integrate the WPS and YPS Agendas into Programmes

Peace depends on the quality of relationships that enable communities to function safely, fairly, and inclusively. The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agendas are central to shaping those relationships. Women and young people are not only aid recipients; they actively contribute to analysis, programme design, monitoring, and decision-making, ensuring interventions address the underlying drivers of tension.

For WeWorld, peace is the quality of relationships, governance, and systems that allow communities to function safely, fairly, and inclusively. Achieving this requires more than the delivery of services; it demands that those most affected by conflict dynamics—women and young people—are central to analysis, programme design, decision-making, and monitoring. This understanding is drawn from programme evaluations, interviews with staff, and direct field experience across multiple countries and operational contexts.

The conflict drivers that most consistently undermine peace—gender-based violence, youth exclusion, institutional mistrust, and inequitable access to resources and services— cannot be effectively addressed unless women and young people have genuine influence over how problems are understood, how solutions are negotiated, and how programmes are implemented.

> " Women and young people are not only aid recipients; they actively contribute to analysis, programme design, monitoring, and decision-making, ensuring interventions address the underlying drivers of tension.

HOW WE OPERATIONALISE THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA

WeWorld's experience shows that peace outcomes improve when women move from mere presence in decision-making spaces to having real influence over decisions, priorities, and local governance processes. Structural gender inequalities shape exposure to violence, access to resources, and the ability to participate meaningfully in community problem-solving. WeWorld operationalises the WPS agenda through:

- **Women-led conflict analysis:** Women identify local tensions, risks, and priorities, informing programme targeting, facilitation, and adaptation.

- **Safe spaces and referral pathways:** Women engage meaningfully in protected environments, with mechanisms in place to reduce risks, including exposure to gender-based violence.

- **Leadership tracks and mediation roles:** Women take on facilitation, negotiation, and decision-making roles within community and institutional forums, building influence and trust.

- **Norm-change initiatives:** Women-led efforts challenge social practices and expectations that perpetuate exclusion, inequality, and violence.

- **Capacity strengthening for women's organisations:** Women's groups receive support to enhance organisational systems, governance, advocacy, and monitoring, ensuring sustainable influence and participation.

Through these measures, women reshape the agendas of discussions, influence decisions, and hold institutions accountable. Their leadership strengthens social cohesion, enhances institutional responsiveness, and fosters structural transformation that addresses the root causes of inequality and conflict.

GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES AS A FOUNDATION FOR PEACE AND THE HDP NEXUS

For WeWorld, gender equality is not only a protection or inclusion objective, but a fully-fledged peacebuilding strategy and a societal transformation pathway. **Gender-transformative approaches aim to challenge and reshape unequal power relations, discriminatory norms, and structural barriers that limit the agency, safety, and participation of women, girls, boys, and men. Because gender norms shape access to resources, decision-making, mobility, and exposure to violence, they are deeply intertwined with the drivers of conflict and social fragmentation.**

This approach is inherently aligned with the WPS agenda, which recognises that sustainable peace depends on women's meaningful participation, protection, and leadership in conflict prevention, response, and recovery. Gender-transformative programming moves beyond participation alone: it supports shifts in social expectations, roles, and institutional practices so that equality becomes embedded in how societies function.

FIGURE 1. **Gender Equality Continuum**
Source: WeWorld Elaboration on UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women (2020)

Gender Inequity				Gender Equity
GENDER UNEQUAL: perpetuate gender inequalities	**GENDER BLIND:** ignores gender norms discrimination and inequalities	**GENDER AWARE:** acknowledges but does not address gender inequalities	**GENDER RESPONSIVE:** acknowledges and considers women's and men's specific needs	**GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE:** addresses the causes of gender-based inequalities and works to transform harmful gender roles, norms and power relations
Exploit		**Accomodate**		**Transform**

Why Gender-Transformative Approaches Matter for Peace

Across contexts where WeWorld works, rigid gender roles often:
- restrict women's participation in decision-making and public life
- expose women and girls to gender-based violence and economic exclusion
- pressure men and boys into harmful models of masculinity linked to violence or risk-taking
- reinforce unequal access to services, resources, and opportunities

These dynamics fuel grievances, weaken trust, and limit communities' capacity to manage tensions constructively. Addressing them is therefore central to reducing conflict drivers and strengthening social cohesion.

Gender-transformative work contributes to peace by:
- expanding inclusive participation and leadership
- promoting equitable access to services and livelihoods
- supporting non-violent models of masculinity and positive social norms
- strengthening equitable and accountable governance
- fostering relationships based on respect, dignity, and shared responsibility

Through these shifts, communities are better equipped to negotiate change, manage tensions, and build inclusive institutions.

Gender Transformation Across Humanitarian, Development, and Peace Contexts

Gender-transformative approaches are essential across the HDP Nexus because gender norms shape vulnerability, resilience, and recovery in all phases of crisis.

In humanitarian settings, gender-transformative action:
- ensures equitable access to life-saving assistance
- reduces risks of violence and exploitation
- supports women's and youth leadership in community response and recovery
- promotes inclusive communication and accountability mechanisms

In development contexts, it:
- strengthens women's economic empowerment and access to services
- promotes shared decision-making in households and communities
- supports inclusive governance and civic participation
- challenges structural inequalities that perpetuate exclusion

In peacebuilding, it:
- reshapes power relations and participation in governance
- supports women and youth as mediators, leaders, and change agents
- fosters social norms that enable cooperation and non-violent conflict resolution

By addressing the root causes of inequality across sectors and timelines, gender-transformative programming helps connect short-term assistance, long-term development, and peacebuilding into a coherent pathway of change.

Renewing Societies Through Equal Gender Roles

Gender-transformative approaches are ultimately about renewing the social contract. When women and men, girls and boys share power, responsibilities, and opportunities more equitably, societies become more inclusive, resilient, and capable of managing change without violence.

For WeWorld, integrating gender-transformative approaches across programmes strengthens the effectiveness, sustainability, and peace impact of humanitarian and development work. It ensures that interventions do not only respond to immediate needs, but contribute to long-term social transformation aligned with the WPS agenda and the HDP Nexus.

HOW WE OPERATIONALISE THE YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA

Young people experience specific pressures that heighten conflict risks, including limited opportunities for participation, exclusion from decision-making, unemployment, strained relationships with authorities, and exposure to polarising narratives or illicit pathways. Treating youth merely as beneficiaries leaves these drivers unchallenged. When youth are positioned as analysts, conveners, mediators, and decision-makers, they become active agents in shaping peace.

WeWorld operationalises the YPS agenda through:

- **Youth-led conflict analysis:** Young people identify tensions, risks, and opportunities, informing targeting, facilitation, and programme adaptation.

- **Community Peace Activists:** Local youth mediate disputes, convene intergenerational dialogue, and act as bridges with authorities, building legitimacy and trust.

- **Mentored small grants:** Youth-led organisations receive targeted funding and guidance to design, implement, and sustain initiatives addressing local tensions, fostering cohesion, and enabling constructive participation.

- **Participation in governance and planning:** Young people contribute to decision-making, monitoring, and institutional engagement, reinforcing accountability and responsiveness.

- **Capacity development:** Strengthening organisational and operational skills to sustain youth-led initiatives beyond individual projects.

These strategies transform youth from potential sources of tension into active contributors to social cohesion, institutional accountability, and long-term structural change. They enable communities to manage conflict constructively, strengthen intergenerational relationships, and embed inclusive practices in local governance.
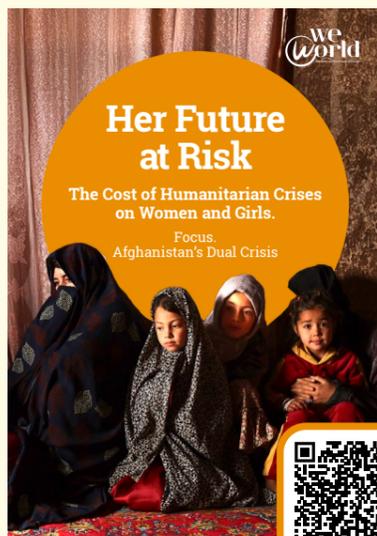
Strengthening the Women, Peace and Security Agenda Through Evidence and Gender-Transformative Practice

This study forms part of a broader effort to reflect on and consolidate years of WeWorld's field experience, where gender integration has always been a central pillar. In recent years, these reflections—firmly rooted in empirical practice—have taken shape in a series of studies that directly connect to the core priorities of the WPS agenda.

The first of these, now developed into an ongoing series, is *Her Future at Risk*. **It explores the impact of conflicts and humanitarian crises on women and girls, highlighting not only the double victimisation they often face, but also the resilience, leadership, and community cohesion they actively generate.** By documenting both vulnerability and agency, the study contributes to WPS objectives on protection and meaningful participation. **The initial editions focused on Afghanistan and Ukraine, and WeWorld plans to expand the series to other countries, demonstrating that gender-transformative approaches are both possible and necessary even in crisis settings.**

Another key capitalisation effort is the *Claiming Space Atlas*, **which examines how women and girls around the world are asserting their rights, carving out their own spaces, and shaping their futures.** This work directly supports the WPS agenda by shedding light on the conditions and support systems that enable women's leadership, civic engagement, and contributions to peacebuilding.

Claiming Space
Atlas on Women's and Girls' Rights
With people, from the margins to the centre

Her Future at Risk
The Cost of Humanitarian Crises on Women and Girls.
Focus. Afghanistan's Dual Crisis

Her Future at Risk
The Cost of Humanitarian Crises on Women and Girls.
Focus. Gender-Transformative WASH Programming in Wartime Ukraine
With people, from the margins to the centre

Thirty years after the 1995 Beijing Conference, inequalities, violence, and cultural barriers persist. Yet the Atlas also presents concrete, practical solutions—programmes, interventions, and approaches that are transforming lives, strengthening communities, and reinforcing women's roles in social cohesion and peace processes. **Drawing on data, maps, stories, and first-hand testimonies from women, girls, and WeWorld staff, the Atlas offers a grounded picture of the challenges encountered and the strategies that truly work to advance equity and rights, in line with WPS commitments to protection, participation, and recovery.** *Claiming Space* illustrates how women's action is reshaping communities and societies—driving real, lasting change that resonates strongly with the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

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The "P" in Practice. Field evidence on operationalising conflict sensitivity, WPS and YPS across the HDP Nexus.

Chapter 1. WeWorld's Understanding and Operationalisation of Peace

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CHILD AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION AS A CORE DRIVER OF PEACE, RESILIENCE, AND INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE

Children and young people are not only future leaders—they are active agents of change today. Their meaningful participation strengthens community resilience, social cohesion, and institutional responsiveness. Excluding them from decision-making perpetuates conflict drivers, social fragmentation, and inequitable access to rights and services. **For WeWorld, mainstreaming child and youth participation means embedding their voices, perspectives, and agency across humanitarian, development, and peace interventions, recognising that they experience unique pressures and opportunities in every context.** This approach is rooted in the notion of the **right to the future: the principle that every child and youth has a claim to a safe, just, and equitable world, and that societies have a responsibility to ensure intergenerational justice.**

Why Child and Youth Participation Matters for Peace

Youth and children often experience:
- limited influence over decisions affecting their lives
- heightened exposure to social tensions, violence, or exploitation

Child-Centred Participation Through the CARES Framework

WeWorld operationalises child and youth participation through the CARES Framework, which ensures that education and development programmes are holistic, inclusive, and rights-based:

Through CARES, participation is not tokenistic—it is embedded across programme design, monitoring, governance, and community engagement, giving children and youth agency while advancing social cohesion, conflict sensitivity, and structural transformation.

- exclusion from economic, educational, or civic opportunities
- marginalisation in emergency, development, or governance processes

These gaps can fuel grievances, reduce trust in institutions, and amplify conflict risks. Active engagement of children and youth transforms them from passive beneficiaries into partners for peace, bridging divides, challenging harmful norms, and building social cohesion.

Participation strengthens peace and intergenerational justice by:
- promoting dialogue and intergenerational collaboration
- fostering leadership, civic skills, and agency among children and youth
- supporting equitable access to services, education, and protection
- creating early-warning networks for local conflicts and tensions
- enabling young people to act as mediators, advocates, and innovators
- ensuring that present decisions do not compromise the rights and opportunities of future generations

COMMUNITY
Engaging Communities in Promoting Children's Agency

ACCESS
Unlocking Access to Inclusive, Quality Learning

EXPRESSION
Amplifying Children's Voices and Perspectives

RIGHTS
Advancing and Protecting Children's Rights

SAFETY
Safeguarding Children's Protection and Well-Being Through Education

Mirko Cecchi/WeWorld

Child and Youth Participation Across Humanitarian, Development, and Peace Contexts

In humanitarian settings, participation ensures:
- programmes respond to children's and youth priorities
- risk reduction and protection mechanisms are effective and inclusive
- young people contribute to emergency planning, community coordination, and local problem-solving

In development contexts, it:
- builds capacity for leadership, civic engagement, and decision-making
- strengthens inclusion in education, livelihoods, and local governance
- empowers youth to advocate for structural and policy change, ensuring their right to shape the future

In peacebuilding, it:
- integrates youth-led dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation initiatives
- strengthens trust between young people, adults, and institutions
- embeds long-term norms of inclusion, cooperation, and non-violent problem-solving, supporting intergenerational justice

By systematically embedding children and youth in programme cycles through the CARES Framework, WeWorld ensures that interventions are inclusive, conflict-sensitive, and aligned with long-term structural change. **Participation becomes a vehicle for intergenerational justice and the realisation of the right to the future, guaranteeing that the voices of the next generation shape a safer, fairer, and more resilient society.**

WPS AND YPS AS STRATEGIC LEVERS FOR PEACE

Integrating WPS and YPS is not an optional cross-cutting theme. WeWorld's operational learning demonstrates that women and youth must be involved from the outset to ensure that conflict sensitivity, social cohesion, and governance improvements translate into durable peace.

- **Operational impact:** Programmes respond more effectively to the drivers of tension and exclusion.

- **Social cohesion:** Women and youth participation strengthens relationships within and between communities, bridging divides and fostering collaborative problem-solving.

- **Institutional accountability:** Engagement of women and youth encourages transparent and responsive decision-making.

- **Structural transformation:** Participation reshapes social norms, power relations, and governance practices, embedding long-term resilience.

When WPS and YPS are fully integrated, they function as engines that reshape relationships, institutions, and systems from within, strengthening inclusion, trust, and the non-violent management of tensions across all sectors.

CHAPTER 2.
Evidence from the Field

WeWorld in
BENIN

With the rise of modern media and social networks, Benin has increasingly faced a range of serious risks, as hate speech, disinformation and sexist content spread more easily across different platforms and raise concerns about messages that could fuel tensions or even spark violence. Inter-religious divisions and land disputes have also contributed to a fragile environment, creating openings that extremist actors could exploit. These challenges have been further complicated by the limited capacity of the media and existing self-regulatory bodies to respond in ways that are ethical, gender-sensitive and supportive of peace. The MEDIA-B project was developed to help strengthen the country's ability to address these issues. Rather than offering quick fixes, it focused on building skills among journalists, traditional and religious leaders, local authorities and civil society organisations, and on encouraging their active role in promoting dialogue and peace.

Highlights

In Benin, communities continue to grapple with disinformation, hate speech, inter-religious tensions, land disputes, weak media governance, and growing risks linked to violent extremism. The **MEDIA-B project** - led by WeWorld in partnership with a broad consortium of organisations and co-funded by the European Union - intervened by strengthening local information ecosystems, equipping youth and media actors with responsible communication skills, and fostering safer, more cohesive environments for dialogue.

OUR APPROACH COMBINED:
→ **Capacity-building** for media professionals on ethical, conflict-sensitive reporting
→ **Youth media-literacy and safe-communication training**
→ **Community Communication Committees** (CCCs) to mediate tensions and counter harmful narratives
→ **Partnerships with community radios** to amplify inclusive, reliable information

SCALE OF INTERVENTION:
→ **17 localities** engaged, plus outreach in 5 major cities

RESULTS AT A GLANCE:
→ Updated and locally validated Media Code of Ethics
→ **31 media professionals** trained on conflict-sensitive journalism
→ **200 young people** equipped with media literacy and peace communication skills
→ Community Communication Committees established and operational
→ Community radios mobilised to promote accurate, inclusive information

MEDIA-B contributed to reducing tensions, strengthening trust between citizens and institutions, and promoting a more responsible and resilient information ecosystem. It enhanced local governance by **improving accountability, transparency, and community participation in communication processes**.

Diego Ibarra Sanchez/WeWorld

WeWorld

FROM INPUTS TO IMPACT: the MEDIA-B Theory of Change

If young people learn to spot misinformation;

↓

and media actors report responsibly and follow clear ethical standards;

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and community radios share reliable content;

then communities become safer and better informed, and harmful narratives lose their power.

A MULTI-STAKEHOLDER MEDIA INITIATIVE IN BENIN

The MEDIA-B project (Mobilisation, Education, Dialogue and Information in Benin), implemented between April 2022 and March 2025 by WeWorld in partnership with the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) and a broad consortium of organisations, operated across the departments of Atacora, Donga, Borgou and Alibori. The project covered 17 localities, including three communes within the four targeted departments, as well as five major cities in southern Benin—Cotonou, Porto-Novo, Abomey-Calavi, Bohicon and Ouidah—bringing together a diverse range of stakeholders. The initiative engaged media professionals and community leaders from traditional, religious and social networks, alongside local authorities such as mayors and prefects. It also worked closely with key media self-regulatory bodies, including the Observatory of Deontology and Ethics in the Media (ODEM), the High Authority for Audiovisual and Communication (HAAC), the Union of Media Professionals of Benin (UNPA) and the National Council of Press and Audiovisual Employers (CNPA). In parallel, a wide array of civil society organisations—local NGOs, youth associations and communal platforms promoting peace and social cohesion—played an active role. Technical partners such as the Federation of Community Radios of Benin (FeRCAB), NGO Educ'Action and the Osservatorio di Pavia (OdP), together with media professionals from neighbouring countries, further enhanced the project's reach and impact.

FROM OBJECTIVES TO RESULTS

OBJECTIVE	KEY RESULTS
Strengthen the professional capacities of media actors to promote ethical, conflict-sensitive and gender-responsive journalism	• A revised and updated national Code of Ethics and Deontology for the Media was reviewed, validated and adopted, providing a strengthened regulatory framework for ethical, gender-sensitive and conflict-sensitive journalism • **31 media professionals** (community radio directors, radio-school directors and ODEM advisers) received intensive training on investigative journalism, conflict-sensitive reporting, gender-sensitive language, misinformation detection and audio/web production • A comprehensive package of communication tools was produced and disseminated, including: **15 press releases, 6 multilingual radio spots, 4 radio dramas, 7 video capsules, 3,000 printed materials** (flyers, posters, brochures) and **11 caricatures** • The National Media Competition "Media Champions of Benin" was launched to promote excellence and ethical standards in journalism
Enhance the capacities of traditional and religious leaders, local authorities and key community actors in dialogue, mediation and conflict prevention	• Communal Consultation Frameworks (CCC) created permanent spaces for dialogue among local authorities, religious leaders, farmers, herders and civil society • Documentary screenings followed by public debates enabled communities to reflect collectively on peace, social cohesion, gender equality and conflict dynamics
Empower young people and civil society to promote peace, responsible digital behaviour and resilience against misinformation and violent extremism	• **200 members of Youth Associations** (AdJ) were trained on responsible social media use, digital citizenship, misinformation detection and the Beninese Digital Code • **204 students from school press clubs** received training on journalistic writing, factchecking and ethical reporting • **Influencer-led online campaigns generated over 21,000 interactions**, amplifying messages on peace, gender equality and responsible digital behaviour
Strengthen community-level communication, awareness and collaboration to prevent violent extremism and promote social cohesion	• Community radios and radio schools implemented microprojects to produce programmes on peace, conflict prevention and social cohesion, increasing local ownership and visibility • Cross-border collaboration was initiated with journalists from Niger, Burkina Faso and Togo, laying the groundwork for a regional network on preventing violent extremism

TOOLS, METHODOLOGIES & INNOVATION

The project drew on WeWorld's conflict sensitivity toolkit[1], which helped analyse local dynamics, apply the do-no-harm principle and tailor activities to contexts marked by inter-religious, land-related and media tensions. Building on this foundation, the project employed a streamlined combination of participatory training, multimedia communication tools and community-based dialogue mechanisms.

- **Participatory training and capacity building:** Practical, hands-on workshops strengthened the skills of journalists, youth groups and community leaders. Targeted training for young journalists, students and community radio actors included modules on sexism, fake news detection and introductory journalism.

- **Awareness-raising and inclusive engagement:** Awareness campaigns and competitions incorporated gender-sensitive criteria to promote the active participation of women and young people in the production of ethical, inclusive and conflict-sensitive media content.

- **Multimedia communication and outreach:** A diverse range of radio spots, video capsules and printed materials ensured messaging that was accessible, culturally relevant and adapted to local contexts.

- **Community-based dialogue and mediation mechanisms:** Documentary screenings followed by moderated debates, together with the establishment of Communal Consultation Frameworks, created structured spaces for dialogue, reflection and conflict mediation at local level.

- **Innovation, digital engagement and media governance:** Innovation was driven through the strategic use of digital platforms and influencers, the revision of the Code of Ethics and Deontology, and the introduction of microprojects enabling local radio stations to produce context-specific content.

Together, these activities supported a coherent, adaptive and sustainable approach to strengthening social cohesion and promoting responsible information practices.

MEDIA-B and the EU approach to Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI)

The MEDIA-B project is closely aligned with the European Union's efforts to counter Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) and to strengthen information integrity worldwide. In Benin, the rapid spread of disinformation, hate speech and harmful narratives across traditional and digital media has increased social tensions and created vulnerabilities that can be exploited by extremist and destabilising actors.

In line with the European Union External Action (EEAS) whole-of-society approach to FIMI[2], MEDIA-B contributed to strengthening societal resilience by placing information integrity at the core of its interventions. The project supported:

- **Strategic communication and awareness-raising**, through campaigns, radio programmes, multimedia content and community dialogue aimed at promoting reliable and inclusive information.

- **Capacity-building for media and institutional stakeholders**, including training in ethical journalism, fact-checking, gender-sensitive communication and conflict-sensitive reporting.

- **Empowerment of civil society and local actors**, by engaging youth associations, community leaders and consultation frameworks in promoting transparency, accountability and democratic resilience.

- **Digital, media and information literacy**, equipping young people and communities with the skills to critically assess information, identify misinformation and resist manipulation techniques.

By strengthening responsible media ecosystems, fostering cross-sector collaboration and promoting critical thinking, MEDIA-B contributed to reducing the impact of harmful narratives and reinforcing democratic and social resilience in Benin.

Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct in the Media

As a result of the project, on 28 February 2025, Benin's media sector adopted a revised Code of Ethics aimed at fostering a more responsible and self-regulated press in the digital age[3]. The new code, consisting of 33 articles, reinforces both the rights and duties of journalists and introduces several updated provisions to strengthen professionalism and safety. Unlike the previous version, which was 25 years old, the revised code places far greater emphasis on tackling disinformation and sets higher standards for online media. Article 22, for example, requires journalists to verify information before publication, helping to limit the spread of false news. In response to growing demands for fairer representation, Article 33 addresses gender and inclusion issues directly, re-affirming the right of women journalists to work in an environment that is respectful, safe and free from discrimination. By promoting accuracy, fairness and ethical conduct, the revised code contributes to creating a healthier media environment in which public debate is grounded in facts rather than polarisation. Such an environment is essential for social cohesion and peace, as it reduces the risk of misinformation fuelling tensions and instead supports constructive dialogue among communities.

THE VOICE OF

OSSERVATORIO di Pavia

Andrea Malnati
Project Manager on behalf of the Osservatorio di Pavia[4]

"The role of the media in shaping public opinion is crucial in all countries, and Benin is no exception. The media, and consequently journalists, are paramount in preventing or, conversely, fomenting violent extremism and in promoting peace and social cohesion. From this perspective, it is crucial that journalists are adequately trained on these issues. This has become even more important with the spread of so-called "new media", where the role of the journalist takes on different nuances than in the past. The emergence and spread of the so-called "citizen journalist" certainly represent a major challenge, as we are often faced with people who produce information simply using their smartphones, without any basic knowledge of journalism. For this reason, the training and regulation of anyone producing information through new media, and social media in particular, represents the great challenge we face in recent years, in Benin as elsewhere. It is a challenge that must be overcome if we care about preventing violence and promoting peace through the fight against disinformation and hate speech.

Within MEDIA-B project, the Osservatorio di Pavia (OdP) was responsible for training the journalists who are members of the board of the Observatory of Deontology and Ethics in the Media (ODEM), an association of journalists for professional self-regulation. The training provided the necessary knowledge to conduct media monitoring to detect incitement to violence and hate speech, as well as cases of disinformation, misinformation and malinformation. The aim was to equip the ODEM board so that they could subsequently contribute to the training of journalists in the field, particularly in the regions covered by the project.

During the training sessions, we focused extensively on the definitions of incitement to violence and hate speech, as well as instances of disinformation, misinformation and malinformation. The goal was to enable people to clearly understand when they are experiencing such phenomena, and when we ourselves unwittingly produce them as a result of the stereotypes present in our culture. Particular attention was also given to aspects related to gender communication. Once it becomes clear to everyone what mistakes we often make without even being fully aware of them, it becomes easier to understand the

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1   The WeWorld conflict sensitivity toolkit is available here https://ejbn4fjvt9h.exactdn.com/uploads/2022/12/Conflict-Sensitivity-Toolkit.pdf

2   For more information see https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/information-integrity-and-countering-foreign-information-manipulation-interference-fimi_en#:~:text=Foreign%20Information%20Manipulation%20and%20Interference%20%28FIMI%29%2C%20including%20disinformation%2C,taken%20a%20leading%20role%20in%20addressing%20this%20challenge.

3   For more information, see: https://srtb.bj/2025_03_03_medias_benin_nouveau_code_ethique_deontologie_journalistes/

4   The Osservatorio di Pavia is an independent research institute specialising in media analysis across web, television, radio and print. Its core mission is to safeguard social, cultural and political pluralism through innovative research and analytical methods. Its main areas of work include political, social, scientific and economic communication. For more information, see: https://www.osservatorio.it/

reasons and preconceptions of others. Understanding others, those who are different from us, is the first step towards building acceptance and therefore a peaceful environment.

Gender communication was in fact one of the most important aspects of the training cycle, and undoubtedly the one that sparked the most interest and discussion. Participants were confronted with the shortcomings they often face, often unconsciously, in addressing these issues. This awareness generated much debate, helping participants understand that, beyond generic words of support, great care is needed to avoid gender discrimination in their work as informants.

As the training progressed, one of the most challenging aspects was getting participants to understand the consequences of certain behaviours and attitudes on the topics discussed. While everyone agreed on the basic principles for combating violence, combating misinformation and properly addressing gender issues, problems arose when they were confronted with behaviours they themselves were perpetrating that went against these principles. The highly participatory nature of the training and the involvement of participants in numerous discussions were essential in overcoming these obstacles.

