



Members of Moldova's Women's Advisory Board (WAB) visited Tbilisi, Georgia, for an exchange with women peacebuilders from the South Caucasus, sharing experiences on inclusive peace, mediation, and women's roles in peace processes. The study visit was organized by UN Women with Sweden financial support and in partnership with Folke Bernadotte Academy, 2024.

Photo credit: UN Women

IN BRIEF



Invisible No More: Women Influencing Peace in Europe and Central Asia

INTRODUCTION

The geopolitical landscape of Europe and Central Asia is shaped by a series of complex and protracted conflicts rooted in historical grievances, ethnic tensions, and territorial disputes. The most prominent example is Russia's ongoing full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which has triggered the largest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II, and continues to destabilize the region. In the South Caucasus, tensions remain high between Armenia and Azerbaijan, despite ongoing efforts to finalize a peace agreement aimed at ending more than 30 years of conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. In Georgia, consequences of the conflicts of the early 1990s, as well as the 2008 war, remains unresolved. Efforts toward a comprehensive and sustainable political settlement have faced significant challenges, and the populations affected continue to experience socio-economic hardships and insecurity due to its protracted nature. The Western Balkans also continue to grapple with unresolved legacies of the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s. Ethnic divisions in countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo* remain deeply entrenched, complicating state-building and democratic consolidation. Kosovo, in particular, faces ongoing tensions with Serbia, especially around

the status and governance of Serbian-majority areas, which has led to periodic clashes, political instability, and fragile dialogue efforts facilitated by the international community. In Central Asia, the Ferghana Valley, shared by Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, remains a historically sensitive area due to its complex demographics and legacy of ethnic tensions and border disputes. However, in recent years, notable progress has been made toward improving bilateral relations and regional cooperation. Efforts include high-level dialogues and border demarcation agreements aimed at reducing tensions and preventing violence. A key milestone was the signing of the Khujand Declaration¹ on 31 March 2025 by Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan as a joint commitment to fostering friendship, regional cooperation, and peace and security.

Women remain significantly underrepresented in peace, security, and political processes across the region, including conflict resolution, negotiations, decision-making, and recovery planning. Despite their critical roles in community resilience and peacebuilding, **women are often excluded from formal mechanisms,**

* All references to Kosovo should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

¹ <https://www.specialeurasia.com/2025/03/31/khujand-declaration-central-asia/>

limiting the inclusivity and sustainability of peace and security efforts. In 2020-2023, **women in ECA region made up just 8% of negotiators and less than 3% of peace agreement signatories** (UN Women Peace Monitor). As showcased by data, women's participation increases the probability of a peace agreement lasting at least two years by 20%, and by 35% the probability of a peace agreement lasting 15 years.²

In October 2023, UN Women released a policy brief **Women Influencing Multi-Stakeholder Peace Dialogue, Processes and Policy Spaces** which made efforts to draw lessons on how women have been participating as actors in influencing peace dialogue and processes related to the women, peace and security agenda in Europe and Central Asia. The analysis provided evidence that effective and sustainable peacebuilding in Europe and Central Asia requires **institutionalized mechanisms** that ensure women's meaningful participation at all levels. Key findings from UN Women-led consultations with key stakeholders in 2020-2024 underscore the **importance of structured engagement** between women peacebuilders, civil society, and formal peace processes. Addressing these issues is essential for more adaptive and risk-informed peacebuilding engagement.

In 2024, UN Women commissioned an independent evaluation of its support to women's participation in peace processes (2018-2023), which confirms that UN Women plays a **unique and valuable role** in this area, leveraging its mandate, leadership, and strong relationships with women's civil society. The evaluation identified **five key mechanisms** through which UN Women contributes to advancing women's participation in peace processes - convening stakeholders; building awareness and commitment; supporting women's mobilization; embedding WPS in institutions; and developing strategic partnerships. These mechanisms were effective across diverse contexts and positive and sustainable outcomes were most likely where UN Women **strengthened institutional capacities** and supported **long-term engagement** with both government actors and women's organizations. The evaluation also noted meaningful progress in applying a **Leave No One Behind** approach, particularly in reaching **diverse and marginalized women**, scaling up **grassroots support**, and investing in **coalitions and networks**.

