



Key takeaways

Annual Conference of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission

The GEC's annual conference [*Women forging lasting peace: Dismantling barriers to gender-inclusive conflict resolution and peacebuilding*](#) was held on 9 June 2026 in Strasbourg and online in cooperation with the Monegasque Presidency of the Committee of Ministers. The conference brought together 200 representatives of member States, Council of Europe bodies, UN mandate-holders and agencies, academia, women's rights and women-led organisations, and broader civil society. Against the backdrop of the global security situation, the conference focused particularly on Russia's full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine. These key takeaways speak to the action needed by the Council of Europe, its member States and partners.

1. Strengthen European and international cross-disciplinary alliances to advance women's participation in conflict-resolution and peacebuilding

The conference's strategic innovation was to bring together the Council of Europe's human rights approach and standards-based expertise on gender equality and combatting violence against women, and the European and international community on women, peace, and security (WPS). Participants called for **continued dialogue to build such essential bridges** between different fora, areas of expertise and levels of influence – local, national, regional (European) and international.

2. Emphasise advancing women's participation in conflict-resolution and peacebuilding as a right linked to both democracy and human dignity

Participants emphasised the need to focus on women's *right* to participate in peacebuilding, alongside arguments related to efficiency, such as the fact that women's participation renders peace more sustainable. **Rights-based arguments are not sufficiently expressed** and need to be strengthened. In this regard, member States and partners should be guided by Council of Europe standards, in particular Committee of Ministers Recommendations (2010)10 on the role of women and men in conflict prevention and resolution and in peace building, and (2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making. **Accountability**, including through the Register of Damage for Ukraine, is a key angle of the human rights-based approach and a driver for stronger participation.

3. Support women's broader political participation and leadership as a key element of democratic security and sustainable, rights-based peacebuilding

Without women in politics who have **meaningful influence**, there is little scope for their engagement in negotiations. Participants identified increasing women's political participation generally as a key area on which the Council of Europe could support the WPS agenda, including through the New Democratic Pact for Europe.

4. Identify and eliminate barriers to participation of women in all their diversity

The conference explored specific barriers to participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding faced by women in all their diversity, including LGBTI women, Roma women, young women, women with disabilities, and displaced women. Participants underlined the importance of **intersectional approaches** to ensure representation and diversity of voices and rights-based solutions to conflict-resolution and peacebuilding, in line with the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2024-2029.

5. Address gender norms, violence against women and girls and militarisation as root causes of women's low participation in peacebuilding

Gendered norms and power dynamics, violence against women and girls, and domestic violence are associated with stigma and exacerbated in times of militarisation and war.

They are **key deterrents** to women's participation in peace processes and are an area which conference participants agreed the WPS agenda should explore further. Guidance for member States and partners to address these deterrents is found in Council of Europe standards and tools, including its Gender Equality Strategy, the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), and Committee of Ministers Recommendation (2019)¹ on preventing and combating sexism.

Gendered expectations of women during conflict can extend to pressure on them to bear children and can adversely impact their **sexual and reproductive health and rights**. Such expectations and their consequences can form barriers to women's participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Participants stressed that efforts should be made to dismantle these barriers.

6. Harness the power of technology to advance, rather than impede, women's participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding

Participants recognised that women in conflict settings, including those at risk of multiple forms of discrimination, such as displaced women, are deliberately attacked by often AI-powered gendered disinformation or technology-facilitated violence aimed at **silencing and marginalising** them further.

Committee of Ministers Recommendation (2026)² on Accountability for Technology-Facilitated Violence against Women and Girls, GREVIO's General Recommendation No.1 on the digital dimension of violence against women, and the future Council of Europe Convention on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) provide a key framework for government action to address these attacks. On the other hand, digital tools can **support women's participation** when they are designed and deployed intentionally for this purpose, and provided risks related to safety, access, exclusion and online harm are addressed.

7. Strengthen women's movements and leadership for stronger peace

Pointing to the resolute women's movements in Colombia, Northern Ireland and elsewhere, participants estimated that behind every **successful peace process there has been a strong women's movement**. Alongside transformative work on gender norms, gendered power dynamics and confidence-building, international and member State support must go to women's movement-building and leadership skills.

Women in Ukraine have taken on diverse roles in society, but they are still absent from peace and security conversations, often due to **limited access, platforms, and capacity**. Conference participants urged the Council of Europe to support women's movement-building, capacity-building, and better integration across all decision-making levels, to ensure stronger involvement of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

8. Provide direct, long-term funding of women's organisations

Participants discussed the **chronic lack, and current disproportionate decrease, of funding** for women's rights and women-led organisations as a key barrier to women's meaningful participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

The **proportion of funding to Ukraine that advances gender equality is well below the global average**, and only a fragment is channelled to women's rights and women-led organisations. Participants stressed that the expertise, experience and unique knowledge of local and national realities that these organisations possess should place them at the centre of any effective efforts towards women's increased participation in peacebuilding.