The training was essentially based on the principle of implementing ethical standards for journalism, with the aim of enabling participants to understand the main errors and, by correcting them, implement the best journalistic standards. The OdP's intervention, however, went beyond the training itself. In support of the ODEM Council, an expert from the OdP contributed to the revision of the Code of Ethics for Journalists. The journalists' code of ethics, revised in 2025 to replace the 1999 code, adapts professional rules to digital challenges while reaffirming fundamental principles such as respect for truth, human dignity, privacy and the prohibition of blackmail or slander, with a particular emphasis on the fight against fake news, the protection of minors and ethics in the face of new technologies. The 1999 code has been updated to become the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct for the Media, including the integration of issues related to the web, social media and the fight against fake news. If I were asked to identify a success story regarding the OdP's involvement in the project, I believe this is the contribution worth highlighting. The OdP's support in streamlining the discussion within the ODEM Council and adhering to the established deadlines allowed the ODEM to present the new Code, and have it approved by the country's journalists, within a very short timeframe.

While the OdP training certainly had an impact on the small group it served, its broader repercussions on all journalists in the country are difficult to assess. Nevertheless, the effort to update the Code of Ethics has had a significant impact on journalists and media outlets across the country, laying a solid foundation for substantial improvement in the most sensitive areas addressed,

particularly with regard to new media and the fight against the spread of fake news.

Reflecting on the experience, it is clear that the problem of the spread of misinformation, which can easily lead to misunderstandings and cases of violence, is not exclusively due to the actions of professional journalists. It also concerns the uncontrolled actions of so-called citizen journalists. From this perspective, the necessary training programme should focus on this category of information workers. Training and awareness-raising should begin in schools, to educate young people about the pitfalls inherent in the profession of journalism, and more generally in the work of those who produce information. Citizen journalists should also be encouraged to meet, discuss and attend training and refresher courses, both to better understand the challenges of the profession and to gain a broader understanding of their rights. The promotion of the new code of ethics for journalists should be the cornerstone of their professionalisation.

Finally, regarding the collaboration with WeWorld, the relationship with the OdP has been excellent, as has the personal collaboration with colleagues. If I had to highlight one area where progress could be made, I would mention the need for more intensive communication about all project activities with all partners, as I sometimes found myself unaware of activities taking place in the field. Strengthening this aspect could allow for greater synergies and collaboration within the project."

OPERATIONALISING THE HDP NEXUS

The MEDIA-B project operationalised the Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) Nexus through an integrated, conflict-sensitive approach focused on preventing violent extremism and strengthening social cohesion in fragile contexts. Rather than addressing humanitarian, development and peacebuilding objectives in isolation, the project deliberately linked short-term risk reduction with long-term capacity building and conflict transformation.

- **Humanitarian:** The project contributed to the reduction of humanitarian risks by addressing key drivers of social and community vulnerability, including hate speech, disinformation and incitement to violence. By improving access to reliable information and promoting responsible media practices, MEDIA-B helped mitigate tensions that can rapidly escalate into violence, displacement or humanitarian needs, particularly in fragile and border-adjacent areas.

- **Development:** At the same time, the project strengthened long-term local capacities by training media professionals, youth groups and civil society organisations in ethical journalism, digital literacy and fact-checking. The establishment of Communal Consultation Frameworks and the support provided to community radios created durable local structures for dialogue, awareness-raising and accountable communication, reinforcing local governance, civic participation and institutional resilience.

- **Peacebuilding:** These efforts directly supported peacebuilding outcomes by promoting inter-religious dialogue, facilitating the peaceful management of land-related conflicts and encouraging the production of positive counter-narratives to extremist discourse. Cross-border collaboration with media actors and professionals from neighbouring countries further contributed to regional confidence-building and the prevention of conflict spill-over.

Through this integrated approach, MEDIA-B demonstrates how preventive humanitarian action, development investment and peacebuilding interventions can be mutually reinforcing, addressing both the root causes and the immediate risk factors of conflict in a coherent HDP-nexus framework.

CONFLICT SENSITIVITY, RISK MANAGEMENT & PARTICIPATION

Comprehensive Conflict Analysis

The project combined quantitative, qualitative and participatory approaches to analyse local conflicts, drawing on community assessments, participatory methods and specialised tools to gain a nuanced understanding of the context and to guide its actions in a targeted and inclusive way. Early studies and interviews with local authorities and community leaders helped identify key sources of tension, including land disputes, inter-religious friction, farmer-herder conflicts, ethnocentrism, forced marriages, school dropouts and hate speech. Consultation spaces bringing together local leaders, youth and women's groups, NGOs and religious representatives enabled joint problem-solving and the development of small action plans to ease tensions. Awareness-raising tools - such as radio broadcasts, posters and caricatures - supported the do-no-harm approach, safe information management and continuous risk monitoring.

Identification and Management of Risks

The project identified several risks that could unintentionally worsen local tensions, such as:

- poor management of inter-religious or land-related conflicts;
- media messages that overlook gender sensitivity or local context;
- the exclusion of women, young people or ethnic minorities from dialogue processes;
- political interference in conflict-management efforts;
- excessive dependence on external funding to sustain consultation frameworks.

All these risks were carefully assessed and used to refine the project's approach, ensuring that every activity strengthened peace and social cohesion rather than generating new tensions. For example, to address the risk of media messages lacking gender sensitivity or awareness of the local context, the project provided specialised training on gender-sensitive communication, conflict-sensitive reporting and ethical journalism for radio directors and journalists.

Community Consultation and Early Warning

Community consultation was embedded throughout the project cycle, beginning with a comprehensive baseline study that combined quantitative and qualitative surveys, interviews with local authorities, religious and traditional leaders, civil society

organisations, youth and women, as well as exchanges with community radios. This early engagement ensured that local perspectives, sensitivities and priorities shaped the project's design. Baseline findings, for instance, **highlighted a strong belief in the value of dialogue and media communication for addressing tensions linked to land issues, religion and sexism, with 83% of respondents expressing confidence in these approaches** - a perception particularly pronounced among institutional actors and media professionals. As implementation progressed, the Communal Consultation Frameworks provided participatory spaces for dialogue, collective risk analysis and the prioritisation of actions, while also functioning as early warning mechanisms. Combined with the project's monitoring and evaluation system, media tracking by the Observatory of Deontology and Ethics in the Media (ODEM) and regular feedback from partner radios, these structures enabled the timely detection of emerging tensions, including hate speech and gender stereotypes.

PEACEBUILDING & SOCIAL COHESION OUTCOMES
Inclusive Relationships and Trust-Building

The MEDIA-B project fostered trust and inclusive relationships by actively involving young people, women, traditional and religious leaders and ethnic minorities. The Communal Consultation Frameworks created safe spaces for inter-religious and inter-community dialogue, enabling constructive exchanges between authorities, civil society and local groups. Training and awareness-raising for media professionals helped spread peace-oriented and inclusive messages in local languages. Strong coordination between consortium members (WeWorld, Educ'Action, FeRCAB and OdP) and local actors further reinforced collaboration. Mechanisms such as media and citizen monitoring committees, journalist networks and dialogue platforms for pastoralists, farmers and religious leaders supported cooperation and peaceful conflict resolution. Together, these efforts improved trust, strengthened local partnerships and encouraged the inclusion of marginalised groups.

> " *Before the awareness sessions, I used to see some local religious leaders as potential sources of radicalisation. The project completely changed my perspective. I now understand the role they play in promoting peace and guiding our communities towards dialogue and mutual understanding."*
> - Project participant

Dialogue, Mediation and Reconciliation Outcomes

The project generated tangible outcomes in dialogue, mediation and reconciliation across the targeted communes. The twelve inter-religious consultation frameworks provided regular opportunities for leaders from Islam, Christianity and endogenous religions to meet, discuss risks linked to violent extremism and promote tolerance and mutual understanding. Community-level mediation also produced concrete results: in Garou, for example, a farmer drew on the project's social-cohesion principles to resolve a land dispute with herders, leading not only to reconciliation but also to stronger relations between the two groups. Similar dialogue sessions between pastoralists and farmers helped ease tensions around land use and encouraged peaceful, negotiated solutions. Awareness-raising and training activities contributed to visible behaviour change, particularly among young people and women, who increasingly adopted responsible and conciliatory attitudes in how they engaged with their communities and local institutions. Traditional and religious leaders played a key role in guiding communities and mediating disputes, helping to reduce the frequency of local conflicts. **According to participants, 91% reported that such conflicts had become rare since the project began, reflecting the positive impact of these dialogue and mediation efforts.**

> " *During a land dispute in my community, I realised I could finally put the training into practice. I used the mediation techniques we had learned, stepped in calmly and helped both sides talk to each other. The tension eased, and what could have turned violent was resolved peacefully."*
> - Project participant

Strengthened Community Resilience and Ownership

The project strengthened community resilience by building local capacities to prevent and manage conflicts peacefully. Training, consultation frameworks and intercommunity dialogue equipped participants with practical skills in mediation, non-violent communication and the handling of land-related and inter-religious tensions. The active engagement of young people, women, traditional and religious leaders and media professionals contributed to the creation of locally driven early-warning and response mechanisms, reducing reliance on external actors. A participatory approach ensured strong community ownership, with local stakeholders involved in identifying challenges, shaping interventions and putting them into practice.

Structures such as monitoring committees, journalist networks and community associations emerged as lasting mechanisms for promoting peace and social cohesion. This collaborative model reinforced local responsibility and helped secure the sustainability of results beyond the project's duration.

OPERATIONALISING THE WPS AND YPS AGENDAS
Women, Peace & Security

In the design and implementation of the MEDIA-B project, gender-specific needs were addressed by ensuring the voluntary participation of women, girls and minority groups across the main activities. Their participation was encouraged in consultation frameworks, youth associations, blogger groups and training sessions for media professionals, helping broaden representation in local dialogue and decision-making.

Challenging Traditional Gender Roles and Power Structures

Women-led CSOs were specifically targeted for capacity-building and played an active role in exchanges with media actors and local authorities. A gender perspective was also embedded in awareness-raising efforts, through the use of non-discriminatory language, respect for the media gender code of ethics and the dissemination of messages in local languages on social cohesion and women's rights via community radios. These combined efforts contributed to challenging traditional gender roles and entrenched power structures within the media landscape. However, during implementation it became evident that women's participation remained low. Because participation in project activities was voluntary, women's engagement continued to be limited, largely due to the fact that the media sector - the project's primary focus - is a field in which few women are active in the Beninese context, especially within the written press. As a result, women represented only 22% of the overall participants, a figure that significantly constrained their overall representation in the initiative.

Youth, Peace & Security

Young people and children were recognised as key actors in community life and powerful drivers of transformation. The project mobilised 40 youth associations, bringing together around 200 members who took part in awareness-raising, mediation and conflict-prevention activities. They received training in inter-religious dialogue, land-related conflict management, non-violent communication and countering disinformation, and a group of young ambassadors for peace and social cohesion was formed to relay these messages and take action within their communities.

Youth Empowerment for Peaceful and Responsible Media Engagement

Youth involvement in the media sphere was also strengthened through training for young journalists from community radios and media schools, enabling them to produce content that promotes peace and social cohesion. Awareness-raising on responsible social media use helped curb hate speech and misinformation, contributing to positive behavioural changes, including fewer violent attitudes, greater social awareness and a stronger commitment to sustainable peace.

WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT MEDIA AND PEACEFUL COMMUNITIES
Strategic Insights

- **Inclusive participation strengthens peace:** Dialogue is most effective when underlying power imbalances are explicitly addressed. Multi-actor consultation frameworks that bring together local officials, religious and traditional leaders, farmers, herders, young people, and women help to prevent and reduce community tensions. Institutionalising inter-generational forums and integrating young women and men into customary mediation processes ensures equitable participation and long-term social cohesion.

- **Media as a tool for peacebuilding:** Strengthening journalists' capacities through training, producing conflict- and gender-sensitive content, and broadcasting interactive programmes reduces hate speech, promotes counter-narratives, and improves perceptions of marginalised groups. Expanding activities across municipalities, reinforcing ethical standards through the revised Code of Media Ethics, and supporting community media outlets enhances reach, consistency, and long-term impact.

- **Communication that engages audiences:** Visually appealing, accessible materials are critical in digital-dominant contexts. Strengthening communication channels and audience-tracking systems ensures messages reach and influence target groups, while strategic monitoring provides early warning of emerging tensions.

Davide Bertuccio/WeWorld

WeWorld in

ITALY

Across Italy, young people still struggle to find a real place in public life. Participation is often perceived as limited to formal moments—signing a petition, attending a meeting, filling in a survey—without genuine influence on decisions. Many face structural barriers linked to geography, socioeconomic or migratory background, while others experience a sense of distance or distrust towards institutions. Young women encounter additional obstacles, from gender stereotypes to environments that do not always feel safe or inclusive. Digital spaces, though important, can trap participation in isolated "bubbles", while offline opportunities remain uneven across territories. A widespread feeling of disillusionment—fuelled by slow institutional responses to deeply felt social issues such as climate change, inequalities and erosion of civil rights—further discourages engagement. In this context, WeWorld's youth participation programme helps rebuild trust — not only in institutions, but also in young people's confidence in their own power to make a difference — opens meaningful pathways into decision-making, and creates spaces where every young person can take part, be heard, and actively shape their future.

Operational Lessons

● **Conflict sensitivity works as a system, not a one-off training:** In MEDIA-B, conflict sensitivity proved effective only when applied as a continuous, interconnected system that combined analysis, dialogue, capacity-building and monitoring across the entire project cycle. The establishment of Communal Consultation Frameworks and other community-based dialogue mechanisms demonstrated that durable peace relies on structured, recurring spaces. Similarly, journalists, radio actors and young communicators showed significant progress only when training was complemented by practical mentoring, ethical guidance and access to tools for responsible communication. Strengthening young people's media-literacy and safe-communication skills, alongside targeted capacity-building for media professionals, supported more accurate, inclusive and conflict-sensitive information flows that help prevent harmful narratives and promote peaceful problem-solving.

● **Transparency and inclusion improve outcomes:** Clear selection criteria, gender-responsive participation models (e.g., childcare support, adapted schedules, women-only spaces), and disability inclusion from the outset enhance fairness, effectiveness, and accessibility. Future programming should embed these measures systematically rather than as ad hoc adjustments.

● **Sustainability requires strategic tools:** Long-term impact depends on equipping local actors with the tools, governance mechanisms and organisational capacities needed to maintain progress independently. Structures such as the community radios, journalist networks, monitoring committees and youth associations proved highly effective but require continued support to remain operational. The revision of the Media Code of Ethics, the use of digital platforms, and the introduction of micro-projects strengthened media governance and encouraged locally produced, context-specific content. Yet sustainability also demands strategic anchoring within local institutions, including integration into communal budgets and stronger organisational development for youth groups and community media, to ensure continuity beyond external funding cycles.

> **KEY INSIGHT:** Peacebuilding through media and community engagement is most effective when it is **inclusive, systemic, and sustained**. Combining ethical journalism, youth participation, arts-based dialogue, and robust monitoring ensures that interventions build trust, reduce tensions, and reinforce social cohesion over the long-term.

✓ Highlights

Across Italy and the European Union, young people still face **limited guidance** on how to access decision-making processes, a **lack of opportunities** to effectively voice their concerns and influence outcomes, persistent **marginalisation of certain groups**, and the continued presence of **gender stereotypes** that limit real inclusion and leadership. Our programme responds to these challenges through a blend of educational and participatory strategies that make civic engagement concrete and accessible.

OUR APPROACH COMBINES:
→ **Creative entry points** (theatre, storytelling, podcasting) to lower barriers and make complex themes accessible.
→ **Structured democratic routes** guiding youth from local dialogue to EU-level advocacy (roundtables, consultations, manifestos).
→ **Cross-sector ecosystems** linking schools, CSOs, municipalities, universities and cultural actors to multiply access and legitimacy.
→ **Digital inclusion and virtual exchange** to connect across regions and borders and reduce geographic/economic barriers.
→ **Gender-transformative practice** and **safe spaces** that challenge stereotypes and grow girls' and young women's leadership.

OUR RESULTS AT A GLANCE BETWEEN 2017 AND 2026 ACROSS ITALY AND PARTNER COUNTRIES
→ **111,890+ young people** directly engaged through education, dialogue, advocacy and community action.
→ **89.5 million citizens** reached via campaigns, festivals and public events.
→ **830+ teachers and practitioners** trained in global citizenship, gender equality, climate justice and youth participation.
→ **30,000+ girls and young women** involved through youth and gender-focused pathways.
→ **100,000+ signatures** mobilised calling for stronger climate action (pre-COP27).
→ **Transnational youth networks in 20+ countries**, building solidarity and shared action.

By combining **creative expression, structured participation pathways**, and **long-term partnerships** with institutions and communities, WeWorld's youth participation programme remains both **effective and sustainable**—empowering young people not only to understand their world, but to actively shape it.

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

For more than 25 years, WeWorld has been active in Italy, working alongside partner organisations in parallel initiatives across several EU countries through direct interventions, policy and advocacy work, and programmes that promote global citizenship education and meaningful youth participation. At the heart of this commitment is the creation of an environment where young people can step forward, take the lead and shape the issues that affect their lives. By amplifying the voice and agency of youth – especially girls and under-represented groups – the organisation supports their meaningful participation in democratic life, their contribution to more inclusive communities, and their role in advancing climate and social justice.

This work unfolds in a context where democratic space is tightening and meaningful youth participation faces increasing pressures. In Italy, the **2025 Security Decree**[1] raised particular concern by introducing sanctions for certain acts of solidarity and non-violent protest — including actions linked to housing rights or peaceful road blockades — renewing fears around the **criminalisation of activism** and the shrinking of civic space for marginalised groups. At European level, **regulatory headwinds** such as the so-called *Omnibus Package* risk weakening sustainability frameworks like the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), influencing how young people perceive institutions' commitment to climate and human-rights protection. At the same time, shifts in **platform policy**, including new EU rules on transparency and political advertising[2], have reduced the visibility of social and civic messages online — highlighting why offline, deliberative forms of participation remain essential alongside digital engagement.

Within this environment, the **Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) and Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agendas** retain strong relevance. Although often associated with conflict-affected settings, their principles matter equally in peaceful, high-income countries like Italy, where the participation and recognition of the leadership of young people is crucial for renewing democratic culture, strengthening social cohesion and addressing persistent inequalities.

In response, **WeWorld runs a coherent, long-term programme that connects education, youth organising, participatory governance, gender equality and climate justice**. Projects are distinct yet intentionally linked within a single pathway — from first steps in safe spaces, to structured dialogue with institutions, to advocacy at municipal, national and European levels — ensuring participation that is accessible, sustained and genuinely transformative.

1　Decree-Law No. 48 of 11 April 2025, converted with amendments and in force since 10 June 2025.

2　Regulation (EU) 2024/900 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 March 2024 on the transparency and targeting of political advertising, published in the Official Journal on 20 March 2024 and entered into force on 9 April 2024.

FROM INPUTS TO IMPACT: Our Youth Participation Theory of Change

If inclusive learning opportunities build civic, global and gender-responsive competences;

and educators and CSO facilitators are trained and resourced to co-create with youth;

and safe, accessible spaces (arts-based labs, dialogue circles, virtual exchanges) enable first-time participation;

and local ecosystems provide clear routes to institutions (roundtables, consultations, manifestos, micro-grants);

then youth participation becomes meaningful and visible, communities grow more cohesive, and—crucially—girls and marginalised young people are able to influence decisions and sustain civic action over time.

BUILDING IMPACT THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

All initiatives are developed within **national and international consortia**, detailed in the individual project sections. These partnerships bring together a broad mix of actors—including universities and research centres, municipalities and regional authorities, INGOs and civil society networks, as well as cultural organisations, youth platforms and activists' networks. This diversity not only enriches the design and implementation of each initiative, but also strengthens their overall relevance, reach and impact.

FROM OBJECTIVES TO RESULTS: WEWORLD YOUTH PARTICIPATION PROGRAMME IN ITALY AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES	PROGRAMME-WIDE RESULTS (AGGREGATED OVERVIEW) BETWEEN 2017 AND 2028
Strengthen the meaningful participation of young people in local, national, and European Union decision-making processes	• **Direct youth engagement: 111,890+ young people** took part in educational, training, advocacy and exchange activities across the programme[3] • **Policy access:** Youth presented **manifestos** and recommendations at the European Parliament, joined **parliamentary debates** and **online consultations**, and engaged municipal and EU dialogues
Promote youth and young women's leadership in democratic and peacebuilding pathways	• **Under-represented youth included:** Structured opportunities ensured that young people facing social, economic or geographic barriers were actively involved in **public debates, multi-country youth gatherings and institutional roundtables**, bringing perspectives that are often absent from formal decision-making spaces • **Girls and young women's participation:** At least **30,000 girls and young women** were directly engaged across the programme, primarily through the "less-involved youth" segment of the project *Global Districts*[4] • **Safe, inclusive spaces:** Arts-based and dialogue formats lowered entry barriers and enabled first-time leadership experiences
Develop civic, critical and global competences through formal, non-formal and informal education	• **Schools and learning ecosystems:** Across the programme, more than **15,000 learners and educators** were engaged through structured educational activities in schools and related learning environments[5] • **Three-pillar Global Citizenship Education (GCE):** Combined **formal** (teacher training, school exchanges), **non-formal** (hackathons, workshops, activism courses), and **informal** (associations, festivals, public talks) learning routes implemented across programmes • **Digital toolkits and virtual exchange:** Scalable, ready-to-use toolkits (e.g., *YouPart* Digital Toolkit) and virtual exchanges (*WORLD*) strengthened critical thinking, intercultural dialogue and global awareness

3　This aggregated figure includes participation in: **35,000 young EU citizens** and **60,000 young people** from less-involved groups via the project *Global Districts* (implemented: 2024—2028); **14,000 students** via the project *Climate of Change* (implemented: 2020—2023); **1,300 young participants** via the project *WORLD* (implemented: 2023—2026); **240 participants** via the project *My Participation Revolution* (implemented: 2022—2024); **240 in-person + 200 online participants** via the project *My Activist Revolution* (implemented: 2024—2026); **180 young people** via the project *YouPart* (implemented: 2022—2024); **240 young people** via the project *My Resistance My Democracy* (implemented: 2023—2024); **470 young people** via the project *R-EDUC* (implemented: 2022—2025); **20 young adults** via the project *Tutta mia la città* (implemented: 2025)

4　This overall figure reflects **30,000 girls and young women** (50%) reached within the 60,000 less-involved youth participating in the project *Global Districts* (implemented: 2024—2028)

5　This overall figure includes: **14,000 students** and **600 teachers** involved in the *Climate of Change* educational debate model (implemented: 2020—2023); **470 young people** aged 14–21 participating in GCE training days, non-formal sessions and contests through *R-EDUC* (implemented: 2022—2025); additional school-based and festival-linked outreach activities delivered under *Changemakers for Climate Justice* (implemented: 2023—2024)

50 The "P" in Practice. Field evidence on operationalising conflict sensitivity, WPS and YPS across the HDP Nexus.

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Foster inclusive and resilient communities capable of addressing global challenges such as climate change, migration and inequality	• **Community reach:** Public campaigns and community events reached approximately **89.5 million citizens**, significantly expanding awareness of climate justice, rights and youth participation across Europe[6] • **Ecosystem design:** Local Solidarity Ecosystems (*HYPE*) and multi-stakeholder round-tables (*BRIDGE*) rebuilt trust and cooperation across communities and institutions • **Climate action with justice lens:** Transnational advocacy (e.g., European advocacy tour) brought perspectives from communities most affected by climate impacts into European debates; **100,000+ signatures** collected pre-COP27 for stronger climate action
Counter gender stereotypes and discrimination, promoting the empowerment of young women	• **Teachers and practitioners trained: 830+ teachers/practitioners** trained on global citizenship, gender equality, climate justice and youth participation[7] • **Gender-responsive education:** *GENERAzione 5* embedded gender-responsive civic education via teacher training and public/extracurricular actions (film matinée, university seminars, web talks) • **Stereotypes challenged:** Youth co-created artistic performances and joined national campaigns (e.g., at the WeWorld Festival) promoting equality and stereotype-free communication

TOOLS, METHODOLOGIES & INNOVATION

WeWorld's approach in Italy combines creative methods, structured participation and evidence-informed capacity-building to support young people, educators, civil society and institutions in co-creating meaningful change. The work begins at the local level and progressively expands outward, allowing what starts as learning or artistic exploration to evolve into advocacy, policy dialogue and community action.

● **Arts-based and creative practice: Theatre improvisation, poetry reading and collective storytelling** make complex themes easier to grasp and help groups build trust, communicate beyond words and make sense of lived experiences.

The **podcast** created through the project *"Tutta mia la città" (The City Is All Mine)* brought together personal voices into a shared and accessible public narrative, expanding its reach without placing participants under performance pressure.

In **civic workshops** such as *Palco in Rivolta (Stage in Revolt)*, theatre games were used as scenario-design tools: participants imagined the decisions they would take if they held power and resources, and explored those choices through embodied practice.

● **Dialogic formats:** Our **"Chiacchierata Attivista" (Activist Chat)** is a format designed to create an open, respectful and participatory space where everyone is listened to with attention. Participants sit in a circle to encourage eyelevel dialogue, take turns speaking, and explore different viewpoints without judgement. Building on this foundation, the activist conversation format places listening and youth voice at the centre. Sessions are informal enough for first-time speakers to feel comfortable, yet substantive enough to draw in policy-makers. This balance lowers anxiety while ensuring institutional relevance, turning conversation into a credible space for engagement with public officials and community stakeholders level.

> " *Resistance to the privatisation of public spaces — such as former barracks — reflects a broader conflict within the city. When public spaces change use, should they remain public (both institutionally and informally), or should they be increasingly privatised and commercialised? In this model of urban regeneration, the municipality plays a major role. Yet the forms of participation offered are often overly institutional, seeking to formalise and contain the lived experiences of diverse and popular cultures." - Young participant to the Activist Chat*

● **Digital and virtual exchange: Digital tools** expand access and continuity. **Virtual exchanges** and moderated online intercultural dialogues connect young people across regions, ensuring safe, inclusive participation—especially for those who cannot travel. Alongside this, interactive **digital toolkits** provide ready-to-use methods, resources and templates that organisations and youth workers can adapt to different contexts, strengthening practice and scalability.

● **Financial support schemes and capacity building:** Small grants make a big difference. **Micro-funding schemes** give community organisations the means to develop cultural, artistic and educational actions rooted in local needs. **Public restitution events**, exhibitions and community showcases bring learning back to the community, building visibility, accountability and shared ownership.

FROM IDEAS TO ACTION: THE PROJECT PORTFOLIO

Democratic Participation & Youth Advocacy

● **My Participation Revolution** (CERV) — *Dec 2022–Nov 2024 | IT, AT, PL, SI*[8]
It helped young people approach the **2024 European elections** with informed and meaningful participation, strengthening their skills and confidence in navigating EU institutions. The project combined national workshops and a conference with two international gatherings, an advocacy seminar and a youth roundtable at the European Parliament, where participants presented the **Central European Youth Manifesto**. It directly involved **240 young people** across the participating countries, while policy-makers and journalists were reached indirectly through the project's advocacy activities.

