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› From Recognition to Alignment: The Next Challenge for European Climate, Peace and Security Policy*

- › Most European policymakers recognise that climate change matters for peace and security. The challenge now is to translate growing this recognition into coherent action across climate, development, peacebuilding and security policies.
- › The EU's efforts on climate resilience, development cooperation, peacebuilding and security, while increasingly addressing many of the same risks, continue to be designed and delivered through separate institutional and financial systems.
- › The EU should now align its external action around three priorities: integrate climate and governance analysis across EU institutions and implementing partners; design and sequence climate, development and peacebuilding programmes around shared objectives at country level; and strengthen regional and sub-regional cooperation to manage cross-border risks.



Across most regions of strategic importance to EU interests, from the Sahel and the Horn of Africa to the Red Sea and the Indo-Pacific, climate pressures are a key factor affecting governance, the economy and conflict dynamics. Yet EU policies designed to address these challenges remain fragmented. Climate adaptation, development cooperation, peacebuilding and security initiatives often operate side by side, but rarely as part of a coherent and comprehensive strategy. As climate impacts intensify and geopolitical competition grows, that disconnect is becoming harder to ignore. Fragmented approaches reduce the EU's ability to use its policy, diplomatic and financial instruments strategically. The next step is a better alignment between climate resilience programming, humanitarian action, development cooperation, peacebuilding and security efforts. Such an approach can help turn separate policies into more coherent action, strengthening resilience in partner countries while advancing the EU's own long-term strategic interests.

However, this will be difficult to achieve if many of these areas continue to lose political and financial support while security spending increases. Without sustained investment in prevention and resilience, the EU risks reacting to

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climate-related crises only after they have escalated, rather than addressing their underlying causes.

Closing the implementation gap

Climate and environmental risks are now embedded in key EU policy frameworks, beginning with the 2022 Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, which identified climate change as a factor that can exacerbate instability and conflict.¹ The 2023 Joint Communication on the Climate and Security Nexus further recognised the implications of climate change and environmental degradation for peace, security and defence, and called for a more integrated response.² More recently, the 2026 Council Conclusions on Coherent Approach to Fragility, EU External Action Instruments and Sustainable Development Outcomes reinforced the need for a more systematic, coordinated and long-term approach to fragile contexts based on prevention, resilience and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.³ These developments signal a growing recognition that climate, development, peacebuilding and security policies must be better connected. The EU has also begun integrating climate and environmental risks into conflict analysis, established new training platforms and introduced environmental advisers and focal points within some civilian missions.⁴

Yet there remains a gap between how risks are understood and how institutions are organised to respond to them. Climate adaptation, peacebuilding, humanitarian action and security policies continue to be shaped by different mandates, funding streams, planning cycles and incentive structures. Even when working in the same countries and addressing similar risks, EU bodies and other partner organisations often pursue parallel objectives, engage different stakeholders and measure success through separate indicators.

While financial demands on European external action continue to grow, public resources are coming under increasing pressure. Data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) suggest that collective EU official development assistance (ODA) fell by around 8 per cent, from 89.5 billion euros in 2024 to 82.5 billion in 2025, reducing the EU's ODA to gross national income (GNI) ratio to 0.44 per cent, well below the 2030 target of 0.7 per cent.⁵ Yet, even as development budgets tighten, the EU still accounts for

¹ Council of the EU, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*, 14 March 2022, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/410976_en.

² European Commission and European External Action Service, *A New Outlook on the Climate and Security Nexus: Addressing the Impact of Climate Change and Environmental Degradation on Peace, Security and Defence* (JOIN/2023/19), 28 June 2023, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52023JC0019>.

³ Council of the EU, *Council Conclusions on a Coherent Approach to Fragility, EU External Action Instruments and Sustainable Development Outcomes*, 18 May 2026, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9285-2026-INIT/en/pdf>.

⁴ European Commission, *Progress Report on the Implementation of the Joint Communication: A New Outlook on the Climate and Security Nexus* (SWD/2025/49), 17 February 2025, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6321-2025-INIT/en/pdf>.

⁵ Council of the EU, *Council Conclusions on a Coherent Approach to Fragility...*, cit., point 24(b) and 25. See also OECD, *A Historic Decline in Foreign Aid: Preliminary 2025 ODA Data*, 9 April 2026, <https://www.oecd.org/en/data/insights/data-explainers/2026/04/a-historic-decline-in-foreign-aid-preliminary-2025-oda-data.html>.



»» *Climate pressures rarely operate in isolation or generate conflict on their own*

nearly half of global ODA.⁶ The challenge is therefore not simply whether the EU can do more, but how it can use existing instruments more strategically and coherently in an increasingly complex geopolitical environment.