The Women, Peace and security (WPS) agenda is central to the implementation of CEDAW General Recommendation No. 40, adopted in October 2024 and reaffirmed **the obligation to ensure women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in all stages of peace processes**. WPS commitments must be integrated into national legislation, security sector reform, and conflict prevention strategies, with a focus on protecting the rights of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict settings, and ensuring accountability for gender-based violations.

During the 2024 WPS Open Debate at the UN Security Council, the **UN Secretary-General's Common Pledge on Women's Participation in Peace Processes** was launched and joined by 25 member states, including Türkiye. This initiative aligns with the 25th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, reinforcing the global commitment to advancing women's roles in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. A progress on implementation of the pledge commitments is expected to report at the WPS Open debate at UN Security Council in October 2025.

This brief aims to highlight the critical but often overlooked role of women in peace processes across Europe and Central Asia, emphasizing their contributions beyond formal negotiations. It seeks to showcase promising practices, where women's leadership in informal dialogues, civil society, and grassroots peacebuilding could advance reconciliation and conflict prevention. By examining UN Women's support for gender-inclusive peace efforts, the brief intends to inform policymakers, peacebuilders, and international actors on effective strategies to enhance women's meaningful participation and promote gender-responsive peacebuilding in the region.

PROMISING PRACTICES

In 2018, UN Women documented **good practices on modalities and strategies to ensure women's meaningful participation in peace processes**, drawing on insights from over 60 practitioners, analysts, and advocates worldwide. The resulting report highlights innovations, emerging trends, and key challenges in the interaction between official, high-level peace processes and unofficial, civil society-led initiatives,

² Source: <https://wps.unwomen.org/participation/>

where women often take on leadership roles. These documented practices have further informed the design and facilitation of UN Women-supported mechanisms for women’s engagement in peacebuilding across the Europe and Central Asia region, as presented below.

Bridging the Gap: Advancing Women’s Participation in the Geneva International Discussions

Background: The Geneva International Discussions (GID) was launched in October 2008 following the Sarkozy-Medvedev six-point peace agreement to guide the peace process after the August 2008 War in Georgia. As of June 2025, the GID has held 64 round of talks, co-chaired by the UN, OSCE, and EU. The discussions bring together key stakeholders to address core issues including non-use of force, international security arrangements, and humanitarian concerns such as freedom of movement, documentation, missing persons, livelihoods, and cultural heritage. Despite ongoing challenges, **the GID remains a crucial platform for promoting dialogue and reducing tensions in the region.**

While the GIDs have traditionally been male-dominated, **women’s civil society organizations** have played a crucial role in influencing the peace process. Through parallel dialogue platforms and policy advocacy, women peacebuilders have raised key humanitarian and human rights issues- especially around displacement, missing persons, and the human security needs of conflict-affected women. Their work has helped integrate a **gender-sensitive approach** into international engagement and has created pressure for more **inclusive peace processes** over time.

UN Women’s engagement: Since 2014, UN Women in Georgia has played a pivotal role in institutionalizing inclusive mechanisms that bridge the gap between internally displaced and conflict-affected women and national peace and security decision-making processes. In partnership with Georgia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, and the European Union Monitoring Mission, UN Women established and sustained regular information-sharing meetings on the GID and its