> " *I felt listened to, and I honestly didn't expect it. I was surprised by the Members of the European Parliament's engagement, because I had anticipated a hint of indifference— like when you try to talk to an adult in everyday life. Instead, they were consistently active and interested, which I really appreciated."* - Project participant

Central European Youth Manifesto

As part of the project, a Central European Youth Manifesto was developed through a transnational process involving young people from Italy, Austria, Slovenia and Poland. It captures their shared political, social, environmental and economic demands, developed collectively through dialogue and collaboration. Presented to political decision-makers in both the European Parliament and the four participating countries, the manifesto delivers a clear and united call for action from young people across the region.

● **My Activist Revolution** (CERV) — *Sep 2024–Aug 2026 | IT, AT, PL, SI*[9]
It deepens young people's involvement in European political life by supporting the co-creation of a new youth manifesto, which will be presented at the European Parliament later in the project. The initiative also opens access to **parliamentary debates and online consultations**, giving under-represented youth a direct route into institutional processes. In addition, it runs an Activist & Advocacy Academy in Vienna (June–August 2026), offering sustained training to up to 20 participants from Italy. Overall, the project involves **240 young people in person** and **200 online**, widening participation The across all partner countries.

● **YouPart – Engage, Connect, Empower** (Erasmus+) — *Jan 2022–Jul 2024 | IT, SI, CZ, RS, GR, AT*[10]
It helped prevent exclusion and strengthened young people's influence at local, national and EU levels. The project was built around three pillars: creating spaces where young people could express their political demands, fostering transnational youth

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6   This overall reach includes: around **84 million citizens** engaged through the **pan-European campaign** of *Climate of Change* (implemented: 2020—2023); approximately **5.5 million EU citizens** reached through outreach and communication activities under *Global Districts* (implemented: 2024—2028)
7   This total includes: **600+ teachers** trained through the project *Climate of Change* (implemented: 2020—2023); **30+ teachers** trained through the project *R-EDUC* (implemented: 2022—2025); **200 youth facilitators** trained through the project *WORLD* (implemented: 2023—2026)

8   "My Participation Revolution" partners: SUDWIND (Austria), FOCUS (Slovenia), FKO (Poland), VHS WIEN (Austria)

9   "My Activist Revolution" partners: SUDWIND (Austria), FOCUS (Slovenia) FKO (Poland), Centro Studi Analisi di Psicologia e Sociologia Applicate (Italy), Wiener VHS GmbH (Austria), Drustvo Kulturno Informacijsko In Sve (Slovenia), Zveza Brez izgovora Slovenija (Slovenia)
10   "YouPart" partners: SUDWIND (Austria), Drustvo Humanitas-Centre Za Globalno Učenje in Sodelovanje (Slovenia), Narodni Parlament (Serbia), Ekumenická Akademie (Czech Republic), Kainotomia & Sia EE (Greece), Bundesweites Netzwerk Offene Jugendarbeit (Austria), Oltre...APS Cultural Association (Italy), Spolek Zastáncu Detskych Práv (Czech Republic), Zavod Mladinska Mreža Mama (Slovenia), Timocki Omladinski Centar (Serbia), Centre for Education and Innovation (Greece)

52   The "P" in Practice. Field evidence on operationalising conflict sensitivity, WPS and YPS across the HDP Nexus.

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networks, and opening structured channels for dialogue with institutions. It directly involved **180 young people and 260 educational actors** across all participating countries, and produced a **Digital Toolkit**[11] for youth workers, offering practical methods, resources and content to support active, informed and sustained youth engagement.

● **My Resistance, My Democracy** (CERV) — *Jan 2023–Jul 2024 | IT, AT, PL, SI*[12]

It connected Europe's histories of resistance with the democratic expressions of young people today through a series of workshops, national and international gatherings, and a youth delegation to Brussels to meet Members of the European Parliament. The project directly involved **240 young people**[13] across the countries engaged in the initiative, while **policy-makers and journalists** were engaged as indirect beneficiaries.

> ❝ *A deeply moving moment that prompted many reflections on the importance of remembrance and on how it must remain connected to the present. Only by learning from its own mistakes can humanity progress and reach collective well-being.*❞ - Mohamed Mekkaoui, participant from Italy

● **4Voices** (CERV) — *Feb 2025–Jan 2027 | 20 countries incl. IT*[14]

It re-examines Europe's past through a gender-aware lens to uphold **human rights, democracy and the rule of law**, rebuild trust in institutions, and imagine more inclusive futures. The project combines non-formal education, co-design and public engagement to make these themes accessible and relevant to young people. It involves participants aged **18–30** along with **12 Youth Ambassadors** from different countries, who help drive the project's activities and connect its work across borders.

🔍 ## Understanding the Context: Major Global Concerns of Young People

Today's political and social climate strongly shapes the way WeWorld works with young people. Rising levels of disengagement and low voter turnout reveal how distant many feel from public life, making it even more urgent to invest in youth participation and critical thinking on issues such as rights and environmental justice. What young people themselves report is equally revealing. Short surveys conducted during awareness-raising and training activities show how their major global concerns have shifted over time: for years the climate crisis topped the list; during the pandemic, health became the central worry; now, the fear of armed conflict is the most widespread. This change highlights a growing need to rebuild democratic connections and create meaningful spaces where young people can engage, express their concerns and find tools to navigate these uncertainties. As a result, the organisation's approach has evolved. While it once focused more directly on themes like the environment and human rights, it now prioritises rebuilding a sense of community and belonging - laying the groundwork for stronger participation and helping young people feel like active, empowered members of society.

What topics concern you the most?

Conflicts
Human rights
Gender equality
Future empolymint
Democracy
Environment
Inclusion
Migration
Other

Results based on responses collected during an activity at the Matinée Festival Bologna 2025, with a total of 23 respondents.

Arianna Arcana/WeWorld

Global Citizenship Education & Civic Competences

● **Global Districts** (DEAR) — *Feb 2024–Feb 2028 | AT, DE, EL, IT, PL, RO, SK, ES, HU*[15]

It builds more inclusive local environments and strengthens young people's capacity to engage with global challenges. The project reaches around **35,000 young EU citizens, 60,000 less-involved youth** (including approximately **50% girls and young women), 7,000 civil society members**, and about **45,000 parents and community members**, with a further **5.5 million citizens** engaged through the wider campaign. Its participation pathways include **civic participation schools** and **virtual exchanges** that connect young people with peers from lower-middle-income countries, broadening perspectives and fostering solidarity across borders. Key outputs include **research on girls' participation in Italy** and a set of **policy recommendations** to strengthen youth engagement, particularly for those with fewer opportunities.

● **R-EDUC** (AICS) — *2022–2025 | Italy (focus Emilia-Romagna)*[16]

It strengthened national and regional capacities for **Global Citizenship Education** by establishing an interregional coordination platform, developing regional Action Plans and monitoring tools, analysing strategic regional documents, and delivering a blend of formal and non-formal learning pathways. Through these efforts, more than **30 teachers** took part in advanced capacity-building initiatives, while **470 young people** engaged in training days, non-formal activities and contests. In addition, around **1,500 citizens** in Emilia-Romagna were reached through the sub-granting scheme, which supported community-level initiatives across the region.

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11   For more information, see: https://www.weworld.it/news-e-storie/news/you-part-digital-toolkit-arriva-la-piattaforma-per-youth-workers-ricca-di-metodi-innovativi-per-coinvolgere-i-le-giovani-nella-vita-cittadina

12   "My Resistance, My Democracy" partners: SUDWIND (Austria), FOCUS (Slovenia), FKO (Poland), Vienna Forum (Austria), MNOM (Slovenia), Mladi Zmaji (Slovenia), MDK 2 (Poland)

13   The identical participant numbers recorded for *My Participation Revolution, My Activist Revolution and My Resistance, My Democracy* do not indicate that the same individuals took part. These are separate projects which share similar structures and methodologies

14   "4Voices" partners: Volonteurope (Belgium), European Institute Foundation (Bulgaria), Imago Mundi (Romania), Incijativa Razvoj I Saradnju (Serbia)

15   "Global Districts" partners: ACRA (Italy), Südwind Entwicklungspolitik Tirol (Austria), Centre for Citizenship Education (Poland), People in Need (Slovakia), Association Assistance and Programs for Sustainable Development – Agenda 21 (Romania), Anthropolis (Hungary), ActionAid Hellas (Greece), ABD (Spain), Finep Academy (Germany), Municipality of Milan (Italy), University of Bologna - Department of Philosophy and Communication Sciences (Italy), Austrian National Youth Council (Austria), Con il Sud foundation (Italy), POJAT (Austria)

16   "R-EDUC" partners: Piedmont Region, Marche Region, Lazio Region, Liguria Region, Calabria Region, Sardinia Region, UNESCO Chair – University of Bologna (Italy), NGO Concord Italia Onlus (Italy)

Global Districts: The civic participation of young women in Italy: obstacles, good practices and recommendations

This report explores the barriers that prevent girls and young women from fully participating in the social, economic, political and civic life of their neighbourhoods and cities. It has two aims: first, to identify inequalities linked to gender, origin, and socio-economic and educational background—as well as differences between urban and rural areas—through an intersectional lens on local youth participation; and second, to set out strategies, approaches and pathways to strengthen, promote and sustain their active engagement and mobilisation.

Global Districts

La partecipazione civica delle giovani donne in Italia: ostacoli, buone pratiche e raccomandazioni

Rapporto di ricerca

●   **Interdisciplinary Participation in International Solidarity** (Erasmus+) — *Sep 2024–Nov 2025 | BE, FR, IT, ES*[17]

It increased youth inclusion **within the associative sector** by improving organisational practices across international solidarity networks and developing an interactive **digital toolkit**[18] for both organisations and young people. The toolkit supported the acquisition of new professional and civic skills, encouraged intercultural and intergenerational exchange, promoted more inclusive participation practices, and enabled joint work among partner organisations, ensuring that all tools remained relevant and adaptable across different country contexts.

●   **Shaping Fair Cities** (DEAR) — *2017–2021 | AL, HR, DK, GR, IT, PL, RO, SE*[19]

It supported local authorities in integrating the **2030 Agenda** into their policy frameworks—particularly in the context of migration challenges—using Results Based Management to anchor measurable and meaningful change. The project combined an international awareness campaign with a series of advocacy actions led directly by local institutions, and mobilised local authorities around key Sustainable Development Goals: **gender equality (SDG 5)**, **peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16)**, **sustainable and resilient cities (SDG 11)** and **climate action (SDG 13)**. It also fostered multi-country cooperation, enabling local governments to jointly address migration-related policy challenges and exchange practical approaches across different national contexts.

Climate Justice & Youth Environmental Activism

●   **End Climate Change, Start Climate of Change** (DEAR) — *Jan 2020–May 2023 | 13 EU countries + KH, SN*[20]

It connected climate change and migration through a wide range of youth-led and public-facing activities, including **school debates**, youth festivals and a **pan-European awareness campaign**, complemented by TEDx events, street tours and targeted advocacy actions. The project also organised an **advocacy tour** featuring young spokespersons from low-income countries, ensuring that perspectives from communities most affected by climate impacts were brought into European discussions on climate justice. Overall, it reached **14,000 students, 600 teachers, 84 civil society organisations** and **62 local authorities**, engaged **over 84 million citizens** through the campaign, involved **300+ decision-makers**, and collected **more than 100,000 signatures** ahead of COP27.

●   **Changemakers for Climate Justice** (AICS) — *Jan 2023–Dec 2024 | Italy*[21]

It built the capacities of teachers and young people on **climate justice** through a combination of formal routes—such as teacher training and school-based exchanges—and non-formal pathways including hackathons, workshops and activism courses. These activities were complemented by **outreach in schools** and at **cultural festivals**, helping to strengthen advocacy skills and deepen public understanding of climate justice at community level.

●   **Together WE Change the WORLD** (Lombardy Region) — *Jan–Nov 2023 | Italy (Lombardy)*

It developed both citizenship and transversal skills among young people, supported community-based action through a **grant scheme** that funded cultural, artistic and educational initiatives promoting sustainability, and culminated in **youth-led policy recommendations** for local environmental strategies. These efforts were complemented by public awareness activities that helped broaden engagement across the wider community.

●   **Be A Change Maker** (Emilia-Romagna Region) — *2025 (4th ed.) | Bologna*

It offered free training for young people aged 18–29 on climate justice and its global interconnections—from migration and supply chains to resource governance—and concluded with a public event to share the work produced. The programme emphasised co-creation and active participation, using the **city as both a learning environment and a space for activism**, and grounding reflection in real-world urban experience.

> " *The activist conversation during the training was incredibly stimulating. I had the chance to speak directly with representatives from local public administration and politics who work daily on participatory processes. On the one hand, there are models and procedures; on the other, there is a growing and disruptive wave of activism on social and climate justice—especially among young people who see climate change as directly linked to their future, to intergenerational justice, to the environment, to the economy and to employment. This raises important questions about how to connect means and goals, politics and administration, policymakers and citizens— and about how good participation can help rebuild trust between them, leading to balanced decisions that serve the common good.*" — Participant in the second edition of the project

●   **WORLD: Our World Our Planet** (Erasmus+) — *Jul 2023–Jun 2026 | IT, AT, KE, TZ, UG*[22]

It uses **virtual exchange** and **intercultural dialogue** to promote gender-responsive climate action, ensuring that climate initiatives reflect the specific needs and contributions of girls and young women. The project reaches **1,300 young participants** and trains **200 youth facilitators**, helping to build strong transnational youth leadership for climate justice.

Gender Equality & Young Women's Empowerment

●   **GENERAzione 5** (AICS) — *Jan 2023–Dec 2024 | Italy*[23]

It strengthened teachers' ability to promote gender equality and prevent gender-based violence by embedding a gender-responsive lens in Civic Education and expanding learning through extracurricular activities such as a film matinée, university seminars and themed web talks. Young people also played an active role, contributing to a national campaign at the WeWorld Festival in Milan and co-creating artistic performances designed to foster stereotype-free communication.

> " *We long for change, for freedom, and for spaces where we can feel safe.*" — Project participant

●   **Tutta mia la città** — *3–6 Jul 2025 | Milan*[24]

As part of the HYPE project (presented in the following paragraph), this activity brought together twenty young adults aged 18–35 to explore themes of **gender, decoloniality and inclusion** through theatre improvisation, vocal practices and guided reflections on privilege and marginalisation—an approach that helped build trust, strengthen non-verbal communication and nurture a sense of collective care. The stories that emerged touched on **queer identities, invisible disabilities and the value of therapy** for both personal and collective well-being. All these threads came together in a **podcast**: a powerful collective narrative that travels through Milan, moving between memories, desires, anger and dreams. The four episodes are titled "Dentro" (Inside), "Confine" (Border), "Conflitto" (Conflict) and "Fuori" (Outside)[25].

17   "Interdisciplinary Participation in International Solidarity" partners: Solidaridad Internacional (Spain), ECHOS COMMUNICATION (Belgium), Nazioarteko Elkartasuna (Belgium), Engagé·e·s & Déterminé·e·s (France)

18   The digital toolkit is available here https://youthin.eu/it/kit-di-strumenti/

19   "Shaping Fair Cities" partners: Emilia Romagna Region - European Policy Coordination, Programming, Cooperation and Evaluation Service (Italy), Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna (Italy), Alicante (Spain), Bashkia Shkoder (Albania), BRCT Iasi - Asociatia Biroul Regional Pentru Cooperare Transfrontaliera Iasi Pentru Granita (Romania), Falkoping (Sweden), Forli (Italy), Generalitat Valenciana (Spain), Iasi (Romania), Modena (Italy), Patras (Greece), Pemba (Mozambique), Reggio Emilia (Italy), Split (Croatia), ROPS - Regional Centre of Social Policy Poznan (Poland), Velje (Denmark), Women Network (Italy)

20   "End Climate Change, Start Climate of Change" partners: Action Aid Hellas (Greece), European Association for Local Democracy (Italy), Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna (Italy), Alianza por la Solidariedad (Spain), Bulgarian Environmental Partnership Foundation (Bulgaria), Buy Responsibly Foundation (Poland), Municipality of Bologna (Italy), European Environmental Bureau (Belgium), FINEP (Germany), Hungarian Baptist Aid (Hungary), Istituto Marques de Valle Flor (Portugal), Oxfam Deutschland (Germany), Slovenian Global Action Platform (Slovenia), SUDWIND (Austria), University of Nicosia Research Foundation (Cyprus)

21   "Changemakers for Climate Justice" partners: CIMA Foundation - International Centre for Environmental Monitoring, ActionAid International Italia, Cesvi, Pandora Società Cooperativa Sociale Onlus, Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna, INDIRE - National Institute of Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research (all from Italy)

22   "WORLD: Our World Our Planet" partners: SUDWIND (Austria), Organisation of African Youth (Kenya), Young and Alive Initiative (Tanzania), Environment Alert (Uganda)

23   "GENERAzione 5" partners: ACRA, SCOSSE, Monte dei Paschi di Siena Foundation, University of Bologna (all from Italy)

24   "Tutta mia la città" partners: Milano Mediterranea, Sex&TheCity (both from Italy)

25   Listen to the podcast here: https://www.spreaker.com/podcast/tutta-mia-la-citta--6700133

> *Tutta mia la città (The City Is All Mine) was an experimental workshop designed to give young people a sense of agency and belonging to a community—those essential elements needed to become protagonists of change. We worked starting from our bodies in the urban space, recognising our political presence and joining together as a collective force, a movement capable of transforming."* — Lucia Imbriaco, programme lead for WeWorld

Social Cohesion & Participatory Governance

● **BRIDGE** (Council of Europe) — *Mar–Oct 2025 | IT, FR, UK, HU, BE, RS, GE*[26]
It strengthened the capacities of civil society organisations on **democratic governance** and on using **Council of Europe** instruments effectively. Learning was anchored at national level through dedicated roundtables, while regional dialogues and a **European Summit in Strasbourg** brought actors together across borders. These efforts were supported by an online awareness campaign that broadened engagement and visibility.

● **HYPE** (CERV) — *Jun 2024–May 2026 | IT, GR, BE, ES*[27]
It rebuilds **local solidarity ecosystems** through youth-led initiatives, multi-stakeholder collaboration and exchange opportunities at EU level. The focus is on **revitalising trust**, reconnecting communities and strengthening participatory governance, with young people acting as ambassadors for future action both locally and across Europe. This **bottom-up, ecosystem-based approach** helps weave communities back together and reinforces the social ties needed for shared decision-making.

OPERATIONALISING THE WPS AND YPS AGENDAS IN HIGH-INCOME CONTEXTS

Women, Peace & Security

Operationalising the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Italy means addressing deep-rooted inequalities, strengthening social cohesion and ensuring that women and girls can genuinely take part in public life. This work takes shape across several interconnected strands:

● **Leadership and participation:** expanding opportunities for girls, young women and women in civil society by creating inclusive spaces in schools, communities, artistic environments and digital settings.

● **Prevention through education:** tackling gender-based violence by promoting gender equality, raising awareness of its root causes, and showing how gender inequalities intersect with crises such as climate change and migration.

● **Gender-responsive approaches to global challenges:** ensuring that work on climate action, governance and policy processes incorporates women's perspectives and strengthens their role in decision-making.

● **Safe spaces for healing and expression:** using participatory arts, theatre and facilitated dialogue to foster emotional resilience, solidarity and collective empowerment.

● **Gender-sensitive education systems:** supporting teachers through training and rights-based, global citizenship approaches that embed gender equality across both formal and non-formal learning.

Youth, Peace & Security

In Italy, the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda takes shape through efforts to counter social fragmentation and democratic disengagement. These efforts unfold across several complementary areas:

● **Active youth engagement:** involving young people as genuine contributors in debates, campaigns, municipal dialogues and transnational exchanges, ensuring their perspectives help shape public life.

● **Safe and inclusive environments:** creating supportive spaces—through theatre, arts-based activities, dialogue circles and peer learning—that build resilience, foster non-violent communication and encourage open expression.

● **Skills for peaceful change:** equipping young people with advocacy, dialogue and community-organising skills that enable them to address tensions constructively and take collective action.

● **Intercultural solidarity:** strengthening cross-border understanding and cooperation through virtual exchanges, international networks and shared learning, helping young people connect local challenges to global dynamics.

WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Strategic lessons

● **Local engagement as the first step towards larger impact.** Working at the local level helps build trust and makes participation feel real and accessible. Once young people gain confidence close to home, it becomes much easier for them to move into national or European spaces where processes are more complex.

● **Participation must be purposeful.** Young people stay engaged when they can clearly see how their contributions influence decisions. Showing the full pathway—from ideas and manifestos to debates and actual policy steps—helps make participation meaningful rather than symbolic.

● **Adults as enablers, not gatekeepers.** When adults—teachers, youth workers, school leaders and policymakers—are trained to truly listen to young people and to support them without taking over, participation becomes more authentic and effective. Building adults' capacity to mentor, facilitate and share power helps create safe, collaborative environments where young people can express themselves freely and learn how to navigate decision-making processes.

● **Diversity drives legitimacy.** When girls, young women and under-represented groups are genuinely included, the outcomes are more balanced, credible and fair. A wider mix of voices leads to stronger decisions that reflect real community needs.

● **Education as the foundation for youth agency.** Combining formal, non-formal and informal learning gives young people the knowledge, confidence and practical skills they need to act. This blend turns awareness into agency and supports long-lasting civic engagement.

● **Partnerships multiply impact.** Bringing together schools, CSOs, municipalities, universities and other actors creates richer ideas, stronger resources and direct access to decision-makers.

Operational lessons

● **Collaborative design with youth voices at the core.** Co-creation with young people from the outset, with agendas and formats shaped together and refined through testing and adaptation, ensures that activities feel relevant and genuinely youth-driven.

● **Make roles and routes clear.** Explaining who is responsible for what, how feedback is used, and how decisions are taken reduces ambiguity and helps build a safer, more transparent environment for participation.

● **Blend methods.** A blended methodology that combines workshops, peer learning, artistic practice and digital tools sustains attention, supports different learning styles, and keeps engagement high over time.

● **Assessment of participation quality and impact.** Monitoring both the quality of participation (who speaks, who decides, who is missing) and the changes achieved strengthens accountability—especially when findings are shared back with participants.

Rocco Rorandelli/WeWorld

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26   "BRIDGE" partners: Volonteurope (Belgium), Social Platform (Belgium), ProActive Group (Georgia), La ligue de l'enseignement 35 (France), Volunteering Matters (United Kingdom), Európa Ház (Hungary), Kimbé-Red (France), IDC Serbia (Serbia)

27   "HYPE" partners: ActionAid Hellas (Greece), Universitat de Barcelona (Spain), Social Platform Plate-Forme Des ONG Europeennes du Secteur Social (Belgium)

58   The "P" in Practice. Field evidence on operationalising conflict sensitivity, WPS and YPS across the HDP Nexus.

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THE VOICE OF

Camilla Serlupi
Program Officer on Social and Climate Justice

"Results are most likely to emerge at the local level, where meaningful dialogue can be created more easily and where it is possible to bring the relevant actors—particularly young people and local institutions—around the same table. At the national level, this bridging function has been less central in our work, whereas at the European and international levels different dynamics come into play. In Europe, for instance, young people tend to engage with topics such as due diligence and environmental regulation. At the international level, one of the most frequent points raised by young participants is the slow pace of implementation of global frameworks, which contributes to disappointment with supranational bodies like the UN.

The importance of local participation is clear: proximity makes institutions more accessible and, at least in principle, more accountable. This is not universal, but being physically and social-ly closer helps young people feel that engagement is possible. By contrast, expectations placed on distant global institutions can create disillusionment—especially when young people have had few opportunities to practise everyday, community-based participation. Participation cannot begin in global forums, which involve only a few representatives; it must start locally, in neighbourhoods and cities, where it can be concrete and transformative.

Another reason why local work is more effective is that it is easier for young people to identify with the issues at stake. Discussing one's own city is very different from navigating broad, abstract global systems. Rebuilding that sense of connection is essential. As for disillusionment, it stems both from a need to restore the meaning and value of participation and from a realistic assessment of global progress. Current data on climate change, human rights and women's rights show limited advances, making frustration towards international organisations somewhat inevitable."

Rocco Rorandelli/WeWorld

WeWorld in

LEBANON

Lebanon is grappling with deep-rooted instability after years of political paralysis, economic collapse, and sectarian power struggles. As poverty rises and essential services erode, tensions within and between communities are intensifying—especially in the dense urban areas of Greater Beirut and Tripoli. Young people, and in particular Palestinian, Syrian refugees and migrants, are among the most vulnerable, facing exclusion, discrimination, and exploitation. The Power of Youth steps in to counter these pressures by creating inclusive spaces, fostering dialogue, and promoting cultural exchange, helping to strengthen social cohesion across diverse urban communities.

✓ Highlights

Lebanon faces a prolonged, multi-layered crisis marked by economic collapse, political paralysis, and deepening social fragmentation. Young people, navigating shrinking opportunities and increasing pressures, are especially affected by these dynamics. The Power of Youth project – co-led by WeWorld alongside Mada and the Jafra Foundation for Relief and Youth Development, with the support of various Lebanese stakeholders – was created to respond to this reality by placing youth at the heart of locally driven, community-based solutions.

OUR APPROACH COMBINED:
→ **Youth-led capacity strengthening**, enabling CSOs and informal groups to design, lead, and monitor community initiatives
→ **Conflict-sensitive and inclusive programming**, grounded in participation of young women, refugees, and migrant youth
→ **Creative and cultural engagement**, from graphic-novel co-creation to youth-led media storytelling, as safe entry points for dialogue
→ **Youth–institution interaction**, encouraging responsiveness and accountability from municipalities and local services

OUR RESULTS AT A GLANCE
→ **Stronger collaboration among youth-led CSOs** across Greater Beirut and the Tripoli region
→ **Greater participation of young women**, supported through safe-space formats and gender-sensitive facilitation
→ **More constructive dialogue spaces**, with youth actively participating in community discussions and being able to engage with local authorities and institutions
→ **Creative outputs gaining visibility**, including cultural events and youth-produced media countering harmful narratives
→ **Improved inclusion**, with deliberate outreach to under-represented groups such as Palestinian, Syrian, and migrant youth

As the project is currently in its first year of implementation, these insights remain preliminary. Still, they already highlight WeWorld's value proposition: acting as a trusted bridge between youth, communities, and institutions, while promoting inclusive, conflict-sensitive, and youth-driven pathways to peace and social cohesion.

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

Lebanon continues to experience profound **systemic fragility**, shaped by years of political deadlock, economic collapse, shrinking public services and livelihood opportunities, and widening inequalities. These pressures fuel **complex tension dynamics**, including growing competition over jobs and housing, gaps in local governance, and the spread of disinformation and polarisation. Layered grievances persist both within and between communities—particularly between **host populations and refugees or migrants**, and among **Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese** youth networks—creating conditions in which everyday interactions can easily become sources of friction.