Taken together, these institutional and financial pressures make greater integration not simply desirable but increasingly necessary. While climate and peace stakeholders increasingly acknowledge that they operate in the same environments and face overlapping challenges, collaboration often remains ad hoc and project-based rather than strategic and systematic. Too often, the focus remains on avoiding harm rather than generating mutually reinforcing outcomes.

Climate, governance and fragility

Climate pressures rarely operate in isolation or generate conflict on their own. Their impact depends on how they interact with institutions, livelihoods, patterns of exclusion and existing social and political tensions. In Iraq, disputes over water are rarely about water alone. In fragile regions, such as Kalar (Northern Iraq) and Al-Zubair (Southern Iraq), existing governance capacities and conflict-resolution mechanisms are often insufficient when addressing climate impacts, shared resource management and emerging disputes, given limited government-community trust and intercommunal grievances.⁷ In Yemen, environmental pressures are closely linked to the breakdown of services, making issues such as water access, flooding and waste management simultaneously an environmental, governance and political challenge. In Aden, increasingly heavy rains regularly flood neighbourhoods and floodwater mixed with sewage and uncollected garbage threatens public health and undermines trust, as political legitimacy depends less on formal authority than on the ability to provide or facilitate access to services and humanitarian aid.⁸

Conflict is far less likely where communities have trusted mechanisms for managing access and resolving disputes peacefully, such as inclusive community dialogues on conflict and environmental challenges.⁹ Similar dynamics can be observed in parts of the Sahel, where discussions around access to water, grazing land and natural resource management have continued even as broader political dialogue has narrowed.

Across these contexts, a common lesson emerges.¹⁰ Climate risks are less likely to become destabilising where institutions and communities are able to manage them collectively, creating greater opportunities for cooperation.

⁶ Council of the EU, *Council Conclusions on a Coherent Approach to Fragility...*, cit., point 23.

⁷ Löble, Nike et al., *Evaluation Synthesis: Iraq Project. Strengthening Iraqi Capacities to Respond to Climate Risks and Their Impact on Existing Conflict Dynamics*, Berlin, adelphi research, October 2025, https://weatheringrisk.org/sites/default/files/document/WRPP_Iraq_Evaluation_Synthesis.pdf.

⁸ Nasser, Summer, "Water, Land and Power: Environmental Conflict Drivers in Abyan, Yemen", in *Berghof Research Reports*, November 2025, <https://berghof-foundation.org/library/yemen-water-land-and-power-environmental-conflict-drivers-in-abyan-yemen>.

⁹ Berghof Foundation, "Environmental Entry Points for Peacemaking in Yemen", in *Berghof Policy Papers*, June 2026, <https://berghof-foundation.org/library/environmental-entry-points-for-peacemaking-in-yemen>.

¹⁰ Moshiri, Nazanine, "Lessons on Climate, Environment, Peace, and Security", in *Berghof Blog Posts*, 21 May 2026, <https://berghof-foundation.org/news/blog-lessons-on-climate-environment-peace-and-security>.



>> Climate risks are less likely to become destabilising where institutions and communities are able to manage them collectively

Recent EU Foreign Policy Instrument and European Peacebuilding Liaison Office regional dialogues on West Africa and the Sahel have reached similar conclusions, identifying governance fragmentation rather than the absence of climate policies as one of the principal obstacles to effective climate, peace and security action.¹¹ The dialogues' participants consistently highlighted the need to strengthen and better connect existing institutions rather than creating new structures. Communities that struggle to engage in politically sensitive issues are often more willing to cooperate around immediate shared challenges such as water management, land use or disaster preparedness. In Yemen, for example, environmental pressures like water scarcity and flooding create shared vulnerabilities that no single side can manage alone.¹² Mediators can therefore use climate-related issues as a more practical, technical and less contentious starting point for dialogue.¹³

However, climate and environmental challenges do not automatically create cooperation, nor should they be viewed as substitutes for addressing underlying political grievances. Environmental concerns may provide an entry point for engagement, but sustainable outcomes still depend on addressing the broader factors that shape vulnerability and conflict. Community ownership, inclusive governance and trusted local institutions remain essential if environmental cooperation is to translate into lasting peacebuilding outcomes.

This has important implications for European policy. Climate action cannot be treated solely as a technical exercise, while peacebuilding and governance initiatives cannot afford to ignore environmental pressures. In many fragile contexts, these are not separate challenges. They are different dimensions of the same problem. As risks are increasingly interconnected, responses also need to become more aligned.