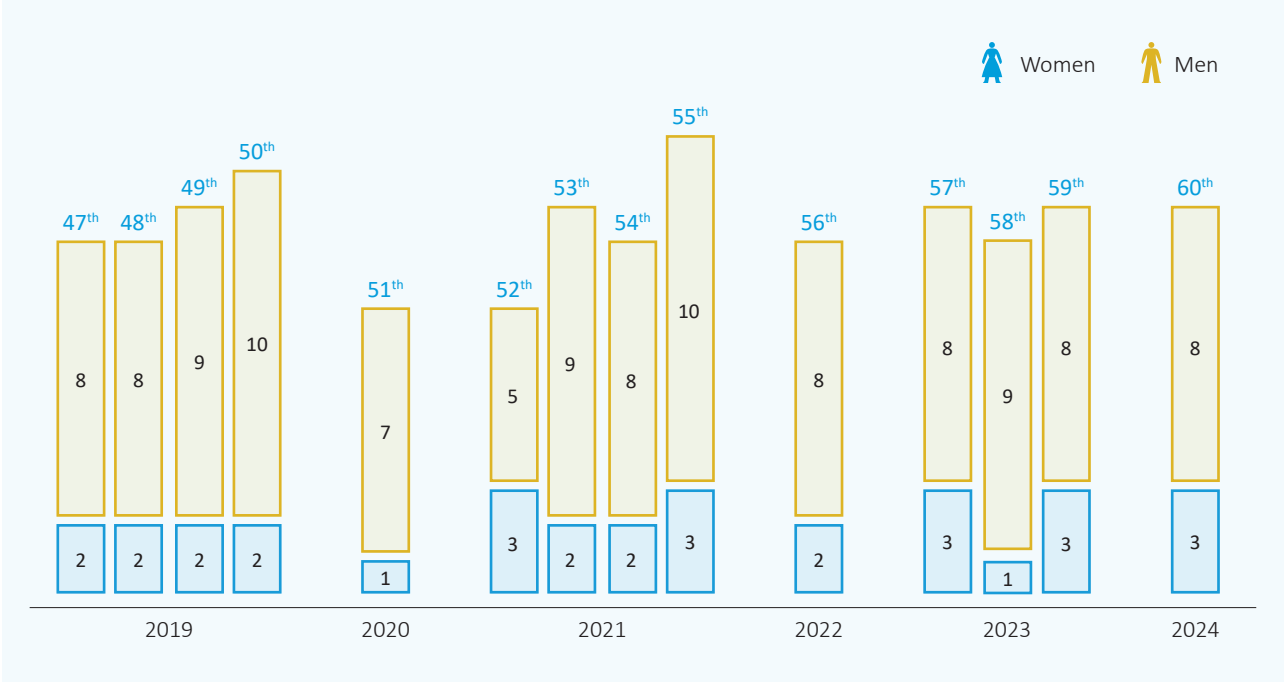
Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) participatns and IDP and conflict affected women. These information sharing platforms - unique in the region- have engaged over 1000 grassroots women and women’s civil society organizations, providing them with a rare and critical opportunity to articulate their human security concerns directly to peace process stakeholders. Yet another milestone was the creation of the ‘Women, Peace and Security – Consultation Platform on the Enhancement of Women’s Meaningful Participation in Peacebuilding’ under the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia back in 2021, which institutionalized regular consultations with fifteen leading women’s CSOs and enhanced their participation in peace and security related decision-making spaces. The format and regularity of these dialogue platforms have been anchored in different iterations of Georgia’s National Action Plan on WPS.³ Amidst a shifting geopolitical and security landscape, these mechanisms have remained a vital conduit for women and their community voices and concerns to reach high-level decision-makers.

Since 2019, UN Women has been actively advocating for the integration of the WPS agenda in a meaningful and sustainable manner within the GID. Among others, the efforts aimed to increase women’s participation and engagement opportunities with the GID to compensate for their systemic exclusion from formal peace process. Efforts have included the establishment of structured dialogue platforms, support for grassroots women’s leadership, and promotion of institutional reforms to lay the foundation for more inclusive peacebuilding. These initiatives were implemented across several UN Women project cycles between 2019 and 2025.

A key milestone in these efforts was the development of a **technical proposal for the creation of a Women’s Advisory Group (WAG)** under the GID Co-Chairs. The technical proposal was created back in 2023 and was presented to all the Co-Chairs under the leadership of UN Representative Cihan Sultanoğlu in 2024. The aim was to explore tangible ways to bring more gender perspectives into formal peace efforts, remedy and compensate women’s limited engagement in peace processes and strengthen their voices, meaningful participation and representation.