Within this environment, **youth occupy a pivotal position**: they navigate multiple identities and information spaces, and while they face significant risks such as exclusion, profiling, and exposure to misinformation, they also possess key strengths. Their peer networks, digital literacy, and creative capacities give them unique leverage to transform narratives, rebuild relationships, and contribute to more cohesive and resilient communities.

FROM INPUTS TO IMPACT: The Power of Youth Theory of Change

If youth-led CSOs and CSO networks are equipped with the technical and organisational skills needed to deliver peacebuilding initiatives within their communities;

and youth-led CSOs and youth groups are supported to implement and monitor meaningful and impactful peacebuilding actions;

and local youth actors work collaboratively to counter disinformation and promote coexistence and peaceful change;

THEN

the individual and collective capacities of youth-led CSOs, groups, networks, and young people from diverse ethnic, religious and cultural background will be strengthened, enabling them to foster inter- and intra-communal peace and to contribute to conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding in Lebanon.

PROJECT LOCATIONS AND CORE PARTNERS

The Power of Youth project runs over two years, from March 2025 to February 2027. It focuses on Greater Beirut — including Shatila and Burj El Barajneh Palestine refugee camps— and on the Tripoli region — including Beddawi and Nahr El Bared Palestine refugee camps. The project is implemented by Mada, the lead applicant, which provides professional ethics, safeguarding, and outreach in Beirut and Tripoli, in partnership with the co-applicants WeWorld and the Jafra Foundation for Relief and Youth Development. Jafra, rooted in Palestinian camps, leads on risk assessment and youth mobilisation. The initiative also brings together youth-led CSOs and informal groups — Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian, and migrant-led — alongside municipalities and local authorities to open meaningful channels for youth–institution dialogue. Youth media platforms and university networks further contribute by co-producing and sharing knowledge throughout the project.

FROM OBJECTIVES TO RESULTS

OBJECTIVES	MAIN RESULTS[1]
Empowering youth-led CSOs with stronger organisational capacities	• **Capacity-building** delivered on conflict sensitivity, peacebuilding design, gender Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (SEAH) prevention, safeguarding and professional ethics, as well as basic MEAL and risk management • **Targeted technical support** provided on organisational governance, financial procedures, inclusive outreach, and ensuring safe and meaningful participation
Mobilising youth leadership for conflict prevention	• **Support to youth-led CSOs** enabling them to design, lead, and monitor community-based peace actions • **Prioritisation of young women's participation** through safe-space approaches and gender-sensitive facilitation
Strengthening youth action against disinformation and harmful narratives	• **Strengthening of a youth-led media platform** to amplify inclusive narratives, counter misinformation, and promote responsible and ethical communication • **Collaboration with university students** supporting the production and dissemination of applied research on social cohesion • **Co-creation of a graphic-novel** capturing youth perspectives across different communities and promoting dialogue

Francesca Volpi/WeWorld

[1] At the time of this report's publication, the project is still ongoing; therefore, the results presented here reflect preliminary findings based on observations from the first year of implementation.

TOOLS, METHODOLOGIES & INNOVATION

● **Conflict-Sensitive and Inclusive Programming:** Mada and Jafra began the project by **consulting youth-led CSOs** to map local realities, identify gaps and risks, and inform the design of the initial engagement tools. As staff capacities continue to strengthen through ongoing coaching, **We-World's Conflict Sensitivity Toolkit** will be fully integrated, supporting continuous conflict analysis and adaptive management throughout implementation. All partners apply a **zero-tolerance approach to Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (SEAH)** and uphold strict Codes of Conduct and Ethics. This commitment is further reinforced by Mada, which is formalising a Professional Ethics Code, Safeguarding and PSEA policy, and Safety and Security SOPs to ensure safe, inclusive, and conflict-sensitive programming.

● **Adaptation to Local Contexts:** Project tools have been designed locally to reflect the cultural norms of neighbourhoods and camps, ensuring **age-appropriate facilitation** and **equitable access for all participants**. Scheduling has also been kept flexible to reduce barriers to participation, particularly for young people working in precarious or irregular jobs. This adaptable approach helps the project remain responsive to the realities of each community and the diverse needs of the youth involved.

● **Artistic, Cultural, and Media Approaches:** The project will support CSOs in delivering **creative activities that serve as non-confrontational entry points for dialogue**, including art exhibitions, film screenings, and other cultural events, with final formats refined as implementation progresses. Young people will also take part in co-creating a **graphic novel** through a workshop that capture their perspectives on society. A strengthened **youth-led media platform** will accompany the project across all locations, raising awareness and sharing core peacebuilding messages. Through close coordination with CSOs and community members, media outputs will spotlight powerful stories, testimonials, and examples of collaboration among diverse groups, both within and beyond refugee camps. The media component will also promote the graphic novel in Lebanon and Europe, while disseminating applied research on social cohesion and peacebuilding produced by university students, helping to counter disinformation and foster meaningful dialogue.

● **Youth–Institution and Intergenerational Dialogue:** The project creates structured spaces where young people can engage directly with municipalities and local service providers, helping to strengthen institutional responsiveness and accountability. Alongside this, activities bring together youth and elders or authority figures in ways that foster respectful interaction and help rebalance power dynamics, encouraging mutual understanding across generations.

OPERATIONALISING THE HDP NEXUS

The Power of Youth project intentionally links the Humanitarian, Development, and Peace components of the HDP Nexus to ensure that short-term support and long-term capacity building reinforce one another.

● **Humanitarian:** Small financial and in-kind grants are provided to youth-led CSOs to address urgent community needs in high-vulnerability contexts—such as refugee camps and deprived neighbourhoods. All interventions are carefully targeted and designed with do-no-harm principles to prevent negative effects on local relationships.

● **Development:** Organisational strengthening of youth-led CSOs focuses on core skills, governance, safeguarding, and MEAL systems, while also improving their links with institutions and local services. This supports both sustainability and more inclusive local development.

● **Peacebuilding:** Dialogue, cultural engagement, and youth-led narratives help reduce mistrust, counter harmful information, and promote everyday coexistence among Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian, and migrant youth.

> " *Working across the nexus means intentionally connecting humanitarian, development, and peace approaches: using humanitarian response as a basis for recovery; ensuring that development actions remain sensitive to conflict dynamics; and integrating peacebuilding principles as a cross-cutting element throughout all interventions. Through this approach, WeWorld seeks to support communities in Lebanon not only in coping with ongoing crises, but also in strengthening their resilience, social cohesion, and prospects for long-term stability."*
> — Valeria Ongaro, Project Coordinator

CONFLICT SENSITIVITY & RISK MANAGEMENT

Conflict Analysis

The project's conflict analysis drew on Lebanon's Tensions Monitoring System (TMS)[2], a well-established nationwide mechanism that tracked tensions through perception surveys, rapid assessments, incident monitoring, and media analysis. These data were complemented by partners' field insights and regular consultations with community members, ensuring a timely and locally grounded understanding of emerging risks and dynamics.

Risk Identification and Mitigation

The project design identified and addressed multiple pre-existing social fractures and vulnerabilities in Lebanon, particularly in the target areas of Beirut and Tripoli. Risks identified included:

● **Severe pressures on vulnerable urban host communities**, including rising rental costs, food insecurity, poor infrastructure, and heightened risks of eviction and social tensions.

● **Exploitative labour conditions, food insecurity, and unsafe living environments, particularly affecting Palestinian, Syrian, and migrant communities**, further compounding marginalisation.

● **Exclusion of marginalised groups from decision-making and participation**, particularly youth and women, leading to interventions that risk failing to reflect community priorities.

● Risk identification and mitigation were grounded in alignment with the **IASC's Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) principles**, ensuring that youth and women were meaningfully engaged in planning and decision-making processes. The project adopted inclusive targeting practices to avoid reinforcing existing power dynamics, with deliberate outreach to under-represented groups such as refugees, migrants, and girls. In addition, **Feedback and Complaints Response Mechanism (FCRM)** materials were integrated into training sessions and shared with all participants, making safe and accessible channels for feedback and concerns clear throughout the project.

> " *The most acute risk is the physical withdrawal of young people—a demographic hollow-out that removes those with the digital skills and innovative energy needed to drive change."* — Layal Boustany, Executive director at Mada Association

Early Warning and Adaptive Management

Early warning and adaptive management were supported through continuous monitoring of shifts in local tensions, allowing activities and messaging to be adjusted in a conflict-sensitive manner whenever needed. Practical barriers to participation—such as the irregular working hours faced by youth from migrant backgrounds—were addressed through flexible scheduling, timely reminders, and short-notice confirmations requests, ensuring that engagement remained accessible and responsive to participants' circumstances.

INCLUSIVE & EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION

Target Groups

The project engages Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian, and migrant youth living in the urban areas of Greater Beirut and Tripoli, including Shatila, Burj El Barajneh, Beddawi, and Nahr El Bared Palestine refugee camps, with the majority of migrant participants being Sudanese, Ethiopian, and Bangladeshi. Their participation is facilitated through partner outreach and safe-space arrangements to ensure accessible and secure engagement. Across all these communities, the project places a particular emphasis on the meaningful participation of young women, who are prioritised throughout the project.

How Inclusion Is Ensured

Inclusion is ensured through a combination of mixed and women-only formats, supported by gender-sensitive facilitation that responds to the needs of different groups. Practical barriers are reduced by adapting transport arrangements, scheduling, and communication methods to make participation as accessible as possible. Young people are also directly involved in co-designing activities, monitoring progress, and communicating results, ensuring that the project remains grounded in their perspectives and priorities.

2   For more information, see: https://tms-lebanon.com/

Tackling Structural Inequalities

The project tackles structural inequalities—such as host–refugee tensions, youth unemployment, overcrowding, and gendered vulnerabilities—through dialogue, arts, and media initiatives that humanise "the other" and expand young people's access to local networks and institutions. These approaches help create spaces where underlying grievances can be addressed constructively, while strengthening relationships across diverse groups and communities.

> *Because the state has historically under-invested in the North, the scarcity of basic services regularly turns everyday neighbourly interactions into potential flashpoints. When resources cannot meet everyone's needs, even a small perception of unfair distribution, whether real or based on rumour, quickly slips into sectarian or "us versus them" narratives, obscuring the deeper issue of state neglect."* — Layal Boustany, Executive director at Mada Association

Expected Peacebuilding & Social Cohesion Outcomes

Given the early stage of implementation, the project is expected to generate the following outcomes across these areas.

- **Trust and Inclusive Relationships:** The project is expected to contribute to building trust and more inclusive relationships by strengthening collaboration among youth-led CSOs across different communities and divides. It is also anticipated to foster more equitable interactions among Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian, and migrant youth, creating spaces where young people can engage on equal terms. In parallel, local stakeholders are expected to increasingly recognise the value of youth contributions, reinforcing a sense of inclusion and shared responsibility within the community.

- **Dialogue, Mediation and Everyday Coexistence:** The project is expected to support young people in facilitating non-confrontational spaces for dialogue and in constructively escalating community issues to municipal interlocutors when needed. Cultural events and youth-led media storytelling are also expected to help reduce stereotypes and promote everyday coexistence, creating opportunities for more open and respectful interaction across different groups.

- **Community Ownership and Visibility:** Community ownership and visibility are expected to be strengthened by ensuring that youth-led CSOs play an active role in shaping the design, implementation, and monitoring of project activities. Inter-regional exchanges and public events are anticipated to highlight youth contributions and promote positive counter-narratives, showcasing their leadership and fostering broader recognition of their role within and beyond their communities.

> *During recent spikes in energy costs, smallholder farmers in Akkar stopped competing for limited resources and instead formed communal solar-sharing clusters. These groups brought together Lebanese landowners, Syrian workers, and local youth to manage shared irrigation and power points. By focusing on the structural challenge of energy poverty, they were able to bypass the sectarian and nationalistic tensions that are often exploited by political gatekeepers to keep communities divided."* — Layal Boustany, Executive director at Mada Association

Bridging Voices Across Communities: Youth Communication, Trust, and Everyday Coexistence Among Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian Youth in Greater Beirut and Tripoli Region

As part of the Power of Youth project, the forthcoming publication "Bridging Voices Across Communities" presents a youth-led qualitative study—currently in progress—exploring how communication, identity, and everyday interactions shape either social cohesion or friction among Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian young people across Beirut (including Shatila and Burj El Barajneh Palestinine refugee camps) and the wider Tripoli region (including Beddawi and Nahr el Bared Palestine refugee camps).

OPERATIONALISING THE WPS AND YPS AGENDAS

Women, Peace & Security

The project strengthens the Women, Peace and Security agenda by **providing young women with training and mentoring in safe participation and media engagement.** It ensures that Palestinian, Syrian, and migrant young women are represented in CSO governance structures and involved in shaping the design of activities. In addition, gender-responsive communication and creative spaces enable young women to shape local narratives and influence community decision-making, reinforcing their role as active contributors to peace and social cohesion-making.

> *Across its programmes, WeWorld recognises that gender transformation is a crucial element of peacebuilding. In Lebanon, women and girls are disproportionately affected by overlapping crises, and widening gender inequalities further strain social relations. Supporting women's leadership, participation, and economic empowerment is therefore essential to strengthening community resilience and fostering more peaceful and inclusive societies."* — Valeria Ongaro, Project Coordinator

> *We need to move beyond treating "empowerment" as a vague slogan and instead focus on concrete, structural opportunities that allow marginalised groups to reclaim power and strengthen social cohesion. One of the most promising avenues is the leadership role women can take in valueaddition and Mouneh (food-preservation) cooperatives. By formalising these roles, women gain real collective bargaining power and become far less vulnerable to the extractive practices of dominant market actors."* — Layal Boustany, Executive director at Mada Association

Youth, Peace & Security

The project advances the Youth, Peace and Security agenda by **strengthening the capacities of youth-led CSOs and supporting young people in leading monitoring efforts and generating evidence on community dynamics**. It promotes youth creativity and expression through the co-creation of a graphic novel, cultural events, and responsible media outputs that amplify constructive narratives. The project also facilitates engagement between young people and local institutions to enhance responsiveness and accountability, while intergenerational formats create opportunities to challenge age-based power hierarchies in a respectful and inclusive manner.

> *Through the Power of Youth project, WeWorld strengthens youth leadership by investing in youth-led CSOs and informal groups with capacity building, financial grants, and essential equipment. This support enables young women and men from diverse backgrounds to design, lead, and implement community initiatives that reduce tensions, foster dialogue, and promote peaceful coexistence, while also building their organisational and advocacy capacities. Young people are further supported to influence decision-making not only at community level, but also by directly contributing to the definition of monitoring frameworks and the systematisation of evidence on impact, allowing successful approaches to be replicated across their interventions."* — Valeria Ongaro, Project Coordinator

EMERGING LESSONS

At this stage, lessons learned and recommendations cannot yet be fully assessed, as the project remains in its early implementation phase and comprehensive monitoring is still underway. Nevertheless, several emerging insights are beginning to take shape, offering an initial indication of what is working well and where further attention may be needed.

● **Integrate conflict analysis earlier in the design cycle** to strengthen risk-mitigation measures from the outset.

● **Tailor engagement strategies for working and migrant-background youth**—including adapted timings, accessible venues, and regular reminders—to support consistent participation.

● **Shift from proposal-oriented tools to full implementation toolkits**, including the ongoing rollout of the Conflict Sensitivity Toolkit, to ensure more effective operationalisation.

● **Deepen community consultations prior to design**, engaging youth, women, CSOs, and municipalities to improve targeting, relevance, and ownership.

● **Maintain a conflict-sensitive MEAL system** that allows for rapid adaptation in response to shifting or volatile dynamics.

WeWorld

THE VOICE OF

Valeria Ongaro
Project Coordinator in Lebanon

"WeWorld seeks to position itself strategically by acting as a bridge between different actors, strengthening the capacities of communities and CSOs while facilitating dialogue with institutions and decision-makers. In Lebanon's fragmented and highly politicised context, credibility and neutrality are essential; adopting a conflict-sensitive, inclusive, and transparent approach is therefore crucial for reducing perceptions of inequality and reinforcing trust.

Strategic positioning also means aligning humanitarian action with longer-term peacebuilding and development goals. WeWorld advances this approach by conducting MEAL assessments and drawing on institutional data as well as local knowledge to inform programme design, helping to ensure that interventions support inclusive, locally grounded, and sustainable peace processes."

WeWorld in

MOZAMBIQUE

Since 2017, Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province has been gripped by violent conflict, with extremist groups killing many and displacing over a million people. Although some fighters come from neighbouring countries, many are local, motivated by deep social and economic marginalisation in one of the country's poorest regions. The discovery of major natural gas reserves has largely bypassed local communities, intensifying long-standing grievances. Despite this fragile context, humanitarian and development actors have continued to deliver vital support, including food, shelter, healthcare, and education. Operating in an active conflict setting requires careful approaches to avoid fuelling tensions, favouring specific groups, or enabling the diversion of aid by armed actors. The Northern Crisis Recovery Project (NCRP) was designed to respond to these challenges by strengthening peacebuilding, social cohesion, and community resilience across affected communities.

⊘ Highlights

Mozambique's Cabo Delgado region continues to face the effects of prolonged violence, displacement, and deep social divides. Against this backdrop, the NCRP project *Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion in Cabo Delgado* worked to rebuild trust, strengthen local structures, and support peaceful coexistence.

OUR APPROACH COMBINED:
→ **Community-led peacebuilding**, through revitalised Peacebuilding Committees (PBCs), volunteer networks, and inclusive dialogue spaces
→ **Creative and cultural engagement**, using theatre, music, murals, sports, and participatory photography to communicate peace messages
→ **Gender-and youth-responsive strategies**, empowering women and young people as leaders, facilitators, and agents of change
→ **Conflict-sensitive and participatory planning**, guided by local mapping, continuous context monitoring, and strong coordination with authorities
→ **Intergenerational collaboration**, bringing together older and younger community members to overcome divides
OUR RESULTS AT A GLANCE
→ **6 Peacebuilding Committees** revitalised, trained, fully operational, and equipped to lead local peace initiatives
→ **120 volunteers** trained on peace, social cohesion, gender-based violence (GBV) prevention, and creative community engagement
→ **15 community associations** trained, with 13 formally legalised
→ **300+ community activities** delivered, including theatre, festivals, murals, dialogue sessions, and football tournaments
→ Youth leadership strengthened, with **25 groups (involving approximately 250 youths)** leading cultural and sporting initiatives and contributing to photography exhibitions
→ Women's participation increased, with women leading PBCs, shaping community assemblies, and taking visible roles in peace messaging
→ Improved collaboration between IDP and host communities

The strength of the NCRP project lies in its ability to grow from within the community itself: empowering local actors, reinforcing inclusive community structures, and using culturally grounded methods that resonate with people's daily lives. By combining peacebuilding, social cohesion, and local leadership development, it leaves communities better equipped to manage conflicts and sustain peace long after the project ends.

FROM INPUTS TO IMPACT:
The NCRP Theory of Change

If communities are actively engaged through culturally relevant, participatory, and intergenerational activities;

and Peacebuilding Committees, volunteers, youth, women's groups, and local authorities are trained, empowered, and equipped to lead inclusive dialogue and conflict-sensitive;

and marginalised groups (women, youth, IDPs) gain space, skills, and recognition to participate in governance and peacebuilding;

and conflict sensitivity, risk monitoring, and Do No Harm principles guide every stage of the project;

then communities will strengthen trust, manage tensions more peacefully, and build sustainable, locally owned mechanisms for social cohesion and long-term resilience.

A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT ACROSS COMMUNITIES AND INSTITUTIONS

The NCRP project *Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion in Cabo Delgado* was carried out from May 2022 to October 2023 by WeWorld, working alongside a broad consortium of partners and stakeholders. The initiative brought together a diverse range of actors — from Peacebuilding Committees (PBCs), traditional and religious leaders, and youth and women's groups to volunteers

and cultural and sports associations. Local authorities were also closely involved, including Administradores, SDAE, SEJE, CNV, Consultative Councils, and district administrations in Ancuabe and Chiure. Key partners such as UNOPS, the Peaceful Change Initiative (PCI), NGUVA, Estúdio Willgeorge Music, local consultants, and universities contributed to the project's reach and impact. Collaboration with PCI played a central role, supporting stakeholder mapping and capacity-building — ultimately strengthening alignment between social cohesion and peacebuilding outcomes.

FROM OBJECTIVES TO RESULTS

OBJECTIVES	KEY RESULTS
Map key stakeholders, community structures, conflict dynamics, and existing peace resources	• Stakeholder and conflict-mapping completed across six target communities • Contextual analysis used to guide and refine project planning
Strengthen and revitalise Peacebuilding Committees (PBCs)	• **6 Peacebuilding Committees (PBCs) revitalised, trained, and fully operational**, supported with bicycles, megaphones, registration kits, and dedicated community spaces
Provide training for youth, women, associations, and volunteers	• **120 volunteers trained** on peacebuilding, social cohesion, gender-based violence (GBV), photography, music, and community engagement • 15 associations trained, with 13 successfully legalised
Encourage community participation through cultural, artistic, sporting, and environmental activities	• **Over 300 community activities delivered**, including environmental action days, theatre performances, festivals, mural creation, football tournaments, and dialogue sessions
Foster stronger cooperation and trust between communities, local leaders, and authorities	• Strengthened collaboration between Internally Displaced People (IDP) and host communities, as well as with local authorities • Case study on land conflict and social tensions between IDP and host communities developed

TOOLS, METHODOLOGIES & INNOVATION

● **Conflict-Sensitive and Inclusive Programming:** The project's design, mapping processes, monitoring, and evaluation were informed by WeWorld's guidance, drawing on Peaceful Change Initiative's conflict-sensitivity methodology as a broader reference framework. Participatory approaches were central throughout, including community mapping, assemblies, Peacebuilding Committees-led dialogues, focus group discussions, and stakeholder consultations. Gender-transformative and youth-empowerment methodologies — such as Women and Peace workshops, leadership training, participatory photography, rap, music, and sports activities — ensured broad, inclusive, and genuinely transformative community engagement.

● **Adaptation to Local Contexts:** Project activities were translated into local languages (Emakhuwa and Makonde) to ensure accessibility and meaningful participation. Cultural practices — including music, dance, and theatre — were used as communication channels for peace messages, anchoring the intervention in familiar traditions. Youth-friendly approaches were tailored to local interests

such as rap, football, and photography, helping sustain engagement and ownership. Women's assemblies were adapted to align with cultural gender norms, creating safe and culturally appropriate spaces for dialogue and self-expression.

● **Artistic, Cultural, and Media Approaches:** Artistic and cultural expressions — including theatre, murals, storytelling, traditional music, rap, photography, and dance — were widely used to convey messages of peace and unity in ways that resonated with local communities. Media engagement through local radio, social media platforms, and community communication channels helped amplify positive narratives, counter misinformation, and promote dialogue and inclusion.

● **Dialogue and Intergenerational Collaboration:** Peacebuilding Committees-facilitated dialogues, together with cultural events, murals, music, theatre, sports activities, and environmental action days, brought together participants of all ages. These mixed-age interactions strengthened intergenerational cooperation and helped reinforce peaceful, respectful community relations.

OPERATIONALISING THE HDP NEXUS

The NCRP project operated as a Nexus initiative, integrating Humanitarian, Development, and Peace components within an active conflict context. While responding to immediate needs generated by displacement and insecurity, the project simultaneously strengthened long-term community structures and capacities to promote sustainable peace and social cohesion. term community structures and capacities to promote sustainable peace and social cohesion.

● **Humanitarian:** Provided safe and accessible spaces for dialogue and community engagement in areas affected by displacement, insecurity, and rising tensions.

● **Development:** Built local capacities by training associations, Peacebuilding Committees (PBCs), and Consultative Councils, and by supporting the legalisation and formalisation of youth and women-led groups. and women-led groups.

● **Peacebuilding:** Facilitated conflict resolution processes, community dialogues, mediation efforts, and a wide range of cultural and artistic initiatives aimed at fostering mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence.

CONFLICT SENSITIVITY & RISK MANAGEMENT

Multi-Layered Conflict Analysis

The project carried out a comprehensive, multi-layered analysis of the local context to guide interventions effectively. Peaceful Change Initiative (PCI) and WeWorld jointly mapped stakeholders, conflict dynamics, risks, power structures, and community networks across the six target communities. Validation workshops with local communities, Peacebuilding Committees (PBCs), and district authorities ensured that the findings accurately reflected local realities and priorities. Continuous context monitoring was maintained through PBCs, volunteers, field staff, and local leaders, enabling the project to remain responsive to emerging risks. Conflict-sensitivity tools were embedded throughout planning, implementation, and monitoring, ensuring that all activities adhered to the Do No Harm principle and minimised the risk of exacerbating tensions.

Identification and Management of Risks

Potential risks were carefully identified both before and during implementation. These included:

● NSAG attacks affecting security, mobility, and community participation;

● tensions between Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and host communities, particularly regarding trust, access to services, and perceptions of fairness;

● risks of favouring specific groups or creating unrealistic expectations of material support;

● miscommunication arising from language barriers or uneven participation;

● high turnover of PBC members due to migration and loss of personal documentation.

The project adopted proactive mitigation measures, including flexible workplans, the relocation or postponement of activities during security alerts, prioritising local facilitators, and identifying safe community spaces. These strategies ensured that activities could continue while protecting participants and reducing exposure to harm.

Early Warning and Adaptive Management

PBCs and volunteers served as early warning sources, reporting emerging tensions or shifts in community dynamics. Field teams gathered information through surveys, observation checklists, and structured feedback channels, enabling continuous adaptation of project activities. Coordination with district authorities ensured up-to-date information on security alerts, movement restrictions, and emerging risks, supporting informed and timely decision-making.

INCLUSIVE & EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION

Community Consultation

Communities were actively involved throughout risk assessment and planning. Participatory methods included focus groups, community assemblies, interviews, and PBC-led dialogues. Women's and youth assemblies helped identify vulnerabilities and contributed to defining safe and culturally appropriate participation modalities.

Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups and Promoting Inclusion

The project systematically assessed potential negative impacts on vulnerable groups — including women, youth, IDPs, and minority populations — to ensure that interventions protected and empowered those most at risk. Activities were intentionally designed to prevent dominance by influential actors and to promote equal voice in decision-making. Capacity-building efforts focused on underrepresented groups, strengthening their participation in governance mechanisms, Peacebuilding Committees, and wider community structures. Joint dialogue sessions, cultural initiatives, and collaborative community actions encouraged intergroup communication, mutual understanding, and peaceful coexistence, helping to reduce tensions and foster sustained social cohesion.

Challenging Structural Inequalities

Beyond addressing immediate needs, the project also worked to tackle underlying structural inequalities. Interventions promoted the representation of women and youth in leadership roles, supported the formalisation and recognition of marginalised groups, and strengthened inclusive governance structures. Cultural and artistic approaches — including theatre, murals, music, and photography — were used to challenge restrictive social norms and enhance the agency of vulnerable groups. By combining these strategies, the project aimed to shift social norms, empower local actors, and ensure long-term, equitable participation in decision-making and peacebuilding processes.