Why alignment?

Alignment means recognising that climate work, humanitarian action, peacebuilding and security efforts depend on many of the same enabling conditions, including effective governance, accountable institutions, social cohesion and widespread public trust.

These are also the foundations of resilience. In this context, resilience should not be understood simply as the ability to absorb shocks, but as the capacity of societies, institutions and communities to anticipate, adapt and respond to interconnected risks before they escalate into crises.

The experience of the COP30, the climate conference held annually under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, in Belém highlighted the how climate policy is becoming increasingly intertwined with wider geopolitical, economic and development priorities.

¹¹ Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN), *Climate, Peace and Security: Entry Points for EU Engagement in Complex Partnership Contexts - Perspectives on the Sahel*. CSDN Meeting Report, European Peacebuilding Liaison Office, June 2026, <https://eplo.org/?p=41343>.

¹² Nasser, Summer, "Water, Land and Power: Environmental Conflict Drivers in Abyan, Yemen", cit.

¹³ Berghof Foundation, "Environmental Entry Points for Peacemaking in Yemen", cit.



»» *The climate, peace and security nexus provides a lens through which existing policies can be assessed, prioritised and connected*

Despite strong EU support for ambitious climate action, negotiations there exposed growing differences between countries over priorities such as climate finance, development and emissions reductions. Subsequent discussions within the EU have reflected a recognition that climate diplomacy increasingly depends not only on climate goals, but also on how trade, development, finance and foreign policy instruments are used in support of broader objectives.¹⁴ Rather than treating climate policy as a standalone agenda, the challenge is increasingly one of ensuring that different areas of EU external action reinforce one another.

The 2026 Council Conclusions on EU Energy and Climate Diplomacy reflect this shift by promoting more integrated, cross-sectoral external action that combines climate ambition with economic competitiveness, strategic partnerships and resilience.¹⁵ More broadly, climate diplomacy is becoming increasingly transactional, with countries placing greater emphasis on issues such as finance, trade, technology and economic interests. More internal alignment will allow the EU to better navigate these debates and argue for its priorities.

From coordination to alignment

The climate, peace and security nexus provides a lens through which existing policies can be assessed, prioritised and connected. This complements the European Commission's 2026 Integrated Approach to Fragility, which seeks to better connect humanitarian, development, peacebuilding and security efforts in fragile contexts. Climate, peace and security can strengthen this approach by ensuring that climate and environmental risks are systematically incorporated into these broader efforts to build resilience and address the underlying drivers of fragility.¹⁶

More coordination, information sharing, and consultation can all help European institutions to avoid duplicating efforts. But alignment means ensuring that climate, development, peacebuilding and security efforts are designed with a clearer understanding of how they affect one another and how they can contribute to shared objectives.

In practice, this requires three shifts:

First, *analysis needs to become more integrated*. Climate and governance risks are often assessed separately, even though they interact in practice. Shared analysis mechanisms across different EU policy units, including between European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships, the Directorate-General for Climate Action, the European External Action Service and the Foreign Policy Instruments Service, can help identify where climate

¹⁴ Abnett, Kate, "EU Rethinks Climate Diplomacy after Bruising COP30 Summit, Document Shows", in *Reuters*, 4 February 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/cop/eu-rethinks-climate-diplomacy-after-bruising-cop30-summit-document-shows-2026-02-04>.

¹⁵ Council of the EU, *Council Conclusions on EU Energy and Climate Diplomacy*, 21 April 2026, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8417-2026-INIT/en/pdf>.

¹⁶ European Commission, *Commission Staff Working Document on an Integrated Approach to Fragility* (SWD/2026/313), 27 May 2026, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52026SC0313>.



>> Efforts should build on existing priorities and adapt the language and approaches to local and operational realities

pressures reinforce existing vulnerabilities, where environmental challenges create opportunities for cooperation, and where interventions in one sector may have unintended consequences in another.

To make this operational, the EU should strengthen mechanisms for conducting shared climate-security analysis both internally and through its implementing partners. This could include joint analytical frameworks, common risk assessment tools and regular information-sharing processes that bring together expertise from across EU institutions alongside insights from organisations working in conflict-affected contexts. Such approaches would support more consistent assessments, improve coordination across programmes and help ensure that climate-security analysis informs policy and programming rather than remaining a standalone exercise.

One practical example is the March 2026 EU-supported Abidjan Climate Security Dialogue, which convened policymakers, practitioners and researchers to jointly analyse climate, peace and security challenges across West Africa and the Sahel.¹⁷ The dialogue identified shared risks, lessons learned and operational recommendations for implementation. Similar approaches could be used more systematically to strengthen shared analysis between EU institutions, implementing partners and regional stakeholders.