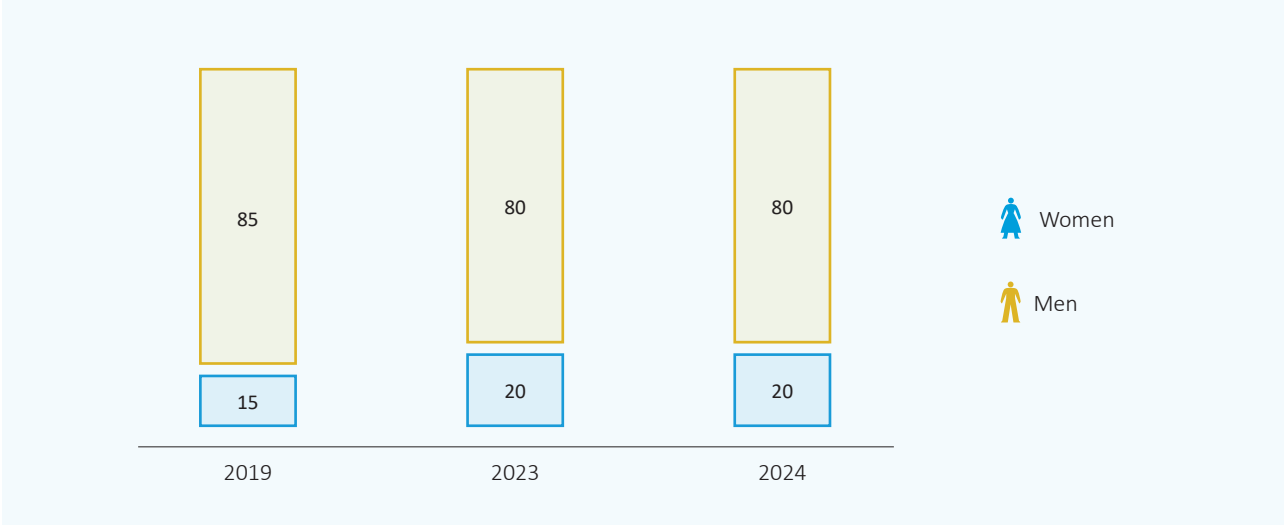
³ In accordance with the National Action Plan of Georgia for Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been managing the GID dialogue meetings and the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality information sharing meetings around IPRM.

Georgian participants in the Geneva International Discussions (GID), by GID rounds and sex 2019-2024



Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. Letter dated 01.05. 2024

Georgian participants in the Geneva International Discussions (GID), by GID rounds and sex 2019-2024



Source: State Security Service of Georgia. Letter dated 15 May 2024.

https://georgia.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/women_peace_and_security_1.pdf

Note: From 2020 to 2022, the number of IPRM participants was limited due to COVID-19-related restrictions.

UN Women’s approach went beyond dialogue facilitation by also building the advocacy capacity of internally displaced and conflict-affected women. Through training, needs assessments, and support

for developing collective agendas, IDP and conflict affected women have become more confident and effective in representing their communities.



The Network of Women and Youth Peace Ambassadors members attending the annual Open Day on WPS to present IDP and conflict-affected women’s needs and priorities. Photo credit: UN Women

Established in late 2024 as part of UN Women Georgia’s ongoing efforts to localize the WPS agenda, the **Network of Women and Youth Peace Ambassadors** with 40 internally displaced and conflict-affected women and youth as founders and around 200 members from 17 municipalities across Georgia. This grassroots initiative, implemented in partnership with local women-led civil society organizations and funded by the UK Government, has become a transformative platform for inclusive peace and resilience building. Members of the network

have reported increased confidence, agency, and leadership, with many initiating peer support groups and joint ventures that foster community resilience. By bridging local realities with national WPS strategies, the network empowers women and youth not as passive recipients but as proactive peacebuilders and advocates. These outcomes underscore the value of investing in women’s leadership and empowerment as foundational pillars for sustainable peace and human security in Georgia.