PEACEBUILDING & SOCIAL COHESION

Fostering Inclusive Relationships and Trust

The project strengthened trust, collaboration, and inclusive relationships across different community groups. Joint activities brought together women, youth, traditional leaders, and host and IDP communities, helping to reduce stereotypes and encourage shared problem-solving. These interactions fostered a culture of cooperation and mutual understanding at the local level.

Dialogue, Mediation, and Reconciliation

Structured dialogue sessions created safe spaces for discussing tensions, expressing grievances, and identifying collective solutions. Local committees and trained facilitators supported mediation efforts, helping to resolve disputes and contributing to meaningful reconciliation. These community-led mechanisms strengthened trust and provided sustainable models for conflict resolution.

WeWorld

Strengthening Community Resilience and Ownership

By empowering local structures, building leadership skills, and promoting collective participation in decision-making, the project strengthened community resilience. Activities encouraged communities to manage conflicts independently and sustain peacebuilding efforts beyond the project's timeframe, fostering long-term social cohesion and a shared sense of responsibility for local peace initiatives.

> *We've seen real progress in how our community interacts, with youth participating more in decision-making and dialogue. People are coming together to solve problems, support vulnerable families, and organise collective actions like infrastructure repairs, clean-ups, and sports and cultural events. WeWorld has facilitated these changes by creating safe spaces for dialogue, training youth and women, and supporting community peace committees. Their approach links humanitarian aid, development, and peacebuilding, strengthening social cohesion. We imagine peace as a community with employment opportunities, gender equality, harmonious coexistence, and absence of conflict. Achieving this requires more training, greater unity, and dedicated peace activists to work with local authorities and sustain these efforts."* - Bernabé Bento Romão, Community Volunteer from Meculane

OPERATIONALISING THE WPS AND YPS AGENDAS

Women, Peace & Security

Gender considerations were integrated throughout project design and implementation. Dedicated *Women and Peace* workshops highlighted women's roles in peacebuilding, and two PBCs were led by women to ensure meaningful female participation. Community assemblies created safe spaces for women to voice concerns, propose solutions, and influence activity planning. Engagement with local leaders helped address cultural barriers, while awareness campaigns on gender-based violence (GBV) and early marriage reinforced equitable participation and protection.

Challenging Traditional Gender Roles and Power Structures

The project actively challenged entrenched gender hierarchies. Women's leadership within PBCs and community governance increased both their representation and visibility, while creative initiatives — including theatre, music, and photography — enabled women to express agency. Intergenerational dialogues further questioned traditional norms, fostering more equitable participation across age and gender groups.

Women as Agents of Change

Women played central roles in planning and leading activities, facilitating community discussions, and promoting peaceful messages through creative and cultural initiatives. Their active involvement strengthened leadership capacities, increased visibility, and ensured their recognition as legitimate and influential actors in local governance and peacebuilding.

> *In our community, poverty, limited services, and land and family conflicts affect everyone, but young people and women are hit hardest. Youth face high unemployment and few opportunities, while women and children are exposed to domestic violence. WeWorld has helped by creating safe spaces for dialogue, training youth and women in leadership, and promoting cultural and sports activities that bring people together. Through these initiatives, young people are now more engaged in decision-making, helping mediate conflicts and support their communities. Women also take active roles in meetings and local projects. These efforts strengthen trust, social cohesion, and peaceful collaboration. Still, we need more economic opportunities, better mediation mechanisms, and expanded programs to empower youth and women fully. With continued support, our community can work together, reduce tensions, and build lasting peace."* - Raibo Chafim, Government Focal Point of Chiúre District

Youth, Peace & Security

Youth were placed at the centre of project strategies as key agents of transformation. 25 volunteer groups — involving approximately 250 young people — were trained in social cohesion and GBV prevention. Young participants led cultural and sporting activities, produced peace-themed rap music, and contributed to photography exhibitions in Maputo and Pemba. Community dialogues and awareness campaigns empowered youth to influence local decision-making, reinforcing their leadership and agency in peacebuilding.

Intergenerational Collaboration

The project promoted intergenerational initiatives to bridge age-related divides. Activities engaged both younger and older community members through joint cultural events, sports activities, environmental actions, and dialogue sessions. These initiatives encouraged mutual learning, fostered respect across generations, and strengthened inclusive decision-making processes.

Challenging Generational Power Structures

Structured youth engagement and intergenerational dialogue helped challenge traditional hierarchies. Creative platforms — including music, theatre, and photography — enabled young people to interact with elders and local authorities, fostering more equitable participation and greater recognition of their contributions to community development.

Youth as Visible Leaders

Young people took active roles in planning, leading, and facilitating activities. By using cultural and creative tools to convey messages of peace and inclusion, they gained visibility, leadership recognition, and legitimacy, establishing themselves as influential actors in community governance and local peacebuilding.

> *The main challenges in our community are land conflicts between natives and displaced people, as well as power disputes among displaced leaders. Young people are most affected by these tensions. Despite this, youth are increasingly participating in community decision-making and taking active roles in promoting peace. WeWorld has helped by creating spaces for youth engagement and supporting recreational and cultural activities. Through trainings, young volunteers have learned how to contribute to social cohesion, lead dialogue, and resolve conflicts. One example is the joint preparation of a theatrical performance to foster unity. These initiatives show that youth can be powerful agents of change. However, more support is needed: additional training, materials, and safe spaces for leisure would enable them to continue promoting peace effectively."* - Inácio Constâncio, Marrupa Community Volunteer

WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT STRENGTHENING PEACE AND SOCIAL COHESION

Strategic Lessons

- **Cultural and sports activities drive cohesion.** Community-based cultural and sports activities — including football tournaments, music competitions, participatory photography, theatre, murals, and initiatives such as *Crochet for Peace* — proved highly effective in fostering social cohesion, dialogue, and inclusion. Extending project duration to 2–3 years would help consolidate peacebuilding outcomes.

- **Tackling inequalities strengthens trust.** Addressing social fractures and structural inequalities (including IDP–host community tensions, gender inequalities, and youth marginalisation) contributed to greater trust and cohesion. Strengthening strategies to reduce structural inequalities and to formalise marginalised groups is key to ensuring equitable representation in local governance.

- **Strong MEAL systems improve responsiveness.** Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) systems with conflict-sensitive indicators and participatory feedback mechanisms ensured that interventions remained responsive to emerging risks and shifting community needs. Linking MEAL findings directly to decision-making strengthened conflict mitigation strategies.

- **Continuous learning reduces risks.** Documenting lessons learned about unintended consequences enabled timely adaptation of project strategies, reducing risks of exclusion or harm. Systematic learning processes should continue to strengthen Do No Harm and conflict-sensitive approaches.

Operational Lessons

● **Scale up the activities that spark cohesion.** Participatory cultural and sports activities, creative methods, and small income-generating initiatives linked to social cohesion should be scaled up to reinforce community engagement and ownership.

● **Consistent training strengthens local capacity.** Training delivered to Peacebuilding Committees (PBCs) and volunteers on conflict management, social cohesion, gender equality, and GBV prevention strengthened local capacities and legitimacy. Standardising PBC training manuals and maintaining ongoing capacity-building are essential for consistent practice.

● **Intergenerational collaboration bridges divides.** Structured intergenerational initiatives should be promoted to help bridge generational divides and encourage mutual learning between younger and older community members.

● **Safe spaces unlock women's participation.** Creating safe spaces for women — through dedicated assemblies, workshops, and leadership roles — ensured meaningful participation and influence in activity planning. Targeted capacity-building for women should be continued and expanded.

● **Strong engagement mechanisms enhance adaptability.** Strong community engagement mechanisms, including focus groups, assemblies, and stakeholder dialogues, supported adaptive and conflict-sensitive programming. Participatory planning and continuous feedback should inform activity design and real-time adjustments.

THE VOICE OF

Aneta Jelinkova
Country Representative Mozambique

"WeWorld positions itself as a facilitator and connector, rather than a top-down implementer. The organisation focuses on empowering local actors, strengthening existing peace structures, and creating inclusive platforms for dialogue and collaboration, while maintaining strong coordination with institutional stakeholders. From the very beginning, the project anticipated potential disengagement risks by prioritising transparency, regular communication, and community ownership. Trust was nurtured through ongoing dialogue, responsiveness to community feedback, and reliance on trusted local structures. Flexibility in implementation and respect for local rhythms helped maintain engagement, even during periods of insecurity or uncertainty. Certain elements stood out for their strong potential to be scaled up. Community-led peace structures, participatory conflict analysis, gender- and youth-transformative approaches, and cultural and artistic methodologies proved adaptable, locally owned, cost-effective, and highly effective in building trust and social cohesion across diverse contexts. At the same time, the project faced challenges, such as working in volatile environments, maintaining participation amid insecurity, and managing different expectations. These challenges highlighted the importance of adaptive planning, flexibility, and strong reliance on local actors. The key lesson learned is the value of continuous context analysis, adaptive management, and investing in relationships as a strategic asset. WeWorld's strength lies in combining humanitarian sensitivity, development expertise, and peacebuilding approaches into a coherent strategy. By fostering inclusive processes, strengthening local ownership, and building trust across communities and institutions, WeWorld contributes to sustainable change and remains a trusted actor in local peacebuilding efforts."

WeWorld

WeWorld in

SWAHILI COAST

Across the Swahili Coast - a stretch of shoreline along East Africa facing the Indian Ocean and spanning Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique - many young people find themselves excluded from civic life and decision-making, with few inclusive economic opportunities to build a stable future. These challenges often leave youth vulnerable to juvenile gangs, crime, and violent extremism, while tensions over land, water, and marine resources continue to rise. At the same time, displacement in northern Mozambique adds another layer of strain to daily life. In this context, the Kujenga Amani Pamoja (Building Peace Together) initiative worked to empower young women and men in the coastal border areas of Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique to become peacebuilders and drivers of positive change.

✓ Highlights

Across Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique, young women and men face limited civic participation, restricted economic opportunities, and heightened exposure to local tensions and insecurity. The **Kujenga Amani Pamoja (KAP) project** - coordinated by WeWorld and co-funded by the European Union, in partnership with a diverse consortium of organisations - responded by empowering youth as peace actors, strengthening local structures for dialogue and mediation, and building inclusive, safe, and cohesive community environments.

OUR APPROACH COMBINED:
➜ Youth-centred peacebuilding
➜ Conflict-sensitive implementation
➜ Arts-based, cultural and media engagement
➜ Inclusive community dialogue platforms
➜ Strengthened intergenerational dialogues and relationships with authorities and security actors
➜ Operationalisation of the Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) nexus, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, and the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda

OUR RESULTS AT A GLANCE
➜ 40 community conflict-analysis workshops (556 participants)
➜ 127 youth consultations + 8 Open Mic Forums (1,645 youth reached)
➜ 130 Community Peace Activists (CPAs) mentored
➜ 37 youth-led peacebuilding initiatives funded
➜ 66 community dialogues and forums facilitated
➜ Photovoice exhibitions in 5 cities
➜ 108 teachers and 99 journalists engaged
➜ 14.732 students involved through school arts initiatives

The KAP initiative strengthened trust across generations, improved youth–security relations, enhanced accountability of public authorities, and fostered cooperation in addressing resource and environmental conflicts. The methodology is **scalable and rooted in community-owned structures**—particularly CSO–CPA-media networks and local peace and security platforms — supported by the systematic application of conflict-sensitivity tools.

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

Despite young women and men being increasingly recognised as key actors in peacebuilding processes, their meaningful engagement remains fragmented and inadequately resourced. Structural barriers — including exclusion from decision-making spaces, limited access to information and resources, restrictive cultural norms, and persistent stereotypes that associate youth with violence rather than peace — continue to limit their active participation. Along the Swahili Coast, these challenges are further compounded by socio-economic and environmental pressures. Many young people face limited livelihood opportunities and rising tensions related to access to land, water and fishing grounds, alongside constrained and often mistrustful interactions with authorities and security actors. At the same time, tensions between Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and host communities in northern Mozambique places additional strain on already vulnerable communities.

The KAP project addressed these challenges through **locally grounded peacebuilding** and youth-led engagement across three interconnected pillars:

1. **Understanding:** promoting a deeper analysis of local conflict dynamics and key actors, while identifying existing and emerging spaces for meaningful youth engagement in peacebuilding processes.

2. **Skills Development:** investing in training and capacity-building for youth — including members of CSOs, journalists, Community Peace Activists, students and teachers — to strengthen conflict resolution skills, conflict sensitivity, and peacebuilding practices.

3. **Engagement:** expanding young people's access to safe spaces and civic opportunities to actively participate in community-level conflict resolution mechanisms and peacebuilding initiatives.

Mirko Cecchi/WeWorld

FROM INPUTS TO IMPACT: the KAP Theory of Change

If young people are meaningfully engaged in identifying and analysing the conflict dynamics affecting them within their communities;

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and gain skills in peaceful conflict resolution, conflict sensitivity and inclusive peacebuilding

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and have access to safe and inclusive spaces and civic opportunities to design and lead impactful peacebuilding initiatives within their communities

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and dialogue platforms between youth, local authorities, security actors and community leaders are strengthened

↓

then youth participate meaningfully and are recognised as legitimate and influential actors in local governance and community-owned peacebuilding mechanisms, contributing to reduced tensions and violence and to enhanced social cohesion within their communities.

A REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP ROOTED IN COMMUNITIES

Kujenga Amani Pamoja was a regional initiative co-funded by the European Union and led by WeWorld, in partnership with a diverse consortium of organisations. Implemented between March 2023 and April 2026, the project aimed to strengthen social cohesion and resilience along the Swahili Coast. At its core, the project engaged young women and men aged 18 to 35 — including members of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), peace activists, students, teachers, and journalists from both traditional and digital media — who constituted the primary participants of the initiative. The initiative also involved a wide range of stakeholders, including traditional and religious leaders, elders' councils, interfaith committees, and formal and informal peace and se-

curity structures such as peace committees and community tribunals, as well as security actors and government authorities.

Alongside WeWorld, the project was jointly led by Peaceful Change Initiative (PCi) and implemented through a strong network of local partners: Tanzania Building Future Organisation (TABUFO) in Mtwara and 4H Tanzania in Tanga (Tanzania); Stretchers Youth Organisation (SYO) in Kenya; and the Conselho Nacional do Voluntariado (CNV) in Mozambique. The work was further supported by key associate institutions, including the Centre for Strategic and Peace Studies at the University of Dar es Salaam, the Horn International Institute for Strategic Studies in Kenya, and the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences at Lúrio University in Mozambique. Together, these partners formed a collaborative platform aimed at driving meaningful, community-rooted change across the region.

FROM OBJECTIVES TO RESULTS

OBJECTIVE	MAIN RESULTS
Strengthening young people's understanding of local conflict dynamics, the actors involved, and the spaces where they can take on positive leadership roles in promoting peace, stability, and conflict prevention	• A baseline survey carried out with CEFA and its partner, Agency for Peace-building (AP) • Academic research exploring the role and potential of young people in peacebuilding • **40 workshops across the three countries, involving 112 CBOs and youth groups and engaging 556 young women and men** (aged 18-35) in community-based conflict analysis • A total of **127 youth consultations and 8 Open Mic Forums** organised by trained Community Peace Activists, reaching 1,645 young women and men (aged 18-35) across the region
Building stronger youth capacities in conflict prevention, mediation, conflict sensitivity, and peacebuilding, enabling young people to take an active and informed role in promoting peaceful communities	• **45 WeWorld and partner staff** trained in Conflict Sensitivity across the three countries • **80 members of local CSOs** (aged 18-35) trained in conflict analysis, conflict sensitivity, and supported in designing context-specific peacebuilding initiatives • **130 young Community Peace Activists** trained in peaceful conflict resolution and community dialogue facilitation • **99 young journalists from 61 media outlets** trained in conflict-sensitive reporting and the media's role in peacebuilding • **108 teachers** (aged 18-35) trained in peace education and the use of arts as a tool for peacebuilding
Expanding young people's access to safe spaces and civic opportunities that allow them to engage meaningfully in decision-making, peacebuilding, and efforts to strengthen social cohesion	• **37 youth-led peacebuilding initiatives** supported through a sub-granting scheme for local CSOs (15 in Kenya, 14 in Tanzania, and 8 in Mozambique) • Engagement workshops for 42 formal and informal Community Peace and Security Structures - including Peace Committees, Interfaith Committees, and community policing groups - to strengthen peaceful conflict management, early warning, conflict monitoring, and youth participation in community-level mediation • **66 youth-led community dialogues** across the region, including inter-generational exchanges and structured forums with policymakers, community leaders and security actors • **12 arts-based peacebuilding projects** implemented in schools, along with 38 art exchanges involving 53 primary and secondary schools and reaching approximately 14.732 students • The **Women See Many Things Photovoice** initiative carried out in all three countries, accompanied by 5 public photo exhibitions in Tanga, Dar es Salaam, Kwale (Kenya), Pemba (Mozambique), and at Fotografia Europea[1] in Italy • 18 events organised to mark international days such as the International Day of Peace and International Youth Day, and national forums on YPS agenda • 5 media campaigns promoting peace and social cohesion in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique

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1　For more information see https://www.fotografiaeuropea.it/fe2025/en/mostra/women-see-many-things/

A CONTEXT-RESPONSIVE APPROACH

Multi-Layered Conflict Analysis

The Kujenga Amani Pamoja project adopted a multi-layered and participatory conflict analysis process, implemented through a three-step approach.

1. The process began with an initial assessment carried out by PCi together with the project team and key informants in each target location across the three countries.
2. This was followed by a training on conflict analysis, conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding for young members of CSOs. Building on this training, CSOs led community-level conflict analyses through a cascade approach involving Community Peace Activists (CPAs) and young people from diverse backgrounds.
3. As part of this process, CSOs - supported by the project team - facilitated 40 community workshops with CPAs and youth aged 18-35. These workshops created spaces for meaningful discussions on the conflict dynamics shaping participants' lives and engaged 112 community-based and youth groups, including *boda boda* riders (motorcycle taxi drivers commonly used for local transport), fishermen, farmers, and women's groups. In total, 556 participants aged 18-36 took part, nearly half of them women.

This preliminary work laid the foundation for a conflict-sensitive approach, supported the development of a shared understanding of local peace and conflict dynamics among project teams in Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique, and equipped communities with the tools needed to conduct conflict analysis within their own contexts.

Kujenga Amani Pamoja within WeWorld's Peacebuilding Approach and EU Priorities on FIMI

Kujenga Amani Pamoja reflects WeWorld's integrated approach to working in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, where peacebuilding, governance, social cohesion and inclusive development are closely interconnected. The project demonstrates how locally led initiatives can address both the drivers and the consequences of conflict while strengthening trust between communities, civil society and institutions. **In line with European Union priorities on addressing Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI)[2], the project also contributed to strengthening community resilience to misinformation, hate speech and polarising narratives. Through collaboration with journalists, civil society organisations and youth groups, the initiative promoted conflict-sensitive reporting, media literacy, critical thinking and inclusive dialogue.** By empowering young people, supporting community mediation and dialogue structures, and fostering responsible media engagement, the project contributed to more informed public discourse and more peaceful, resilient communities. The experience and lessons generated will continue to inform WeWorld's future programming across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.

2　For more information see https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/beyond-disinformation-what-fimi_en

RISK IDENTIFICATION

Analysing Conflict Drivers and Community Dynamics

Several **conflict drivers and community-level tensions** emerged across all contexts, including the exclusion of youth from decision-making structures; widespread mistrust between young people and security actors, often linked to harassment, arbitrary arrest, and corruption; rising youth involvement in crime, substance abuse, and in some settings violent extremism; persistent gender inequality and pervasive Gender Based Violence (GBV); as well as longstanding intergenerational tensions and identity-based (interfaith or interethnic) disputes.

● **Kenya (Kwale County)** faces acute challenges linked to land governance, where unclear tenure systems, corruption, exclusionary cultural norms, and unresolved succession disputes fuel conflict. Youth also reported extremely high levels of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), limited awareness of protective laws, and insufficient support mechanisms. Crime, drug abuse, juvenile gang activity, and forms of violent extremism are recurrent, exacerbated by weak rehabilitation services and police misconduct. Additional risks include youth exclusion from land boards, mediation structures, and interfaith platforms, as well as localised tensions linked to witchcraft accusations.

● **Tanzania (Mtwara and Tanga regions)** presents a range of governance-related tensions, including weak youth engagement, perceptions of favouritism and corruption within government loan schemes, and strained relationships with local authorities. Youth–police tensions are widespread, particularly affecting *boda boda* (motorbikes) riders who face harassment, arbitrary fines, and movement restrictions. Resource-based conflicts involving pastoralists, farmers, fishers and seaweed farmers, and small-scale producers emerge due to land pressure, unclear boundaries, or contentious enforcement of natural resource regulations. Social risks include youth criminality, influence of radical narratives in some areas, and structural barriers affecting women—such as GBV, exclusion from leadership, and gendered economic inequalities. Interfaith and intergenerational tensions, moral policing of girls and young women, and debt-related vulnerability further undermine social cohesion.

● **Mozambique (Cabo Delgado and Nampula)** exhibits particularly severe risks shaped by conflict dynamics. Youth describe entrenched exclusion, corruption, nepotism, and manipulation of opportunities within governance structures. Relations with security forces are highly strained due to intimidation, extortion, arbitrary arrests, abuses during counter-insurgency operations, and fear of profiling. Unemployment and social frustration drive youth into crime, substance abuse, and in some cases recruitment—voluntary or coerced—by insurgent or criminal networks. GBV is pervasive, with early and forced marriage, domestic violence, impunity, limited access to justice, and discrimination against women and girls. Further tensions arise around land governance, access to basic services (water, health, education), ethnic divides, host–IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) relations, and perceptions of unfair humanitarian-aid distribution. Tensions around humanitarian aid further compound these dynamics, particularly where assistance intersects with existing vulnerabilities and grievances.

School-level conflict analyses revealed a range of complex and interrelated tensions both within schools and between schools and their surrounding communities. Within schools, these tensions included strained relationships among teachers and within leadership structures; tensions between teachers and pupils, often expressed through harsh disciplinary practices such as corporal punishment, as well as favouritism, discrimination and verbal abuse; and conflicts among pupils themselves, frequently taking the form of bullying, discrimination and violence. Tensions between schools and communities included disputes between teachers and parents, between parents and pupils, and conflicts related to the management of school resources and infrastructure, alongside differences associated with cultural and religious practices. Gender-based violence (GBV) emerged as a major concern across both school and community settings. Reported incidents included harassment and abuse of schoolgirls by *boda boda* riders, as well as cases of teachers demanding bribes from pupils in exchange for passing examinations. In some instances, teachers were reported to abuse their positions of authority by coercing young female pupils into early marriage, sometimes under the pretext of providing financial support to their families.

Mirko Cecchi/WeWorld

Cross-Cutting Risks Across All Countries

Youth Exclusion
- Limited participation in governance and decision-making
- Weak consultation processes and marginalisation in community structures

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)
- Normalised violence, harmful norms, impunity
- Barriers to justice and limited protection systems

Mistrust with Security Actors
- Harassment, corruption, arbitrary arrests
- Excessive force and lack of accountability

Crime, Substance Abuse & Extremism
- Driven by unemployment, frustration, trauma, and peer pressure
- Criminal or extremist groups exploiting youth vulnerability

Intergenerational Conflict
- Elders dominate; youth feel undervalued or dismissed
- Weak inclusive mediation structures

Interfaith/Interethnic Tensions
- Competition for influence, identity-based discrimination
- Low youth representation in religious forums

Kenya (Kwale County)

Resource & Land Conflicts
- Unclear tenure, corruption, unresolved succession
- Youth excluded from land-related committees

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) at Critical Levels
- Harmful norms, stigma, weak dissemination of legal frameworks

Witchcraft-Related Violence
- Localised fear, accusations, and intergenerational tensions

Tanzania (Mtwara & Tanga regions)

Governance Tensions
- Perceived favouritism, corruption, lack of transparency
- Weak youth engagement with authorities

Security & Law Enforcement Strain
- Boda boda riders report harassment, arbitrary fines
- Profiling of youth as both victims and suspects

Resource-Based Conflicts
- Farmer–pastoralist disputes
- Tensions over marine resources and fishing regulations

Youth Crime & Radical Narratives
- Criminality, emerging extremist rhetoric in some districts

Mozambique (Cabo Delgado & Nampula)

Severe Governance Exclusion
- Corruption, nepotism, clientelism, manipulated opportunities

High-Risk Security Environment
- Intimidation, extortion, arbitrary arrests by security forces
- Fear of insurgent profiling

Youth Recruitment & Criminality
- Insurgent and criminal groups exploit unemployment and trauma

Service-Access Tensions
- Disputes over land, water, health services, and education
- Corruption and weak infrastructure deepen mistrust

Host–IDP Tensions & Aid Distribution
- Competition over land, jobs, aid; perceptions of unfairness
- Mistrust of NGOs due to unmet promises or lack of transparency

> *Across many communities, people reported recurring tensions shaping everyday life. Young people often feel excluded from decision-making, while elders see them as lacking respect or direction. Political favouritism, especially around elections or resource distribution, deepens mistrust. Cultural and religious disagreements also emerge, such as differing Islamic practices related to moon sighting or Iftar timings. Gender-related conflict is rising, with more cases of marital disputes and domestic violence. Added to this, digital misinformation spreads rapidly during periods of tension, heightening fear and eroding social cohesion. These pressures fall most heavily on young people and women, who face high unemployment, limited influence in community affairs, greater exposure to gang recruitment, and reduced access to justice and reliable information.* — Joseph Mwangi Karinga, Stretchers Youth Organisation (Kenya)

> *In our community, tensions mainly come from economic insecurity, competition over resources, youth unemployment and unequal access to opportunities. Pressure on coastal resources often creates disputes, while gender inequalities and the marginalisation of young people deepen frustration. Climate-related shocks add further stress to already fragile livelihoods. Women, young people and low-income households are the ones who feel these challenges most acutely, as they have the least protection and influence in local decision-making.* — Joseph Desideri, 4H Tanzania (Tanzania)

> *Here in Mozambique, one of our biggest challenges is unemployment and poverty. Many families live in extreme hardship, without the resources required for a decent and secure livelihood, and this makes people even more vulnerable. Inequalities within the same community have grown, and ethnic tensions have become more pronounced. The Muani community is suffering the most, as they are often unfairly perceived as the group that shelters or supports terrorists, which only deepens their marginalisation.* — Luis Jobe Mutombene, National Volunteering Council (Mozambique)

Risk Management and Mitigation Measures

Risk mitigation combined proactive communication, inclusive design, and continuous monitoring. The project consistently reinforced its non-political mandate, applied transparent selection criteria, and implemented targeted outreach strategies to minimise exclusion and manage expectations among participating youth.

● **Ongoing monitoring enabled adaptive management.** Regular field visits, close coordination with CSOs, CPAs, schools, media actors, and local authorities, and continuous supervision allowed emerging risks to be identified early and activity design or facilitation to be adjusted in real time. The project also maintained geographical flexibility, prioritising hotspot areas where tensions were rising. In Mozambique, where security conditions shifted rapidly, activities and methodologies were adapted on an ongoing basis.