Second, *programming needs to become more deliberate and sequenced*. This also requires greater attention to how EU delegations frame and implement climate-related work. In practice, many delegations already engage with climate risks, but often through other entry points such as food security, water management, population movements or transhumance rather than through explicit climate programmes. Rather than introducing new climate-security agendas, efforts should build on these existing priorities and adapt the language and approaches to local and operational realities.

The Global Gateway, the EU's flagship for sustainable infrastructure and investment partnerships with partner countries, can provide a useful entry point.¹⁸ As delegations increasingly focus on its implementation, climate, peace and security considerations can be integrated by ensuring that infrastructure investments are inclusive and environmentally sustainable, that the rights of affected communities are protected and that conflict-sensitive, do-no-harm approaches are applied to project design. This would also help translate broad climate-security ambitions into more concrete approaches at country level.

Making these approaches work in practice will require stronger implementation at country level. Given that more than half of Global Gateway investments in 2021-2024 were in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa region, strengthening implementation in these climate vulnerable regions should be a priority.¹⁹ Greater emphasis should therefore be placed on preparedness and scenario-based planning that brings local, EU and international stakeholders to build resilience before crises escalate. Recent

¹⁷ Shabu, Samson, "From Abidjan to Benue: Rethinking Climate Security through Lived Realities and Regional Dialogue", in *Building Block for Peace News*, 13 May 2026, <https://www.bbforpeace.org/blog/from-abidjan-to-benue-rethinking-climate-security>.

¹⁸ European Commission DG for Communication website: *Global Gateway*, https://commission.europa.eu/node/5445_en.

¹⁹ Ibid.



»» **The EU should give greater attention to regional and subregional cooperation**

dialogue processes have highlighted the value of funding pilot initiatives and systematically incorporating lessons learned into future programming cycles, allowing successful approaches to be adapted and scaled where appropriate.

Third, the EU should give greater attention to *regional and subregional cooperation*. Climate pressures do not respect national borders, nor do many of their consequences. Migration, pastoral mobility, transboundary water management and conflict spillovers frequently require regional responses. Subregional institutions built around shared environmental systems are often better positioned to address these challenges than national frameworks alone. Water basins, pastoral corridors and cross-border ecosystems frequently cut across political boundaries, making cooperation at this level essential for managing environmental and social pressures, as well as their security implications.

This is evident in regions such as the Horn of Africa, where the Intergovernmental Authority on Development plays an important role in addressing cross-border climate and security risks through regional drought resilience, early warning, transboundary resource management and climate security initiatives.

Similarly, the Lake Chad Basin Commission provides a regional platform for Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria to coordinate the management of shared water resources, strengthen livelihoods, respond to displacement and environmental degradation, and support regional stability in one of Africa's most climate-vulnerable and conflict-affected regions. These examples illustrate the value of regional institutions as platforms for cooperation.

The Abidjan Climate Security Dialogue also highlighted the importance of EU support for platforms that facilitate dialogue and technical cooperation across political divides, including between the Economic Community of Western African States and the Alliance of Sahel States. Participants argued that climate, peace and security can provide a practical entry point for cooperation around shared operational interests, even where broader political relations remain strained.²⁰

Conclusion

The EU has already made significant progress in recognising the links between climate, peace and security. The next challenge is to translate that recognition into more coherent action and ambition. In other words, while risks are increasingly understood as interconnected, responses remain fragmented.

This does not require entirely new institutions or strategies. Many of the necessary tools already exist. What is needed is greater alignment between climate adaptation, development cooperation, peacebuilding and security efforts, where climate risks, fragility and geopolitical pressures converge. This begins with more integrated analysis, more deliberate and sequenced programming, and stronger support for regional and subregional cooperation in contexts where climate pressures, fragility and geopolitical competition intersect.

²⁰ Shabu, Samson, "From Abidjan to Benue", cit.



Achieving this will require more than better coordination within EU institutions. It also depends on creating spaces where policymakers, regional organisations, implementing partners and local actors can jointly analyse risks, exchange lessons and shape responses. The experience of the EU-supported Abidjan Climate Security Dialogue illustrates how the EU's convening power can itself become a strategic tool for advancing climate, peace and security objectives.

In an increasingly interconnected world, Europe's resilience will depend not only on what it does at home, but also on how effectively it supports resilience beyond its borders. The challenge is no longer to demonstrate that climate, peace and security are interconnected, but to organise existing policies and investments so that they reinforce one another in practice.

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