Moldova - Transnistrian Settlement Peace Process: Women's Advisory Board for Sustainable Peacebuilding

Building on the model developed in Syria, UN Women Moldova supports partners in replicating this mechanism to ensure that women from both banks of the Nistru/Dniester River are meaningfully engaged in peacebuilding and dialogue processes. **The Women's Advisory Board for Sustainable Peacebuilding (WAB) was established in 2022 to strengthen women's participation in peace and trust-building efforts.** This was initiated through UN Women's advocacy, with financial support from Sweden and the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UN-DPPA). Given that the OSCE facilitates a three-tier negotiation process aimed at achieving a comprehensive and lasting political settlement of the Transdnestrian conflict, the OSCE Mission was briefed on the establishment of the WAB and its consultative role within the peace process.

Among the topics discussed were women's crucial role in conflict negotiations, the promotion of inclusive security solutions, and gender-sensitive priorities - all critical to the negotiation agenda. Throughout 2023 and 2024, following multiple regular meetings, the WAB developed position papers on advocacy to address gender-based violence, civic status documentation, and entrepreneurship development, identifying shared concerns for both banks. They also drafted a joint letter reflecting women's perspectives, which was shared with the chief negotiators from Chisinau and Tiraspol. In May 2024, the WAB and women activists from the South Caucasus convened in Georgia to exchange experiences and lessons learned.

In 2025, with support from UN Women, the WAB actively engages in responding to the sudden energy crisis in the Transnistrian region. Members contributed to data collection, supported vulnerable groups in their communities, and highlighted the solidarity and resilience of women on both banks of the Nistru/Dniester River.⁴ WAB also met with officials and key stakeholders involved in the Transnistrian settlement process, bringing forward gendered perspectives, with a particular focus on social cohesion, trust-building and inclusive peace efforts.

Simultaneously, **78 young leaders joined the Young Peacebuilders Network**, developing skills, digital tools, and youth-led dialogue initiatives that amplified youth voices internationally. Media professionals

were trained and supported to produce gender- and conflict-sensitive content, while 12 local peace initiatives across 55 localities engaged over 5,500 people in activities fostering trust, social cohesion, and women's inclusion in peacebuilding.

In addition, on the left bank of the Nistru river (Transnistrian region), three Women's Discussion Platforms (WDPs) were created in 2022 contributing to gender-responsive humanitarian action and social cohesion in their communities. The platforms were equipped and capacitated institutionally with UN Women's support and Sweden and Swiss funds, whereas two of them are under legal registration process as CSOs.

These efforts subscribe to UN Women's broader contributions in promoting a more balanced representation of women in peace processes, as evidence shows that women are mostly excluded from the formal peace talks on the Transnistrian settlement process, with only three women having acted as Chief Negotiators since 1992 and 28.5 per cent (2023) constituting the combined share of women from both banks in leadership roles of the 14 Thematic Working Groups for Moldova- Transnistrian Settlement Peace Process.

Providing actionable recommendations based on global lessons and good practices to inspire and inform Moldovan efforts, the publication "**Women's Inclusion in Peace Processes: Global Lessons for Moldova**" was developed with UN Women support and PBF funds to raise awareness among policymakers, international actors, and civil society about the criticality of women's inclusion in peace negotiations.

Members of the WAB actively contributed to the **2024 Open Day for the Regional Women, Peace and Security Dialogue**, held on 5-6 September 2024 in Chisinau, Moldova. The event brought together approximately 80 women leaders and representatives from women-led organizations across Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. This regional dialogue provided a strong opportunity to exchange views, experiences, and best practices related to the implementation of WPS commitments. The joint statement and outcome document emerging from the meeting reflect the

⁴ <https://egalitadedegen.md/declaratie-de-solidaritate-contextul-crizei-energetice/>

perspectives of participants and outline proposed solutions to address sub-regional challenges in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Emphasis was placed on advancing human security and gender

equality, and on the urgent need to introduce practical and inclusive mechanisms that ensure women's full, equal, and meaningful engagement in peacebuilding processes at all levels.