● **Capacity-building and mentoring strengthened local risk awareness.** Partners' ability to recognise and navigate risks linked to local norms, power relations, and sensitive issues improved over time, increasing the project's overall conflict sensitivity.

Collectively, these measures reduced unintended negative impacts while fostering social cohesion, inclusive participation, and more constructive, peaceful approaches to conflict resolution across diverse community contexts.

> *In some communities, the selection of youth activists and CSOs for the trainings initially sparked feelings of jealousy and exclusion among those who were not chosen, especially as many believed the role might come with financial benefits. To address these concerns, 4H Tanzania and WeWorld took several steps: they communicated the selection criteria openly, held community meetings to explain the purpose of the trainings, encouraged local leaders to support more inclusive nomination processes, and ensured that future activities involved a broader and more diverse group. These efforts helped ease misunderstandings and gradually strengthened trust within the communities."* — Joseph Desideri, 4H Tanzania (Tanzania)

🔍 Tracking Outcomes and Social Cohesion

As part of the ongoing monitoring process, changes in social cohesion were tracked through testimonies, case studies, and success stories, focusing on two key indicators:

● shifts in how young people perceive themselves and are perceived by community actors;

● improvements in relationships, trust, and collaboration among youth and between youth and other stakeholders.

These indicators captured strengthened relations between different community groups — including youth, elders, religious leaders, and authorities — and improved youth–authority and youth–security relations, reflecting enhanced trust and cooperation.

> *Across our activities, we've seen real signs of change. Young people who took part in looting have sat down with business owners, and even helped with compensation. In places like Bongwe, Mbuawani and Mkwakwani, people can now move freely again after community peace actors brought different groups to the table. Former rival gangs in Ukunda are working side by side on environmental projects, and during our Intergenerational Dialogues, elders have openly recognised the positive role of youth. Women mediators are helping families resolve disputes, easing tensions at home, and CPAs have stepped in to stop violent clashes between schools in Munje–Kingwede. All these moments show that trust, inclusion and shared responsibility are growing in our communities."* — Joseph Mwangi Karinga, Stretchers Youth Organisation (Kenya)

TOOLS, METHODOLOGIES & INNOVATION

Conflict Sensitivity

Conflict sensitivity was embedded throughout the KAP project through a set of practical tools and routines that kept teams alert to risks and responsive to change. This included:

● **Conflict Sensitivity Matrices**, created through the guidance of Peaceful Change Initiative (PCi) and tailored to each target location. These helped teams understand how planned activities might fuel existing local tensions or support existing peace dynamics.

● **Incident Trackers**, also developed in coordination with PCi and adapted to the local context. They offered a clear and consistent way to record and analyse conflict-sensitivity incidents that could affect project delivery or community dynamics.

● **Observation Checklists**, which supported real-time assessment of inclusivity, neutrality, safety, accessibility, and facilitation practices, enabling staff to flag and respond to risks as they emerged.

● **WeWorld's Conflict Sensitivity Toolkit**, introduced to each country team, providing shared guidance and practical steps to keep conflict sensitivity at the heart of everyday work.
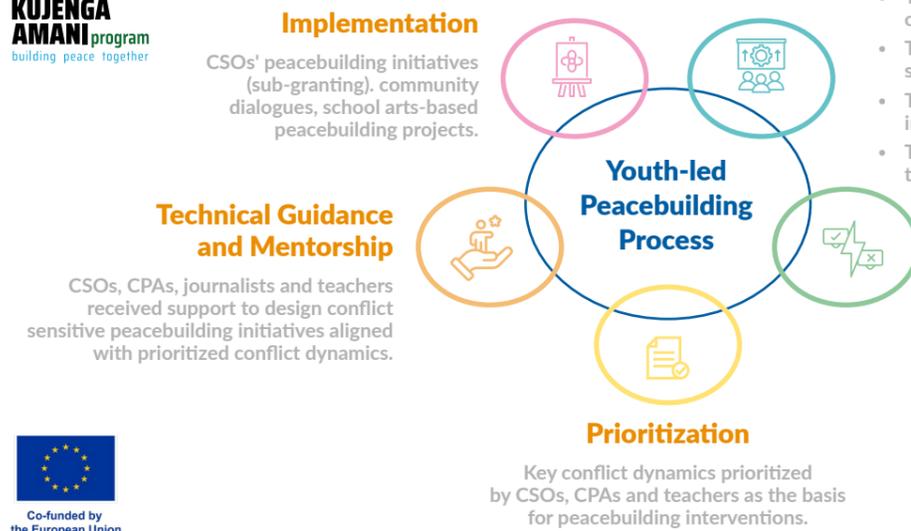
Key Conflict Sensitivity Interactions

Conflict sensitivity interactions typology	Opportunities (if well managed)	Mitigation & management
Politicisation/diversion by authorities or political actors	Increased visibility and buy-in when neutrality is clear	Publish neutrality rules; pre-brief authorities; restrict political speeches/symbols; Codes of Conduct for CSOs/CPAs/journalists
Perceived unfair distribution and failure to reach marginalised youth	Improved intergroup relations via visibly fair criteria and representation	Transparent selection criteria; demographic tracking (use proxies for sensitive traits); quotas/flexibility to ensure diversity; inclusive mobilisation (in youth spaces)
Unrealistic expectations of tangible benefits among vulnerable youth	Constructive agenda-setting and referrals that address priority needs	Clear scope messaging (social cohesion aims); map and refer to livelihoods opportunities; track and follow up on leaders' promises
Power asymmetries and modelling behaviour (elders/authorities/men dominating)	Demonstrable culture of equal respect and safer participation	Safe and neutral venues, equalising set-up (seating); explicit ground rules; intragroup dialogues before intergroup sessions, facilitator playbooks
Sensitive topics backlash (GBV, religion, radicalisation, party politics)	Safe spaces to address divisive issues constructively	Pre-dialogue stakeholder consultations; risk screening during intragroup sessions; indirect facilitation tools (games, metaphors); confidentiality; culture-anchored framing; facilitator playbooks
Cultural framing misread/reinforces harmful norms	Culture-anchored approaches that are inclusive and peace-promoting	Use shared local values (avoid divisive labels); pilot and adapt approaches with small groups; engage trusted community allies; integrate gender-sensitive use of cultural references, positive storytelling

Inclusive and Safe Engagement: a Youth-led Peacebuilding Process

Dialogue formats were tailored to local dynamics to make discussions safer, fairer, and more engaging. This included:

- **Preparatory sessions with young women**, giving them the space and confidence to take part safely in community discussions and helping create more balanced, inclusive conversations.
- **Clear and transparent selection criteria**, ensuring that grassroots organisations and youth groups could participate meaningfully rather than being sidelined.

- **Gender-sensitive facilitation**, with a focus on active engagement and open dialogue instead of lecture-style sessions, making it easier for everyone to contribute.
- **Community consultations**, involving civil society organisations (CSOs), Community Peace Activists (CPAs), journalists, community-based organisations (CBOs), teachers, youth groups, and local authorities in assessing conflict dynamics, identifying key actors, and co-designing peacebuilding initiatives.
- **Addressing power imbalances**, which helped shape more equitable interactions and informed the design of future workshops.

KUJENGA AMANI program
building peace together

Co-funded by the European Union

Implementation
CSOs' peacebuilding initiatives (sub-granting). community dialogues, school arts-based peacebuilding projects.

Technical Guidance and Mentorship
CSOs, CPAs, journalists and teachers received support to design conflict sensitive peacebuilding initiatives aligned with prioritized conflict dynamics.

Youth-led Peacebuilding Process

Prioritization
Key conflict dynamics prioritized by CSOs, CPAs and teachers as the basis for peacebuilding interventions.

Capacity Building
- Training of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) on conflict analysis and conflict sensitivity.
- Training of Young Journalists on conflict-sensitive reporting.
- Training of Community Peace Activists (CPAs) in conflict mediation and dialogue facilitation.
- Training of teachers on peace education and the use of arts for peacebuilding.

Community and school-level Conflict Analyses and youth consultations

Although the project was not explicitly designed as a Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) intervention, it nevertheless strengthened key protective factors for young people at risk of radicalisation and recruitment by violent extremist organisations, across individual, peer, family, community, and institutional levels. The project adopted a targeted and deliberate approach to ensure the meaningful participation of disenfranchised youth—a diverse group of young people facing exclusion, marginalisation, and limited access to opportunities and resources. A crucial enabler in reaching "youth at risk" was the role of trained Community Peace Activists (CPAs). As trusted members of their communities, CPAs were well placed to identify, reach and engage marginalised and at-risk young people who might otherwise have been excluded from formal initiatives.

For monitoring purposes, the project tracked the number and type of cases in which marginalised and vulnerable groups—including women, youth at risk and persons with disabilities—were meaningfully engaged in activities and played tangible roles in preventing or addressing specific community-level conflict.

> *Historical land injustices, entrenched patriarchal norms, and deep generational divides continue to shape relationships within the community. Older members often hold significant authority, which can inadvertently marginalise the voices of young people. Women also experience structural power imbalances, as cultural expectations frequently restrict their participation in leadership and decision-making spaces.*
>
> *Certain clans and ethnic groups still carry longstanding grievances, influencing how resources are distributed and how local politics unfold. These layered inequalities can easily fuel mistrust. Yet the KAP dialogues demonstrate that, when people meet in neutral and inclusive spaces, they are able to renegotiate these relationships in constructive and positive ways."* — Joseph Mwangi Karinga, Stretchers Youth Organisation (Kenya)
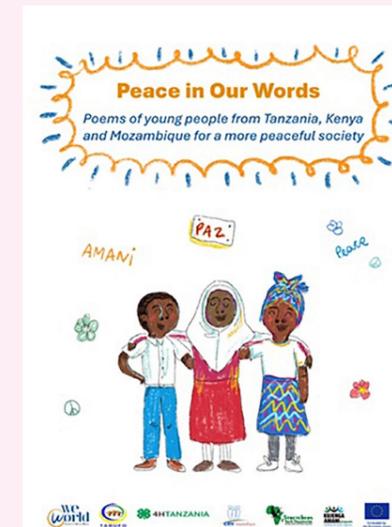
Arts and Cultural Approaches

In schools and communities, the use of arts created safe, non-confrontational spaces for expression and collaborative problem-solving. Activities included:

Peace in Our Words

This poetry collection was produced as part of KAP project. The poems were created by young people through arts-based peace education activities in their schools, providing a safe space to express their emotions, hopes and everyday challenges.

Through poetry, the young authors shared dreams of peace alongside experiences of pain, fear, resilience and resentment, offering honest reflections of their daily lives. The collection aims not only to highlight the injustices and challenges facing younger generations, but also to call for collective action to protect them and to build a more united, equal and peaceful society rooted in schools and communities. The anthology is organised into three themes: **No More Hurt**, which explores violence at home and school; **School for Everyone**, which emphasises education as a pathway to justice and equality; and **Living in Peace Together**, which celebrates peace as the path to freedom and unity.

Peace in Our Words
Poems of young people from Tanzania, Kenya and Mozambique for a more peaceful society

- **Theatre, poetry, and dance**, which encouraged empathy and reflection among students, teachers, parents, and community leaders.

Untitled

I come to you today with a heavy heart.

I want to talk about the cruelty that young girls face.

Let the abuse end. Let girls be free!

Girls find no joy, not even at school.

They encounter predators and is subjected to harm.

They may be violated against their will.

Let the abuse end. Let girls be free!

Some of our sisters are forced into acts without consent, enduring cruelty. Girls go... suffering and pain.

Let the abuse end. Let girls be free!

Some are assaulted on the way to school.

Distance contributes when the school is far away.

A student delays leaving after finishing lessons.

Let the abuse end! Let girls be free.

By Hamimu
Shangani Primary school,
Tandahimba DC, Mtwara region (Tanzania)

- **Cultural events and performances**, that brought together host and displaced communities and helped to build mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence.

- The **"Women See Many Things"**[3] Photovoice initiative, that gave young women a platform to capture their lived experiences and hopes for peace. Their photos were later shared in public exhibitions, opening up safe spaces for dialogue with communities and decisionmakers.

3   For more information see https://womenseemanything.weworld.it/womenseyesita/

86   The "P" in Practice. Field evidence on operationalising conflict sensitivity, WPS and YPS across the HDP Nexus.

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"Women See Many Things" Photovoice: Seeing Peace Through Women's Eyes

As part of the Kujenga Amani Pamoja project, the Photovoice initiative was carried out in Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique between February and May 2024. It brought together 32 young women aged 18 to 35, working under the guidance of Italian-French photographer Myriam Meloni and three local professionals: Halima Gongo, a multimedia journalist from Kwale County in Kenya; Gertrude Malizeni, a film-maker and multidisciplinary artist from Dar es Salaam; and Nelsa Guambe, an artist from Inhambane Province in Mozambique.

The workshop was designed for women only, recognising that in all three countries gender roles remain strongly shaped by patriarchal norms, often limiting women's opportunities and visibility. By creating a dedicated and supportive space, the activity aimed at ensuring that women were not merely subjects of discrimination but active storytellers of their own experiences. Through this initiative, participants shared their perspectives, exchanged ideas, and used photography to express their personal reflections on peace and conflict within their communities.

> *I am convinced that, thanks to this training and the experience they are gaining, if these young women have access to a platform where they can share the photographs they take within their communities, they will be able to tell stories that inspire and empower other women. At the moment, if you search online for meaningful images from this region, you find very little. It is a clear gap, linked in part to the limited presence of women in photography. For me, too, this has become a personal challenge: I have always photographed other places and other people, neglecting my own community. Now I feel it is time to change direction, embrace this challenge, and give something back to my home."* — multimedia journalist Halima Gongo

> *Photography is an incredibly powerful tool. It can capture a problem, but it can also hint at possible solutions. Through images, we can communicate emotions and deeper feelings, bringing them to the surface and allowing others to recognise themselves, understand, and reflect on how to address conflict and build peace. Learning to collect these visual narratives, to discuss them together, and to create spaces for dialogue on different issues is essential. Photography plays a crucial role in sparking meaningful conversations and encouraging reflection on the solutions available."* — film-maker Getrude Malizeni

Francesco Bellina / WeWorld

Media Engagement

Training for journalists and closer collaboration between civil society organisations (CSOs) and the media strengthened ethical reporting, improved factchecking, and reinforced the media's role in peacebuilding. This joint effort encouraged more nuanced coverage, challenged harmful narratives, and opened space for inclusive dialogue and accountability. In Mozambique, 5 media campaigns further promoted peace, social cohesion, and awareness of gender-based violence (GBV).

Studies on Youth Engagement in Peace and Security along the Swahili Coast

These studies explore the role of young people in peace and security within their communities, examining how they participate in and influence peace and security governance processes. They analyse how communities perceive young people and their contribution to peacebuilding and security initiatives, while also identifying the social, cultural, economic and institutional factors that either hinder or enable youth to play a constructive and positive role. In addition, they investigate how Swahili cultural values, social ties and traditional practices manifest across different locations and how these elements contribute to strengthening peace and social cohesion.

Exploring the Space for Young People in Peacebuilding in Coastal Communities of Tanzania and Kenya

Exploring the Space for Young People in Peacebuilding in Northern Mozambique

OPERATIONALISING THE HDP NEXUS

The Kujenga Amani Pamoja project was primarily a development intervention. However, by deliberately combining protection-focused safe spaces, youth empowerment and governance strengthening, and conflict prevention and social cohesion initiatives, it operationalised the **Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) Nexus** in a practical and meaningful way.

- **Humanitarian:** In conflict-affected areas of Cabo Delgado and Nampula (Mozambique), the project complemented WeWorld's emergency work by addressing protection risks and supporting communities affected by armed attacks. It strengthened safe spaces for young people, reducing their exposure to harm and recruitment, and easing tensions between host and displaced populations. Coordination with humanitarian actors ensured that youth needs were reflected in wider crisis-response efforts.

- **Development:** Across Mozambique, Tanzania, and Kenya, the project supported development by tackling the barriers that limit young people's role in governance and community development. It strengthened youth leadership and civic engagement, promoted inclusive dialogue between communities and authorities, and supported youth-led initiatives that addressed insecurity and exclusion. Through coordination with institutions, civil society organisations, and the private sector, the project also connected young people to livelihoods opportunities through multi-stakeholder forums that facilitated linkages to potential pathways to employment and income generation. In Kenya, the project builds synergies with two programmes implemented by WeWorld in Kwale County, co-funded by the European Union: Sikiliza Sauti Yetu (SSY) project and Sheria Ya Vijana project (SYV) improving youth engagement in environmental governance and climate resilience and advancing their social and economic inclusion, with a focus on green and digital economies.

- **Peacebuilding:** The project strengthened young people's skills in dialogue, conflict prevention, and mediation, enabling them to act as constructive peace actors. Through youth-led analysis, dialogue, and local initiatives, it addressed key conflict drivers and promoted collaboration between communities, authorities, and security actors. This helped build trust, reduce violence, and reinforce local peace structures.

> *WeWorld operates at the nexus of humanitarian aid, development, and peacebuilding through a coordinated approach. It supports local CSOs in responding to GBV cases while raising community awareness to ensure immediate protection. In the development sphere, it strengthens the financial skills of young people, women, and persons with disabilities, linking them with Community Development Officers to access the government's 10% loans and build sustainable livelihoods. For peacebuilding, it trains young Community Peace Activists to prevent conflict and promote dialogue, and provides training and dialogue spaces for government officials and state and nonstate actors to improve coordination, trust, and cooperation. Ongoing feedback meetings with CPAs support continuous learning and help adapt community interventions when needed."*
> — Isaac Dawa, Saidi Fadhili & Mohamed Ally, TABUFO (Tanzania)

OPERATIONALISING THE WPS AND YPS AGENDAS

Women, Peace & Security

A gender-sensitive approach shaped the entire project, ensuring that gender equality was actively promoted and that the different needs and perspectives of women, men, girls, and boys were meaningfully considered, This approach was woven throughout the project through dedicated training sessions, inclusive participation, gender-responsive monitoring systems, and efforts to challenge structural inequalities. In addition to these elements, the project further strengthened its gender-sensitive approach through the following actions:

- **Gender-sensitive data collection and analysis:** Baseline survey and research tools were designed to collect gender- and age-disaggregated data, helping ensure that the priorities of women and girls informed both planning and implementation. Additionally, gender perspectives were systematically integrated into conflict analyses.

- **Conflict sensitivity interactions monitoring** which explicitly include gender-related interactions and risks.

- **Dedicated gender-focused initiatives:** Activities such as Photovoice "Women See Many Things" brought together young women from the three countries to explore their experiences of conflict and peace through photography. The exhibitions that followed created inclusive public spaces where gender-specific challenges could be shared, and harmful norms openly questioned.

- **Youth- and CSO-led peacebuilding on gender issues:** Civil society organisations and students carried out peacebuilding initiatives addressing gender-related concerns, including GBV, strengthening both local awareness and community accountability.

- **Promoting young women's leadership:** The project boosted the role of young women in peacebuilding and decision-making spaces traditionally dominated by men, including elder-led mediation and community governance structures. This was supported through school and community-based dialogues and awareness campaigns.

- **Gender-responsive MEAL indicators:** The MEAL framework included indicators such as:
  - the proportion of women among mediators and leading peacebuilding initiatives within their communities.
  - the number of initiatives tackling gender-specific conflict drivers.

> *In relation to WPS (Women, Peace, Security), WeWorld tackles gender--based violence (GBV) through local CSOs, which in turn raise awareness and offer reporting channels and protection for women and children. This builds in women security and good living, which is at the heart of the agenda of WPS."* — Isaac Dawa, Saidi Fadhili & Mohamed Ally, TABUFO (Tanzania)
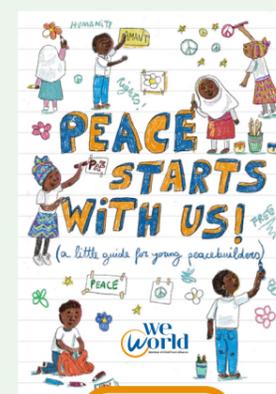
Youth, Peace & Security

The project placed strong emphasis on intergenerational collaboration and youth empowerment, recognising that lasting peace depends on genuine cooperation across age groups and the active leadership of young people. This approach can be summarised across three main thematic areas:

- **Intergenerational Collaboration:** A mix of intergenerational dialogues, capacity-building for community peace&security structures, young mediator training, and engagement with policymakers helped establish steady and meaningful cooperation between generations. These shared spaces encouraged open listening, reduced stereotypes, and supported joint problem-solving on issues such as land disputes, community safety, and youth involvement in crime. Over time, elders increasingly acknowledged the value of young people's contributions, while youth gained confidence and legitimacy within traditional community structures.

- **Challenging Generational Power Structures:** As already mentioned, the project created structured opportunities for young people to engage directly with elders, community and religious leaders, local authorities, and security actors. These platforms helped shift perceptions of youth: from passive recipients or sources of insecurity to credible partners and agents of positive change. By taking active roles in mediation structures, Early Warning and Early Response mechanisms, and policy dialogue forums, young women and men strengthened their agency and visibility, opening up governance and peace processes that had long been dominated by adults.

- **Youth as Agents of Change:** All peacebuilding initiatives were youth-led, reinforcing young people's leadership, ownership, and their central role in strengthening social cohesion. A dedicated component focused on creating peaceful and inclusive learning environments, including training 108 young teachers in peace education and arts-based methods. As part of efforts to strengthen learning environments and engage younger children in peacebuilding activities, the project also developed "Peace Starts With Us: A Little Guide for Young Peacebuilders", a booklet used in classroom group work to explore themes such as active citizenship, children's rights, leadership, accountability, peacebuilding, and non-violent conflict resolution.

Peace Starts with Us: A Little Guide for Young Peacebuilders

Although the project primarily targeted young adults aged 18–35, it also recognised the importance of nurturing a culture of peace from an early age. For this reason, *Peace Starts With Us: A Little Guide for Young Peacebuilders* was developed as a child-friendly booklet to help younger children begin to understand their place within the community and the positive role they can play. Through contextualised simple stories, games and reflective activities, it encourages them to explore values such as rights, democracy, peace and respect, while gradually building the confidence and skills needed to contribute to safe, inclusive and peaceful environments as they grow. **The booklet is also available in Kiswahili and Portuguese.**

> *In relation to Youth, Peace and Security (YPS), WeWorld trains young people in Tanga as Community Peace Ambassadors, equipping them with skills in conflict prevention, mediation and peace promotion. Through village meetings and CSO-led activities, WeWorld creates safe spaces for youth to express concerns, engage with local leaders and build trust with institutions, contributing to long-term stability."* — Joseph Desideri, 4H Tanzania (Tanzania)

COMMUNITY-LEVEL OUTCOMES

Improved Relations with Security Actors

Police–youth dialogue platforms helped reduce harassment, profiling, and mistrust, improving communication and strengthening respect for the rule of law. Community policing forums and peer-to-peer healing spaces allowed young people to safely express concerns and co-develop solutions with police and local leaders.

Dialogues between youth and policymakers further strengthened collaboration and created opportunities for young people to articulate their priorities.

> *Community policing helps to create relationships between police officers and community members. Through this process , both youth and women can report threats, raise concerns about safety, and work with officers to maintain peace and prevent violence."* — Isaac Dawa, Saidi Fadhili & Mohamed Ally, TABUFO (Tanzania)

Stronger Institutional Accountability

In Tanzania, engagement platforms with Community Development Officers improved transparency and accountability in the government loan scheme for youth, women, and persons with disabilities. These interactions also built trust and mutual understanding between young people and public institutions. More broadly, the project linked peacebuilding with livelihoods, governance, and access to services by facilitating dialogues on economic opportunities, loan schemes, land and resource management, and community security. This integrated approach further strengthened transparency and deepened confidence in local institutions.

> *In Mtwara, young people, women, and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) have begun to place greater trust in the 10% government loan scheme and in the Community Development Officers (CDOs). Aware of the challenges involved in qualifying for these loans, villagers from Msimbati Ward in Mtwara and Mkundi Ward in Tandahimba organised themselves through village meetings to share information, clarify procedures, and support one another with their applications.*
>
> *As a result, three groups in Msimbati Ward and two groups in Mkundi Ward successfully accessed the loans, while many others were encouraged and guided to apply. By pooling their knowledge, offering peer support, and working closely with the CDOs, the community not only addressed the barrier of limited capital but also strengthened trust, reduced tensions, and fostered greater cooperation between youth, women, PWDs, and local authorities."* — Isaac Dawa, Saidi Fadhili & Mohamed Ally, TABUFO (Tanzania)

Drawing on insights from community-level conflict analyses and youth consultations, a Policy Brief on *Advancing Peace and Security through Youth Inclusion* was co-developed with CPAs and CSOs in each project location to inform policymakers of strategic and programmatic priorities for strengthening meaningful youth engagement in community-level peacebuilding processes. These briefs identify entry points for more youth-inclusive and sustainable solutions, emphasise the need for stronger institutional support to youth-led peacebuilding initiatives, and call for multi-stakeholder collaboration to challenge harmful stereotypes and assumptions about young people that undermine cooperation and inclusion.

To promote shared ownership and legitimacy, structured community dialogue sessions were organised to provide youth representatives with a platform to present, discuss, and validate the recommendations with key stakeholders, including local authorities, security actors, and community elders.

Cohesion in Displacement-Affected Areas

In Mozambique, school- and community-level dialogue initiatives, supported by media campaigns, fostered understanding between Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and host communities, helping ease tensions and strengthen social cohesion. School-based initiatives and civic and peace education activities also contributed to more inclusive relationships among students, teachers, parents, and community members, creating safer and more cohesive learning environments.

> *The province of Nampula previously welcomed large numbers of people displaced from Cabo Delgado, offering solidarity and a wide range of humanitarian support. Today, however, Nampula itself is experiencing displacement as a result of terrorism, and some of its own displaced residents are now being hosted in Cabo Delgado."* — Luis Jobe Mutombene, National Volunteering Council (Mozambique)

Resource and Environmental Conflict Mediation

Resource- and environment-related mediation processes — including dialogues on fisheries management, land rights, and sustainable natural resource use — reduced rivalry and improved cooperation among competing groups. Exchanges between fishermen and seaweed farmers, farmers and pastoralists, and fishers and vegetable farmers led to clearer agreements, better communication, and more collaborative management of shared resources.

> *There have been noticeable positive changes in community interactions and collaboration. Members are increasingly engaging in joint problem-solving rather than allowing tensions to escalate. For example, during a recent dispute over access to seaweed farms by fishers and fishing vessels in Moa, youth, women's groups and village elders convened a joint meeting facilitated by the local leaders. Instead of each group pushing its own agenda, they collectively analysed the conflict, identified shared interests and agreed on fishing site access. This solution not only reduced tensions but also strengthened trust among the groups. The process demonstrated a shift towards inclusive decision-making and reinforced the community's capacity to resolve issues peacefully."* — Joseph Desideri, 4H Tanzania (Tanzania)

Strengthened Community Resilience

The project strengthened community resilience by empowering local actors, fostering inclusive dialogue, and embedding peacebuilding skills within existing community structures. Communities were treated not as passive beneficiaries but as co-creators of the process.