Central Asia – Advancing Gender-Responsive Preventive Diplomacy

Efforts to enhance women's participation in peacebuilding and conflict prevention in Central Asia have been ongoing since 2012, including through collaboration with the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA). As part of these efforts, **a Terms of Reference for a Women's Advisory Board (WAB)** was developed that year in close consultation with women peace activists across the region and shared with UNRCCA for consideration.

The relevance of establishing such a Board was once again highlighted during the **2023 Women, Peace and Security (WPS) consultations** for Central Asia, where participants emphasized the importance of formal mechanisms to ensure that women's voices are meaningfully included in regional peace and security dialogues.

Despite the groundwork that has been laid, the WAB has not yet been operationalized. This gap continues to affect the integration of gender perspectives into policy discussions on key regional issues such as conflict prevention, counter-terrorism, climate and natural resource management, and cross-border cooperation.

In light of this, a renewed **inclusive consultation on the establishment of a Women's Advisory Board**

to UNRCCA need to be explored, building on the 2012 Terms of Reference and insights from recent regional WPS processes. Such renewed discussions could help strengthen regional frameworks for gender-responsive preventive diplomacy and align with broader international commitments to inclusive decision-making. Additional steps to support this goal may include commitments to ensure gender-balanced representation in all UNRCCA-led dialogues and consultations, with a target of 50/50 gender participation at the decision-making level, and participation of diverse women's voices, including Afghan women and women from cross-border and conflict-affected areas, in regional discussions and consultations.

The **lack of a gender-inclusive advisory mechanism** contributes to gaps in regional decision-making on critical issues including conflict prevention, counter-terrorism, climate and natural resource management, and cross-border cooperation. Renewed consultations on the operationalization of the WAB - building on both past efforts and current momentum - are timely and necessary and offer an opportunity to strengthen inclusive governance, enhance the effectiveness of preventive diplomacy, and ensure that regional security dialogues fully reflect the diverse perspectives and priorities of the population.

MOVING FORWARD: INSTITUTIONALIZING INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND SECURITY

- **WAB/WAG represents a promising and evidence-based approach to advancing women's meaningful participation in peace and security across the region.** When coupled with long-term capacity strengthening, institutional support, and sustained political will, such mechanisms ensure that women's perspectives are systematically integrated into regional dialogue and decision-making processes.
- **There is a pressing need to establish formal, inclusive, and institutionalized consultation mechanisms between women's organizations, peacebuilders, and decision-makers.** This includes ensuring that gender-responsive frameworks are embedded into the core operations of regional institutions and peacebuilding and conflict resolution platforms, rather than relying on ad hoc or occasional engagements.
- **Structured and well-resourced engagement between women peacebuilders and formal peace and security actors must be prioritized and integrated into existing peace and dialogue**

frameworks - not ad hoc. Regular consultation platforms and advisory structures will serve to translate grassroots perspectives into actionable policies, enhancing the legitimacy, inclusivity, and effectiveness of regional responses to security challenges.

In this context, it is recommended to **continue and institutionalize the practice of annual consultations with local and grassroots women peacebuilders through the "Open Days for Peace" model**, originally launched by UNIFEM/UN Women in 2010 to support **national, regional, and cross-regional peace dialogues. Open Days for Peace as an annual and institutionalized platform for dialogue** between women's organizations and UN missions/high-level officials in the region would contribute meaningfully to strengthening inclusive cooperation and accountability.

UN Women will continue to support women's peacebuilding efforts and initiatives, ensure follow-up and accountability to advance the WPS agenda, and promote women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in peace and security across the region. It will also document women's engagement in peace processes and monitor the commitments of peacebuilding actors to ensure that women remain at the center of all peacebuilding efforts.

UN Women thanks the donors for their continued funding support and commitment to advancing the WPS agenda. These contributions are vital to ensuring women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and recovery efforts across the region.



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UN Women exists to advance women's rights, gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. As the lead UN entity on gender equality, we shift laws, Institutions, social behaviours and services to close the gender gap and build an equal world for all women and girls. We keep the rights of women and girls at the centre of global progress - always, everywhere. Because gender equality is not just what we do. It is who we are.