Resilience was built through locally grounded conflict analyses and participatory planning, with youth, women's groups, CSOs, CPAs, teachers, journalists, and local authorities jointly identifying conflict drivers and risks. This ensured that interventions addressed real tensions and reinforced local capacity to understand and respond to conflict. Shared ownership grew through CSO- and youth-led initiatives funded under the sub-granting scheme.

> *The project has demonstrated significant opportunities for strengthening community resilience. Intergenerational dialogue platforms have enabled young people and elders to codesign solutions, while community dialogues and peace forums have created spaces for equal participation across groups. Capacity-building sessions for youth and women have enhanced their skills in mediation, leadership, and advocacy, further supporting their engagement in local governance processes.*
>
> *The dissemination of policy briefs has amplified youth voices and increased their visibility in decision-making arenas. Participation in International Youth Day has also helped connect young people with duty bearers, fostering stronger relationships and mutual accountability. As a result, marginalised groups now feel more confident and are increasingly recognised as key peace actors rather than passive beneficiaries."* — Joseph Mwangi Karinga, Stretchers Youth Organisation (Kenya)

WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT STRENGTHENING PEACE

- **Power matters:** dialogue is most effective when underlying power imbalances are openly addressed, as meaningful participation depends on who holds influence, voice, and decision-making authority. Sustained trust and joint problem-solving require process-oriented engagement with core participant groups rather than ad hoc activities. Strengthening youth participation in traditional mediation likewise requires continuous engagement with elders to formally integrate young women and men into customary structures, including joint elder–youth mediation teams, and to ensure the recognition and legitimacy of young mediators within those structures. It also requires targeted training for local authorities, elders and security actors on peacebuilding, conflict sensitivity, WPS/YPS agendas.

- **Leveraging culture, arts and media for dialogue:** arts, culture and media proved effective entry points for opening dialogue and challenging narratives. Arts-based and cultural initiatives (photovoice, theatre, poetry, music, community events, and school-based arts projects) created non-confrontational spaces to address sensitive issues, supported healing and dialogue, amplifying positive narratives of youth contributions and enabled participation by groups that might otherwise be excluded, particularly youth and women. Scaling civic and peace education in schools and communities further reinforced these outcomes.

- **Conflict sensitivity works only as a system, not a one-off training:** effective conflict sensitivity depends on long-term, interconnected processes, as it requires strengthening the ability to recognise and manage risks embedded in local norms and power relations. Young mediators' roles should be formalised through clearer coordination and recognition within local protection and referral systems, while grassroots, youth-led initiatives require ongoing mentoring and adequate resourcing to ensure conflict-sensitive implementation. MEAL systems should incorporate conflict-sensitive indicators that capture changes in relationships, trust, inclusion, and power dynamics. Joint programme–MEAL reviews of conflict sensitivity monitoring tools, together with continuous feedback mechanisms engaging project participants, are necessary to ensure effective adaptive management and effective learning.

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- **Transparency, inclusion and multi-stakeholder engagement improve peace outcomes:** clear and transparent selection processes build trust and legitimacy. Gender-responsive and flexible participation models — including childcare support, adapted schedules, women-only spaces, and community sensitisation — enable sustained and meaningful engagement. Disability inclusion must be embedded from the outset through accessible venues, adapted facilitation, and partnerships with disability organisations. Multi-actor engagement in identifying conflict dynamics and addressing needs and priorities leads to concrete collaborative actions, while reinforcing community acceptance, shared ownership and more effective outcomes.

- **Youth resilience increases when dialogue meets livelihoods and social support services:** Linking dialogue and peacebuilding initiatives with livelihoods and economic opportunities strengthens youth resilience by addressing both social grievances and everyday economic pressures. At the same time, engagement of youth affected by trauma, substance abuse, gang involvement or displacement revealed gaps in psychosocial support. While safe spaces and mediation roles supported reintegration, the absence of structured psychosocial services limited deeper recovery and longer-term resilience.

- **Adapting to political, security and humanitarian contexts** require flexibility, contingency planning, and stronger alignment with humanitarian actors. At the same time, election cycles and civic unrest across East and Southern Africa, alongside youth-driven, digitally organised mobilisation — particularly among Gen Z — revealed the need to redefine engagement approaches. As digital coordination reshapes political participation and allows local grievances to escalate rapidly, peacebuilding initiatives must adapt to these new forms of participation and strengthen national and cross-border youth engagement platforms.

THE VOICE OF

Rebecca Romagnoli
Project Officer

Another key insight relates to conflict sensitivity as a cross-cutting organisational strength. The comprehensive conflict-sensitivity framework developed and applied under KAP has reinforced WeWorld ability to design and implement interventions that "do no harm" while maximising positive peace outcomes. This experience has demonstrated the relevance of peacebuilding principles beyond standalone peace projects, offering clear potential for integration across humanitarian, development and governance programming.

Overall, the Kujenga Amani Pamoja project has strengthened WeWorld identity and credibility as an actor capable of linking local engagement, youth leadership, and conflict-sensitive practice to tangible peacebuilding outcomes. It has enhanced organisational learning, adaptability, and strategic positioning, while opening new opportunities to mobilise resources and partnerships in the fields of peacebuilding and social cohesion."

THE VOICE OF

Daniela Riva
Project Coordinator

"This regional intervention represented a significant learning opportunity for WeWorld across the three countries involved, and we are grateful to have implemented it in partnership with FPI, the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments of the European Commission, which supports EU external action and international peacebuilding initiatives. It enabled the organisation to deepen its understanding of youth-specific conflict dynamics and to refine its capacity to engage effectively with different stakeholders in complex, fragile contexts. By working through existing community structures and decision-making spaces, WeWorld and its partners adopted a structured, locally anchored and highly impactful approach to peacebuilding.

A key insight concerns the value of the bottom-up, youth-centred methodology. Through participatory conflict analyses and youth-led dialogues and initiatives, this approach proved effective not only in addressing immediate tensions but also in strengthening trust, inclusion, understanding and collaboration across community groups, including local authorities and security actors.

The project also produced a strong capacity-building effect. Staff, partners, CSOs and Community Peace Activists were trained in conflict analysis, dialogue facilitation, mediation and conflict sensitivity, creating a durable pool of skills and knowledge. These tools and methodologies are now transferable across countries, programmes and thematic areas, representing a long-term institutional asset for WeWorld."

WeWorld in
UKRAINE

In Ukraine, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate, with millions of people exposed to trauma, limited access to essential services, and ongoing risks from mines and unexploded ordnance. In response, WeWorld takes an integrated, programme-level approach that combines humanitarian assistance, local development support, and initiatives to strengthen social cohesion. Through projects such as Protect Kharkiv, as well as gender-responsive WASH programmes, psychosocial support for children and families, and collaboration with local partners, WeWorld seeks not only to meet urgent needs but also to reinforce community capacities, create safe and inclusive spaces, and promote resilience. By prioritising the well-being and participation of women, young people, and other vulnerable groups, these interventions contribute to rebuilding trust and the social fabric in conflict-affected areas.

✓ Highlights

In a context shaped by ongoing conflict and displacement in Ukraine, the project "Protect Kharkiv. Integrated Humanitarian Intervention for the Protection of Women and Children in Conflict-Affected Areas in the Kharkiv Region"—implemented from July 2025 to December 2025 by WeWorld in close partnership with Peaceful Heaven of Kharkiv (PHK) and funded by the Emilia-Romagna Region and ChildFund Korea—focused on practical, community-centred solutions that protect dignity, reduce stressors, and rebuild social ties.

OUR APPROACH COMBINED:
→ Community-led sub-grants to create locally owned spaces and activities, enabling continued, low-threshold interaction in schools and neighbourhoods
→ Conflict sensitivity mainstreaming using WeWorld's toolkit to guide risk mitigation, inclusive targeting, and trusted communication
→ Mobile protection and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) for children, adolescents, caregivers, and adults, with referral pathways to specialised services (including for cases of gender-based violence)
→ WASH support with a strong gender focus, delivered through hygiene kits specifically tailored to women and girls—including menstrual hygiene items and a menstrual diary—and reinforced by community-based awareness activities on hygiene and menstrual health designed to promote dignity, safety, and informed choice.

OUR RESULTS AT A GLANCE:
→ **Stronger social cohesion through community and school-led initiatives** funded via sub-grants, with tangible assets that communities own and use
→ **Improved access to psychosocial support**, especially for children and caregivers, through child-friendly, play-based, and adolescent-tailored activities
→ **Better hygiene and menstrual health outcomes** thanks to targeted kit distributions and community awareness
→ **Safer, more inclusive spaces for learning and support**, including for children with special educational needs and war-affected families
→ Trusted, adaptive delivery enabled by continuous partner check-ins, context-sensitive messaging, and feedback loops

The project proved effective by combining immediate support with genuinely locally-led action, reducing harm while seeking to build trust. Its sustainability stemmed from placing assets, skills, and decision-making in the hands of communities and partners—ensuring that the benefits continued well beyond the project's lifetime.

FROM INPUTS TO IMPACT:
Theory of Change of the Protect Kharkiv Project

If conflict-affected communities in Kharkiv oblast receive immediate humanitarian support that reduces basic stressors (including WASH assistance and MHM);

and local actors are strengthened through capacity-building, mobile protection/MHPSS services, and clear referral pathways;

and communities are empowered to lead cohesion-building initiatives through a conflict-sensitive, well-supported sub-granting mechanism;

then vulnerable households will experience improved well-being, safer access to essential services, and stronger social connections.

FROM OBJECTIVES TO RESULTS

OBJECTIVE	MAIN RESULTS
Assist conflict-affected communities across Kharkiv oblast	• **Strengthened community-based social cohesion initiatives**, with local groups empowered through technical accompaniment and 2 sub-grants
Integrate conflict sensitivity and promote community-driven initiatives	**Locally owned community assets created through sub-grants**, including upgraded facilities and equipment that enhanced cultural, educational, and recreational offerings: • In Berezivka, the House of Culture was upgraded (laptop, printer, furniture, inventory, board games), enabling expanded cultural, educational, and leisure activities • In Berestyn, key equipment (interactive board, laptop, projector, charging station, furniture) supported a safer, more inclusive space for out-of-school education and psychosocial support for war-affected children, including those with special educational needs
Offer Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) to both children and adults	• **Improved access to psychosocial support for children and caregivers** through mobile outreach, which brought services directly to conflict-affected communities, and through the creation of safer, more inclusive learning and support environments equipped for child-friendly activities and tailored adolescent sessions
Provide essential WASH assistance, as unmet water, sanitation, and hygiene needs were among the most urgent stressors faced by conflict-affected households, directly affecting dignity, health, and daily coping capacity—especially for women, girls, and vulnerable groups	• **Enhanced hygiene and menstrual health well-being** through the distribution of hygiene kits—including menstrual hygiene items—and targeted awareness sessions

A COLLABORATIVE, LOCALLY ROOTED IMPLEMENTATION

From July 2025 to December 2025, the Protect Kharkiv project—funded by the Emilia-Romagna Region and ChildFund Korea and implemented by WeWorld in close partnership with Peaceful Heaven of Kharkhiv (PHK)—brought together a strong and varied coalition of stakeholders, each contributing decisively to its impact. At its heart were conflict-affected community members, with particular attention given to groups identified as most vulnerable. Local institutions and grassroots initiatives formed a solid backbone of the intervention—with contributions from the dedicated teams of the Berezivka House of Culture and the Berestyn Centre for Children and Youth Creativity, who anchored activities within their communities.

Local authorities provided essential support through recipients' identification, the coordination of distributions, and participation in public events and oversight bodies. Throughout every stage, PHK's close collaboration was fundamental not only to the smooth delivery of activities, but also to the implementation of training and psychosocial support services, ensuring that the project remained locally grounded, trusted, and responsive.

Regione Emilia-Romagna

Katya Moskalyuk / WeWorld

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Community-Led Impact: The Winning Sub-Grants in Berezivka and Berestyn

Berezivka Sub-Grant: The Revival of the Bereziv House of Culture

The winning sub-grant in Berezivka addressed the lack of suitable spaces for regular interaction among different groups, including internally displaced people, veterans, young people, and older residents. This absence had contributed to diminished trust, increased isolation, and a decline in the community's overall psycho-emotional well-being. While the initiative was open to all residents, it placed particular emphasis on children and their parents, recognising their central role in community life. The initiative aimed to create a multifunctional, resource-rich, and inclusive space within the Berezivka House of Culture—designed to restore trust, strengthen interpersonal relationships, and foster social cohesion and emotional resilience across the village. By working through the House of Culture, the initiative strengthened an existing local institution and created a platform for longer-term community engagement beyond short-term assistance. To achieve this, the project focused on several key objectives:

- **Ensuring comfort and inclusivity** by providing mobile, adaptable furniture suitable for different age groups and physical abilities.
- **Organising regular creative and educational activities**, including masterclasses, art therapy sessions, and themed events, supported by modern equipment and technology.
- **Promoting physical activity and emotional relief** through the provision of sports equipment and the establishment of clubs and recreational games.
- **Enhancing the quality of cultural and festive events** by upgrading stage, lighting, and sound equipment, as well as decorative materials.
- **Systematically procuring and installing** the equipment, tools, inventory, and furniture necessary to ensure the full functionality of a multifunctional and inclusive community hub.

Berestyn Sub-Grant: Creating Inclusive Spaces for Children and Families

The winning sub-grant in Berestyn addressed a longstanding challenge within this heavily war-affected community near the frontlines: the lack of adequate out-of-school education and support for children with special educational needs, as well as for those affected by the ongoing Russian aggression. The initiative targeted children aged 4 to 18, alongside their parents or guardians, providing a much-needed safe space for learning, development, and emotional recovery. The project sought to strengthen the psycho-emotional well-being of children and families affected by the war—including internally displaced persons, families caring for children with disabilities, and orphans. In addition to counselling and psychosocial support, the initiative offered extracurricular activities, educational programmes, information sessions, and practical guidance, ensuring that children had access to stimulating opportunities beyond the formal classroom. A central aim was to guarantee equal access to high-quality out-of-school education for children with special educational needs, while also providing social assistance and tailored support to families navigating displacement and trauma. To achieve this, the project focused on creating a modern, welcoming, and aesthetically pleasing environment in which children could feel calm, safe, and at ease. The sub-grant illustrates a practical HDP nexus pathway in a frontline setting: meeting urgent protection and psychosocial needs of conflict-affected children and caregivers, while strengthening inclusive out-of-school support as part of community recovery, and addressing stigma around disability.

TOOLS, METHODOLOGIES & INNOVATION

- **Conflict-Sensitive and Community-Led Programming:** As part of the Protect Kharkiv project, WeWorld systematically integrated its **Conflict Sensitivity Toolkit** into partner and staff capacity-building and capacity-strengthening initiatives, creating a shared foundation for harm-mitigation, trust-building, and responsible engagement within conflict-affected communities. Through this approach, the team identified key "do no harm" risks—such as exclusion, stigma, and aid fatigue—which shaped how activities were communicated, targeted, and adapted. Complementing this, the **sub-granting mechanism** emerged as the main driver of peacebuilding and social cohesion outcomes, enabling community groups to design and lead initiatives that genuinely reflected communities' priorities.

- **Tailoring Conflict Sensitivity to Communities Affected by War:** Delivering conflict sensitivity training required particular care in how concepts such as "peace" and "conflict" were introduced, given that participants remain directly and deeply affected by the Russian invasion and ongoing aerial attacks. Rather than framing discussions around the broader war dynamics, the training deliberately centred on **local tensions** and on cultivating the conditions for **positive, community-level peace**. This approach demanded time, patience, and sustained trust-building to ensure that participants felt safe, respected, and genuinely engaged in shaping constructive solutions within their own environments.

- **Creative Methodologies and Media Outreach:** Artistic methodologies were integrated into psychosocial support activities, with psychologists using creative approaches to engage women and children in a safe and expressive way. To broaden the project's visibility and document its impact, Peaceful Heaven of Kharkhiv (PHK) also produced a video showcasing key activities, which will be shared across their social media channels.

OPERATIONALISING THE HDP NEXUS

The Protect Kharkiv project was designed as a Nexus intervention, intentionally linking humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding components through sequenced and mutually reinforcing actions that responded to both immediate needs and longer-term community resilience.

- **Humanitarian:** Immediate support helped reduce stressors faced by vulnerable households, primarily through the distribution of hygiene kits—including menstrual hygiene items—to safeguard dignity and mitigate health risks. Co-ordination with local actors helped minimise duplication and ensured that assistance was delivered efficiently and responsibly.

- **Development:** Development-oriented activities focused on building local skills and improving connections between services. Working together with our partner Peaceful Heaven of Kharkhiv (PHK), the project provided training and shared practical methods, introduced a mobile team model, and set up referral pathways to specialised protection and gender-based violence services.

- **Peacebuilding:** Peacebuilding was woven throughout the project by applying a conflict-sensitive approach and using a sub-granting mechanism to support inclusive community and school initiatives. These efforts helped rebuild trust, strengthen social connections, and encourage collective recovery among communities affected by the conflict.

> *Peace is understood as a condition where people feel safe, trust one another, have equal access to services, and can participate meaningfully in community life. Although important progress has been achieved, sustained investment in social cohesion, economic opportunities, and inclusive governance remains essential to building durable peace."* — Kolisnyk Valeriia, Peaceful Heaven of Kharkhiv

Roundtable: Integrating the Peace Dimension in the HDP Nexus in Ukraine

As part of WeWorld's broader commitment to advancing dialogue and practice on peacebuilding, WeWorld participated in the YPS Week in Bruxelles, and convened an online roundtable about the integration of the Peace dimension in the HDP nexus in Ukraine on the 11th of December 2025, bringing together Ukrainian peacebuilding organisations alongside international humanitarian, development, and peace actors. The aim of the roundtable was to share practical lessons learned through Project Protect Kharkiv to weave peace dimension into everyday programming—rather than treating it as a standalone pillar. Participants stressed the importance of moving from high-level commitments to real day-to-day practice: shared language, trained staff, and feedback loops that allow communities to flag unintended harm. They also noted the lack of a clear coordination space for actors working across the HDP nexus, making NGO-led exchanges like this especially valuable. Key takeaways from the discussion included:

- **Conflict sensitivity as a practical entry point.** Participants agreed that applying conflict or context sensitivity from the start helps organisations spot risks, adjust targeting, and find opportunities to strengthen longterm impact across sectors—from WASH to protection and livelihoods. Ongoing assessments were seen as useful for both partners and donors, although finding local peacebuilding partners remains challenging for some INGOs.

- **The central role of Ukrainian civil society.** Ukraine has a strong network of organisations experienced in dialogue, peacebuilding, and conflict transformation. Involving them in setting priorities and strategies helps ensure interventions are grounded in local realities. Their expertise, combined with increasing numbers of Ukrainian staff in INGOs, supports culturally sensitive approaches and better inclusion of marginalised groups (e.g. Roma, LGBTQIA+, veterans and their families).

- **Community-led initiatives as engines of resilience.** Approaches such as sub-grants or peer-to-peer work were recognised as effective ways to strengthen local CSOs, support participation, and reinforce democratic practices. Education and safe learning spaces were highlighted as strong entry points for social cohesion, especially in communities hosting displaced children, with potential to inform wider recovery and donor strategies.

- **The importance of framing.** Talking about "conflict" or "peace" can be sensitive and sometimes counter-productive. Participants found that framing work around "community cohesion", "local tensions", "inclusion", or "access to resources" often opened safer and more constructive conversations. Polarisation appeared less visible than expected—pointing to the need for deeper shared analysis on sensitive themes like politics, language, and reintegration.

- **A Nexus approach is about mindset, not mastering all three pillars.** Working across the HDP Nexus means integrating perspectives, starting with a conflict analysis, and building continuous feedback with communities—seeing peacebuilding as something cross-cutting, not a separate add-on.

- **Trust as the foundation.** Above all, trust—between organisations, partners, and communities—was seen as the key enabler. Trust makes coordination possible, supports honesty about risks, and allows teams to adapt quickly when unintended effects emerge.

> " *Peacebuilding begins with local initiatives — with spaces where people start to listen to one another, appreciate differences as a value, and see cooperation as the key to the future. Such activities lay the foundation for social cohesion and community resilience, even in the most difficult times.*" — Anastasiia, a young peacebuilder from the Ukrainian organisation STAN

CONFLICT SENSITIVITY & RISK MANAGEMENT

Analysing Conflict Drivers and Community Dynamics

Within the Protect Kharkiv project, the conflict analysis was carried out through a participatory process embedded in a **conflict sensitivity workshop** involving 5 staff members from PHK and 5 from WeWorld. Through a structured, facilitated discussion, participants jointly identified the key conflict drivers and stressors affecting communities in Kharkiv oblast, as well as the main stakeholder groups and the relationships and power dynamics shaping the local environment. This discussion formed the basis for a combined exercise in **stakeholder mapping**—examining who influences what, who is excluded, and who is trusted—and in **analysing critical dynamics** such as grievances, pressure on local services, and vulnerabilities linked to displacement. Building on these reflections, participants were also able to assess how different forms of assistance might interact with these dynamics, helping ensure that the project's design and implementation remained both context-appropriate and conflict-sensitive.

> " *Power dynamics in the community are shaped by differences between host residents and internally displaced people, by unequal access to resources, and by varying degrees of representation in local decision-making. While historical divisions play a role, current inequalities linked to displacement and economic hardship are far more significant. If left unaddressed, these disparities can undermine trust and cooperation, making inclusive approaches essential to maintaining social cohesion.*" — Kolisnyk Valeriia, Peaceful Heaven of Kharkhiv

Identification and Management of Risks

As a result of this discussion, participants discussed how the intervention could unintentionally reinforce existing vulnerabilities or deepen social fractures, which led to the identification of the following risks:

- the **potential replication of marginalisation and stigma**, particularly towards groups already perceived as "different" or "burdensome", such as internally displaced people, families caring for children with disabilities, war-affected children, and other vulnerable groups facing social or economic exclusion;

- the **risk of contributing to aid fatigue** in communities repeatedly receiving external assistance which sometimes fail to cover core needs;

- the **possibility of exacerbating divisions** if support were perceived as selective, based on unclear criteria, or unfair.

Although the project's duration limited the scope for major design revisions, risk management relied on continuous contextual awareness and close coordination with partners. Frequent communication with PHK allowed the team to draw on their real-time understanding of community dynamics and operational constraints, enabling quick adjustments to scheduling, modalities, or priorities as conditions evolved. In parallel, the project monitored how interventions affected social cohesion, using staff observations and feedback loops with psychologists and the local partner to spot emerging issues early and adjust activities in a timely and informed way.

> " *Key risks relate to burnout, economic hardship, insecurity, and limited long-term funding. If key actors disengage, trust may weaken, community coordination could decline, and the sustainability of peacebuilding efforts would be undermined—potentially increasing tensions and deepening isolation among vulnerable groups.*" — Kolisnyk Valeriia, Peaceful Heaven of Kharkhiv

How Ukrainians Perceive NGOs During Wartime

In line with WeWorld's broader commitment to understanding how external assistance is perceived—and to ensuring that support remains genuinely sensitive to the local context—WeWorld and Peaceful Heaven of Kharkhiv (PHK) carried out a short exploratory consultation in November 2025 to explore **how Ukrainians view INGOs and NGOS and their staff during wartime**. The aim was to capture dominant narratives, emerging tensions, and potential stigma that could help shape future research and awareness efforts. An additional driver behind this work was the growing need to **better understand the risk of aid fatigue** (the population's growing weariness or scepticism toward repeated humanitarian interventions) **in communities repeatedly receiving external support**, and how NGOs can avoid unintended harm or duplicated efforts—especially in a context where strong local actors are already active, trusted, and deeply embedded in their communities. The consultation gathered **201 voluntary and anonymous responses**, mainly from adults in Eastern Ukraine, including both aid recipients and non-recipients. Although not statistically representative, the findings offer useful early insights:

- **NGOs are widely seen as essential.** Almost half of respondents had received humanitarian support in the past year—mainly food and hygiene items—and most described NGOs efforts as both effective and necessary, especially in frontline or vulnerable areas.

- **Trust is moderate to high, but not automatic.** Around 75% expressed full or partial trust in NGOs, with confidence strongest in well-known organisations. Trust, however, depends on personal experience, transparency, and a visible presence—people trust specific NGOs rather than the sector in general.

- **Effectiveness is valued, but confidence remains fragile.** About 70% rated NGOs effectiveness as high or rather high. Yet when including the 17% who "found it hard to answer", the proportion of respondents with doubts rises to 29%. This highlights an ongoing perception gap around the visibility and impact of NGOs work.

- **Transparency is the weakest area.** Only 12% openly rated NGOs financial transparency as low, but another 33% felt unsure about how funds are used. In total, 46% perceived transparency as unclear — pointing to a clear need for more accessible reporting and communication.

- **Social value and resilience contribution are strongly recognised.** Despite concerns about transparency, attitudes towards NGOs remain very positive. 87% see NGOs work as socially useful, and nearly 79% believe NGOs support Ukraine's resilience and resistance. NGOs are viewed not only as service providers, but as drivers of solidarity and hope.

- **Gender perceptions are largely balanced.** Around 70% saw no difference between the roles of men and women in NGOs. Where distinctions were made, men were associated with logistics and physical tasks, and women with coordination and communication.

Michele Lapini/WeWorld

Living in Constant Adaptation: Energy Insecurity, Gendered Burdens, and Staff Well-Being in Ukraine

Alongside our commitment to listening to and amplifying the voices of Ukrainian actors—because humanitarian work cannot succeed without those rooted in their own communities—WeWorld also places strong emphasis on **duty of care**: safeguarding the physical safety, mental well-being, and overall welfare of its staff, especially in high-risk or conflict settings. This is not only a moral and operational imperative but also critical to **social cohesion and peace**: when local humanitarian workers are protected, supported, and resilient, they can maintain essential services, sustain trust within communities, and uphold the social fabric under extreme pressure.

In Ukraine, this responsibility is particularly urgent. Frontline staff navigate the harsh realities of daily life while simultaneously holding together the communities they serve. In January 2026, during one of the harshest winters in recent years—with temperatures consistently below freezing and dropping to –20°C or lower in several regions—WeWorld conducted a consultation with its own staff and local partners.

The picture that emerged was one of **extreme strain but remarkable resilience**: a population accustomed to modern living, yet forced to adapt as bombardments repeatedly disrupted or suspended essential services. Staff described **not a temporary emergency but a prolonged state of constrained living**, where energy and water insecurity reshape every aspect of daily life. Survival becomes a matter of **managing scarcity**: storing water, timing chores around electricity, carrying supplies, constantly adjusting plans.

The physical cold intertwines with **psychological fatigue**, resulting in exhaustion and a decline in well-being. **Women reported carrying a disproportionate burden**—domestic work, childcare, and hygiene management fall largely on them—and even basic personal hygiene, including menstrual hygiene, becomes harder, more time-consuming, and emotionally taxing, often linked to feelings of discomfort, anxiety, and loss of dignity. Even when respondents said they were "coping", this reflected resilience under pressure rather than an absence of impact.

The combined effect is reduced productivity, more illness, emotional strain, financial pressure, and an erosion of dignity. Across responses, the mix of extreme cold and recurrent power and water cuts was not described as an inconvenience, but as a chronic condition reshaping everyday life—practically, physically, psychologically, financially, and in clearly gendered ways.

> *Cold temperatures and recurring outages significantly complicate my daily life."*

> *We're freezing. We can't lead our usual lifestyle."*

> *It is harder to remain productive when there is no electricity."*

> *The biggest challenge is emotional stability."*

> *I feel dirty, I am constantly worried."*

CONFLICT SENSITIVITY & INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION

Community Participation and Consultation Processes

During the project, community consultation was largely facilitated through our partner Peaceful Heaven of Kharkhiv (PHK), whose deep engagement and long-standing presence within local communities enabled practical, trusted, and culturally sensitive interactions with stakeholders. Much of the consultation process unfolded through **local partners and community-driven design**, ensuring that insights from those directly affected shaped both risk assessments and activity planning. For example, in the hygiene kit component, needs were identified through coordination with local authorities and humanitarian actors, complemented by mobile team field visits that allowed for direct engagement with households.

The sub-granting mechanism also served as an important structured channel for consultation: the two **proposals submitted by local groups** not only validated project assumptions regarding needs and emerging tensions, but also provided an evidence-based pathway to identify community-defined priorities.

Multiple feedback mechanisms were made available to participants. This was reflected in the psychosocial support component, where the project established an **emergency phone line** to enable timely communication and address urgent concerns. Similarly, for peacebuilding and social cohesion initiatives, the evaluation framework incorporated **participant feedback forms**, allowing continuous refinement of activities based on direct community input.

Inclusive and Equitable Participation

The project placed strong emphasis on ensuring inclusive and equitable participation across different population groups. Women and girls were engaged both as direct participants and through **gender-sensitive WASH design**, ensuring that hygiene assistance—especially menstrual hygiene support—responded to their specific needs and promoted dignity and safety.

Children and young people were at the centre of the psychosocial and education components. Mobile teams of psychologists delivered **child-friendly activities** tailored to support emotional well-being and strengthen coping skills among conflict-affected children and their caregivers. The sub-granting mechanism further reinforced inclusive participation by explicitly targeting children and adolescents with special educational needs through **safe spaces** and **out-of-school learning opportunities**.

> *"Young people and women are already contributing as volunteers, facilitators, and community organisers. There is strong potential to further involve them through leadership training, civic initiatives, peer-to-peer support, and income-generating opportunities that can strengthen both individual agency and overall social cohesion."* — Kolisnyk Valeriia, Peaceful Heaven of Kharkhiv

Maria's Diary: a Safe Guide for Girls Entering Adolescence

In a context where the war has made access to safe, gender-responsive hygiene services even more difficult, WeWorld created Maria's Diary, an educational and awareness tool on menstrual health and hygiene (MHM). It is a journal developed to accompany Ukrainian girls as they begin their transition into adolescence, offering a private and reassuring space where they can reflect on their feelings, questions, and everyday moments. Written in Ukrainian to ensure familiarity and ease of understanding, the diary introduces the theme of menarche and the physical and emotional changes linked to it in a gentle and accessible way. Through this tool, WeWorld seeks to foster dignity, awareness, and confidence among young girls, while reinforcing its broader commitment to gender-sensitive approaches within all WASH activities.

Preventing Reinforcement of Existing Power Imbalances

While the duration of the project limited opportunities to directly challenge deeper structural inequalities, deliberate measures were taken to avoid reinforcing existing power imbalances. Rather than relying solely on externally delivered activities, the project prioritised the **involvement of locally rooted partners and community-led initiatives**, supported through technical assistance and sub-grants. This approach shifted agenda-setting power toward local actors, reduced the risk of external "project capture", and helped ensure that priorities reflected community perceptions and needs.

OPERATIONALISING THE WPS AND YPS AGENDAS

Women, Peace & Security

Within WeWorld's broader programme vision in Ukraine—separate from, yet complementary to, the Protect Kharkiv project—the report *Her Future at Risk: The Cost of Humanitarian Crises on Women and Girls. Focus: Gender-Transformative WASH Programming in Wartime Ukraine* reflects a wider programmatic and strategic approach that positions gender-transformative WASH as a concrete pathway to operationalise the WPS agenda across both humanitarian and recovery settings.

This approach goes beyond technical fixes to centre dignity, safety, and agency—from safe toilet placement and lighting to reliable menstrual health and hygiene (MHM) in shelters—while working in partnership with women-led local organisations, embedding intersectional analysis (gender alongside disability, age, displacement, ethnicity, and class), investing in women's leadership and governance within WASH services, reducing unpaid care burdens through smarter design, and hard-wiring feedback and accountability mechanisms that shift power to users.

Gender-equitable WASH systems are central to advancing the WPS agenda: when designed around women's needs and safety, they reduce risks of gender-based violence, uphold dignity and autonomy, and create real opportunities for women to participate in planning and oversight. In this way, WASH becomes not just a service, but a platform for meaningful engagement and community resilience. By contrast, facilities that overlook gendered needs risk reinforcing exclusion, insecurity, and harm.

Within the Protect Kharkiv project, these principles translated into practice through gender-responsive WASH activities—including hygiene kits with MHM supplies, menstrual health awareness, and locally-led delivery with PHK—practical steps that safeguard dignity and enable women's meaningful participation in community life and service decisions.

Taken together, this strategic and programmatic approach demonstrates how gender-transformative WASH contributes to the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus by linking life-saving services with longer-term recovery, strengthening local leadership, reducing protection risks, and supporting inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding in Ukraine.

Her Future at Risk: Key Insights on Gender and WASH in Wartime Ukraine

Published in July 2025, *Her Future at Risk: The Cost of Humanitarian Crises on Women and Girls. Focus: Gender-Transformative WASH Programming in Wartime Ukraine* examines how the war has deepened gender inequalities within the WASH response and reshaped roles and decision-making power. The report finds that women's participation in WASH governance is too often symbolic, with local groups sidelined and under-resourced, while critical links between WASH, gender-based violence, and sexual and reproductive health remain poorly integrated. It also highlights how women's unpaid labour fills service gaps, yet their expertise is rarely recognised or leveraged. In response, the report calls for genuinely gender-transformative WASH: safe, inclusive systems led by affected communities—particularly women—supported by investment in local leadership, accessible infrastructure, and adaptive, intersectional programming. Embedding gender equity in WASH is not optional; it is essential for building fair and resilient systems in Ukraine and directly contributes to advancing the HDP nexus and the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda by strengthening local leadership, reducing protection risks, and supporting inclusive, long-term recovery and peacebuilding.

The report was developed in consultation with over 25 Ukrainian and international organisations and more than 800 women and girls. It was presented in Rome during a side event titled *"Empowered Ukraine: Rebuilding from Human Capital"* at the Ukraine Recovery Conference in July 2025, alongside Italian partners active in Ukraine, including the Italian Agency for Cooperation and Development (ACIS), and local Ukrainian organisations.

Youth, Peace & Security

Youth and children were engaged in the Protect Kharkiv project not only as recipients of services, but also as active contributors to community recovery and social cohesion. The project integrated child-friendly, peacebuilding-oriented psychosocial activities—including play-based approaches and tailored sessions for adolescents—to **strengthen emotional well-being** while **fostering constructive interaction and solidarity among peers**. Across the project, the overall design consistently encouraged **youth participation and leadership**, helping challenge traditional generational roles and positioning young people as meaningful actors in their community's resilience and recovery.

A clear example of this approach came through the **Berestyn sub-grant**, which explicitly positioned adolescents as "young leaders of change". The initiative emphasised leadership development, participation in decision-making processes, and child-rights awareness, supported by the creation of a dedicated space where active teenagers could meet, collaborate, and co-design activities for their peers.

WHAT WE LEARNED FROM THE PROTECT KHARKIV PROJECT

Strategic Lessons

- **"Peace" and "conflict" must be framed with particular sensitivity in active war settings**, as these terms are far from neutral and may be misunderstood or rejected if presented too directly. Effective engagement requires adapting terminology and narratives to local perceptions shaped by trauma, displacement, and ongoing violence.

- **Fatigue linked to short-term humanitarian approaches signals the need for longer-term, integrated programming.** Communities showed signs of weariness when assistance cycles were short or fragmented, highlighting the importance of multi-phase interventions that connect Psychosocial Support (PSS), social cohesion, and peacebuilding.

- **Conflict sensitivity works best when built in from day one.** Even a light, routine framework—risk logs, perception checks, feedback loops[1]—helps prevent harm and makes project decisions more context-responsive.

- **The Nexus approach requires clear sequencing.** It works best when immediate stressors are addressed first—such

[1] These refer to a set of light, routine tools used to keep programmes responsive to the local context. Risk logs are simple trackers that record emerging risks and potential unintended effects. Perception checks involve asking community members and partners how they view activities, fairness, and any early signs of tension. Feedback loops ensure that concerns or suggestions from participants are systematically collected, discussed, and acted upon, so adaptations can be made quickly and transparently

as improving access to WASH services and protection—because this creates the basic stability people need to engage meaningfully in further support. Once these urgent needs are reduced, efforts can focus on strengthening local capacities through referrals, educator support, and other community services. With this foundation in place, it then becomes possible to deepen social cohesion and peacebuilding outcomes in a way that is both sustainable and locally grounded.

Operational Lessons

- **Sub-granting is most effective when paired with coaching, clear selection criteria, and simple reporting.** Beyond providing funding, the mechanism functions as a powerful consultation tool that surfaces local priorities and validates programme assumptions. Its impact is stronger when it enables the creation of locally owned spaces and activities, offering repeated, low-threshold opportunities for interaction that substantially strengthen peace, social cohesion, and inclusion.

- **Conflict sensitivity tools must be actionable and routine.** Light instruments such as conflict sensitivity toolkit or matrices become highly effective when used in quarterly partner reflections, risk updates, and agreed mitigations.

- **A conflict-sensitive MEAL system should track patterns, not just outputs.** Monitoring participation gaps, perceptions of fairness, trust signals, rumours, complaints, and stigma/backlash indicators support quicker and better-informed adaptation. This also requires a **strong emphasis on qualitative tools**—such as key informant interviews, focus groups, participatory mapping, and reflective field notes—that can capture nuance, context shifts, and early warning signals that quantitative metrics alone may miss.

- **Integrating Psychosocial Support (PSS) and social cohesion requires stable, longer-term engagement.** Short timeframes limit the depth and consistency of psychosocial and cohesion interventions, making it harder to reduce distress or build stronger community ties.

- **Local partners are essential to ensure adapted, trusted interactions.** They provide real-time insight into needs, tensions, and community perceptions, enabling activities to remain relevant and responsive. For this reason, and in line with delocalisation principles, **local actors must be enabled to take on central and decision-making roles**—ensuring that programmes are shaped by those closest to the context and better positioned to guide effective, locally grounded responses.

Scaling Conflict Sensitivity into Humanitarian Mine Action: The AICS-funded SMINA Project

Building on the lessons learned through Protect Kharkiv WeWorld is applying a conflict-sensitive, community-centred approach within humanitarian mine action.

The project "SMINA - Humanitarian Demining and Awareness-Raising of Affected Communities for the Reduction of Mine and Unexploded Ordnance Risk in Ukraine" (AID 013157/01/0), funded by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) and implemented by WeWorld, forms part of the Italian Cooperation's broader emergency initiative in support of vulnerable populations in conflict-affected regions of Ukraine. Implemented from October 2025 for 15 months, the intervention focuses on the oblasts of Mykolaiv and Kherson, aiming to enhance the safety, resilience, and recovery prospects of conflict-affected communities through integrated humanitarian mine action and risk awareness.

A core feature of SMINA is the systematic integration of conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm. The project acknowledges that, in areas recently affected by hostilities, mine action and risk education interventions can unintentionally exacerbate tensions - including between returnees and long-term residents - or reinforce patterns of exclusion and stigmatisation if outreach, prioritisation, and engagement are (or are perceived as) unfair or opaque. To reduce these risks, the project will:

- Train consortium staff on conflict sensitivity principles, and practical risk mitigation, so that teams can identify connectors and dividers and adapt delivery as context shifts.

- Identify core risks through a participatory conflict analysis and community-based mapping of needs, ensuring that decisions on prioritisation and delivery are based on transparent, evidence-informed criteria that communities can understand and scrutinise.

- Mitigate key risks through a participatory process, translating findings of the analysis into clear mitigation measures (for example, transparent communication on criteria, inclusive outreach, and safe community feedback channels).

- Identify entry points to maximise positive impacts and strengthen social cohesion, for example by working through and supporting local institutions (including schools and community structures) so that risk awareness and protective behaviours can be sustained and owned locally.

Through this integrated approach, SMINA seeks not only to reduce the physical threat posed by explosive ordnance, but also to support equitable recovery and community ownership in a fragile and rapidly changing conflict environment.

Alessandro Parente/WeWorld

Lorenzo Giuliani
Peacebuilding Expert

"WeWorld views "peace" in this context as the creation of conditions for positive peace to take root—conditions grounded in justice, inclusion, equality, and strong social systems. This understanding has shaped our strategic priorities, guiding us to work alongside Ukrainian civil society organisations with a peacebuilding mandate and encouraging approaches that move beyond humanitarian delivery alone. Strengthening relationships, rebuilding trust, and promoting inclusion have therefore become central elements of our engagement.

Across this experience, two aspects of our approach showed particular potential for scale-up. The first is the mainstreaming of conflict sensitivity—through workshops, practical tools, and continuous feedback loops—which helps reduce harm and enables programmes to adapt as contexts shift. The second is intentional networking and structured collaboration with

Ukrainian peacebuilding NGOs, which deepens contextual understanding, strengthens referral pathways, and enhances coordination. These elements are highly transferable across fragile settings where well-intentioned assistance can inadvertently fuel tensions if not delivered with sensitivity.

At the same time, we confronted a number of strategic challenges that required careful adaptation. The environment was extremely fragile and politically sensitive, and even speaking about "conflict" or "peace" demanded caution and thoughtful framing. A key lesson was the need to use language that resonates locally—such as social cohesion, community tensions, access to resources, or inclusion—while relying on conflict-sensitive processes to guide the work and avoiding terminology that might be perceived as politicised. This helped ensure that peacebuilding entry points remained both respectful and effective."

Collettivo Gaze/WeWorld

CHAPTER 3.
Conclusions & Recommendations

Max Cavallari/WeWorld

3.1. What Our Experience Tells Us

WeWorld's experience across fragile and protracted crisis settings confirms that peace is not a discrete theme; it is the core goal and strategic priority that determines whether humanitarian assistance is safe and effective and whether development outcomes endure. Programme success rises and falls with the quality of relationships between communities, institutions, and service systems, and with the fairness of access, voice, and accountability.

This chapter synthesises what the field experience repeatedly demonstrates, the operational realities this creates, and what donors and partners can do to strengthen peace-responsive programming across the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus.

CROSS-CUTTING DRIVERS OF FRAGILITY

WeWorld consistently encounters a set of structural and relational drivers of tension and violence affecting everyday life across humanitarian, development, and governance arenas. A cross-cutting lesson is that fragility is multi-dimensional, relational, and structural. Solutions must be multi-year, locally led, and conflict-sensitive by design.

DRIVER	FIELD SIGNALS WE REPEATEDLY OBSERVE	OPERATIONAL RESPONSE	IMPLICATIONS FOR DONORS/PARTNERS
Youth exclusion	Limited access to decision-making; weak inter-generational dialogue; unemployment; exposure to polarising narratives and illicit economies	Engage youth as co-analysts and co-designers; support Community Peace Activists; enable youth–authority dialogues; use arts and media to de-polarise	Fund youth-led analysis, sub-grants with mentoring, and structured seats for youth in local platforms; pair with livelihood and MHPSS linkages
Gender inequality & GBV	Restricted mobility and voice for women and girls; high prevalence of GBV; harmful norms undermine cohesion, trust and meaningful participation	Women-led and gender-transformative conflict analysis; safe spaces and GBV referral; women mediators/facilitators; when possible and safe, gender-transformative interventions and norm-change initiatives, including in schools and communities; links to economic inclusion	Fund gender sensitive analyses that can inform gender-transformative interventions and ensure do no harm; make GBV systems and norm-change core deliverables; include women's organisations as co-implementers with capacity strengthening
Institutional mistrust	Perceived corruption; uneven service delivery; low accountability; fragile citizen–authority relations; youth disillusionment.	Embed transparency, feedback mechanisms, grievance redress; convene community–institution forums; calibrate humanitarian targeting to avoid resentment	Fund platform stewardship, accountability routines, and conflict-sensitive service delivery as part of programme infrastructure
Economic marginalisation	Competition over land, water, jobs, and services; youth unemployment; tensions magnified in displacement contexts	Couple social cohesion with livelihood interventions, dialogues and pathways; use equitable access as a de-escalation mechanism	Allow Nexus budgets to integrate light livelihoods within peace-centred grants; build referral bridges to larger economic programmes
Intercommunal tensions	Friction between host and displaced populations; perceptions of unequal aid; pressure on services	Transparent targeting, proactive information-sharing, and joint problem-solving that includes host communities	Require host community representation in decision spaces; finance communication and accountability to affected populations explicitly
Polarisation & disinformation	Fake news, hate speech, divisive narratives erode cohesion, especially among youth	Media literacy; ethical journalism training; arts-based approaches such as theatre and photovoice to widen constructive participation	Fund content and local media partnerships as cohesion tools; treat narrative work as risk mitigation

WORKING IN FRAGILITY: OPERATIONAL REALITIES

Several predictable challenges recur across contexts. WeWorld addresses them through deliberate process design, turning challenges into inputs for adaptation rather than barriers to progress.

Key operational realities:
- **Political sensitivities and language:** "Peacebuilding" can be perceived as politically-charged and partisan. What helps: use conflict-sensitive framing around social cohesion, inclusion, and access; align communications and beneficiary selection with do-no-harm principles.

- **Retention of youth and women facilitators:** Economic insecurity, mobility limitations, and caregiving responsibilities risk drop-off. What helps: retention packages including transport, childcare, peak stipends, mentoring, role progression; sub-grants with accompaniment to stabilise organisational continuity.

- **Structural gaps: livelihoods and MHPSS:** Dialogue alone cannot sustain gains where unemployment and trauma are acute. What helps: link cohesion efforts to livelihood and MHPSS services, or establish formal referral partnerships.

- **Disability inclusion:** Accessibility and tailored facilitation are often under-resourced. What helps: budget for reasonable accommodation, partner with organisations of persons with disabilities, and track inclusion as a quality indicator.

- **Platform fragility and volatility:** Multi-actor fora and youth–authority dialogues fade without facilitation; elections and civic unrest shift priorities overnight. What helps: a light platforms playbook (membership, facilitation rota, agenda rules, follow-up) and adaptive management including pre-cleared pivots, no-cost extensions, and budget realignments.

GOOD GOVERNANCE AS A PILLAR OF PEACE

Peace depends on institutional behaviour: fairness of service delivery, predictability of rules, and the ability of citizens, particularly women and youth, to influence decisions affecting their safety and access. Weak governance and low accountability repeatedly emerge as primary conflict drivers.

GOVERNANCE FOCUS	MECHANISMS WEWORLD USES	EXPECTED EFFECTS
Institutional capacity & accountability	Support to authorities, schools, community safety structures, and service providers on consultations, grievance redress, and inclusive policy dialogue	Fairer targeting and service access; fewer tensions; increased trust and acceptance
Community–institution interfaces	Youth–authority fora, inclusive governance roundtables, mediation spaces	Predictable contact; faster de-escalation; shared responsibility for cohesion; reduced fragmentation
Civil society as governance actor	Sub-grants and organisational mentoring for women- and youth-led CSOs	Local leadership with staying power; legitimacy; post-project continuity; reduced epistemic injustice
Transparency & information	Clear communication on targeting, referrals, and institutional roles; AAP mechanisms	Fewer rumours; fewer grievance cycles; better do-no-harm performance

3.2.   Recommendations

Drawing on the lessons from the field, the following practical adjustments highlight how **donors and implementing partners can work together** to strengthen peace-responsive program-ming, ensuring both investments and operational approaches are effective, inclusive, and sustainable.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION	LEAD ACTOR	KEY OPERATIONAL LEVERS
Multi-year, flexible funding	Donors	24–36 month envelopes; pre-cleared pivots; no-cost extensions; budget realignments for context shifts
Conflict sensitivity as programme infrastructure	Donors & Implementing Partners	Ongoing analysis; partner workshops; adaptation logs; community feedback loops; recognise learning as outputs
Invest in local CSOs (women & youth)	Donors & Implementing Partners	Sub-grants + mentoring; budget lines for organisational strengthening; multi-year partnerships
Link peace, livelihoods, MHPSS	Partners	Purposeful allocations; cross-sector referrals; integrate cohesion work with livelihoods and psychosocial support
Fund multi-actor platform stewardship	Donors & Implementing Partners	Facilitation, accessibility, documentation, follow-up; anchor platforms in civic/service structures
Support shared learning & scaling	Donors & Implementing Partners	Joint analyses; youth- and women-led studies; playbooks/toolkits; replicate tested approaches with contextual adaptation

♥ REFLECTIONS ON POSITIONALITY AND THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL NGOS

As international NGOs, we operate within complex power dynamics and must continually interrogate our own positionality. Recent reflections on conflict sensitivity emphasise that the identities, privileges, and behaviours of aid actors influence how interventions are perceived and how they shape local dynamics. These factors can affect relationships with stakeholders, filter the information practitioners receive, and unintentionally reinforce existing inequalities or exclusion.

This includes recognising that aid delivery carries implicit messages about power and authority, and that well-intentioned programmes can trigger resistance or place partners at risk when they are not grounded in a deep understanding of local realities. These insights connect closely to ongoing debates on decolonising aid, where the persistence of hierarchical structures and assumptions of neutrality can alienate communities or heighten tensions. Acknowledging how positionality influences operational choices allows for more equitable engagement and more context-responsive programming (Giuliani, 2025).

Effective peace-responsive programming requires humility:
- **Valuing local knowledge and co-producing solutions with communities.**
- **Avoiding the imposition of external agendas.**
- **Remaining critically aware of how our presence shapes local dynamics—positively or negatively.**

By deconstructing our role and foregrounding local leadership, we strengthen both the legitimacy and sustainability of our interventions. Integrating reflexivity into our practice ensures that peace efforts are not simply externally funded but genuinely locally owned—helping aid contribute to dismantling, rather than perpetuating, systemic inequalities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DONORS

- **Align funding with the realities of peacebuilding:** Provide multi-year, flexible funding envelopes (24–36 months) that allow activity-level adaptation without reopening contracts. Emergency and recovery funding should be paired with longer-term continuity to support trust-building, platform stewardship, and local leadership.

- **Treat conflict sensitivity and adaptation as programme infrastructure:** Allocate resources for ongoing context analysis, stakeholder engagement, and systematic adaptation. Recognise learning and reflection as programme outputs and enable budget realignments or no-cost extensions when contexts shift.

- **Invest in local civil society as long-term partners:** Support women- and youth-led organisations through multi-year sub-grants, structured mentoring on safeguarding, MEAL, and financial management, and budget lines for organisational strengthening. Long-term support consolidates capacity and reduces epistemic injustice.

- **Strengthen Nexus linkages:** Ensure peacebuilding initiatives are purposefully linked to livelihoods and mental health and psychosocial support, either through integrated funding or formal referral mechanisms, so that relational gains translate into tangible improvements in people's lives.

- **Recognise multi-actor platforms as essential public goods:** Fund facilitation, accessibility, documentation, and follow-up, and encourage anchoring of platforms in existing civic or service structures to ensure continuity beyond single projects.

- **Support shared learning and scalable approaches:** Fund joint analyses, youth- and women-led research, and the development of playbooks, toolkits, and training pathways to replicate tested approaches while preserving contextual adaptation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

- **Embed adaptive management as routine practice:** Conduct regular context reviews, adjust activities based on community feedback and conflict sensitivity findings, and maintain clear adaptation logs.

- **Prioritise inclusion and local leadership:** Ensure meaningful participation of youth, women, and marginalised groups. Engage them as co-analysts and co-designers of interventions, and track participation to guide programme adaptation.

- **Strengthen multi-actor platform stewardship:** Facilitate ongoing dialogue between communities, authorities, and service providers, documenting outcomes and maintaining continuity beyond project cycles.

- **Collaborate across sectors:** Link peacebuilding efforts with livelihoods, psychosocial support, and governance initiatives. Establish formal referral pathways to reinforce the sustainability of results.

- **Invest in organisational capacity and sustainability:** Provide mentoring in safeguarding, MEAL, financial management, and governance practices. Ensure sub-grants and support structures enable local organisations to operate independently over time.

- **Document and share learning systematically:** Collect operational lessons, produce briefings, toolkits, and playbooks, and share insights with peers and donors to inform programme adaptation and replication across contexts.

Across programmes, peace grows where relationships are fairer, institutions are more responsive, and women and young people hold real influence over decision-making. Conflict sensitivity as routine, local leadership as architecture, convening as practice, governance strengthening as a pillar, and engagement of women and youth as engines together convert humanitarian and development inputs into durable, non-violent outcomes. This is what years of field experience demonstrates works, and it is what donors and partners can scale with the right timeframes, flexibility, and collaborative approaches.

⚤ Gender-Transformative Approaches as a Strategic Lever

Why it matters: Gender equality is not an add-on; it is central to reducing conflict drivers, building social cohesion, and strengthening institutional responsiveness. Women's leadership, safe participation spaces, and norm-change initiatives create systemic shifts that underpin sustainable peace.

Operational entry points:
- Women-led conflict analysis informs programme design.
- Leadership tracks, facilitation, and mediation roles give women influence in governance and community decisions.
- Norm-change initiatives in schools, families, and communities reshape harmful gender roles.

Implications for donors & partners:
- Fund WPS leadership tracks and safe spaces as core deliverables.
- Support women's organisations as co-implementers with capacity strengthening.
- Include gender-transformative objectives in multi-year, flexible funding strategies.

👪 Child and Youth Participation & the CARES Framework

Why it matters: Children and youth are both present actors and the future of peaceful societies. Meaningful participation strengthens intergenerational justice, social cohesion, and the right to the future.

Operational entry points:
- Youth- and child-led conflict analysis, planning, and monitoring.
- Community Peace Activists and youth–authority dialogues.
- CARES Framework in education and programming.

Implications for donors & partners:
- Fund sub-grants, mentoring, and structured seats for youth in local platforms.
- Embed youth participation in governance, monitoring, and programme adaptation.
- Recognise intergenerational justice as a programme goal and link it to livelihoods, MHPSS, and education.

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WeWorld is an independent Italian organisation engaged in development cooperation and humanitarian aid projects over the last 50 years, operating today in more than 20 countries.

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We work alongside individuals on the geographic, economic or social margins to overcome inequalities together and build a fairer future which respects the dignity and diversity of people and the environment. We support people and communities with humanitarian assistance in crisis contexts and support pathways to self-determination and development, to contribute to structural change and generate opportunities for all people.

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