



A POLICY BRIEF

YOUNG DISPLACED WOMEN – CONFLICT, GENDER & GENERATIONAL TRAUMA

POLICY PRIORITIES FROM THE SOUTH
CAUCASUS AND EASTERN EUROPE

Content

INTRODUCTION	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
KEY FINDINGS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	10
DISPLACEMENT – AN ONGOING CONDITION	10
GENDER-SPECIFIC DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE	11
LEGAL LIMBO AND DOCUMENTATION BARRIERS	13
HOUSING INSECURITY AND INADEQUATE SERVICES	14
ECONOMIC EXCLUSION AND LOSS OF LIVELIHOODS	16
SOCIAL EXCLUSION, MISREPRESENTATION AND HATE-SPEECH	17
ONGOING TRAUMA, LOSS OF IDENTITY AND BELONGING	19
POLITICAL EXCLUSION FROM DECISIONS AFFECTING YOUNG WOMEN'S FUTURES	21
LITERATURE	23

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation | 2026

This policy brief was developed by The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation based on learnings from a workshop held in June 2026 with young displaced women from the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe region.

This brief is financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). Sida does not necessarily agree with the opinions expressed. Kvinna till Kvinna is responsible for the content.

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Kvinna till Kvinna, October 2026

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Kvinna till Kvinna is one of the world's leading women's rights organisations, working directly in areas affected by war and conflict to strengthen women's influence and power. We work closely together with more than 100 local partner organisations across 20 countries to end violence against women, reach lasting peace and close the gender gap once and for all.

Introduction

"Displacement is leaving somewhere you feel safe."

Throughout the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe, many people are forcibly displaced due to prolonged and unresolved conflicts. Many have lived in situations of protracted displacement for decades, unable to return home while also struggling to fully integrate into their new communities. Their lives are often put on hold as they wait either to return home or to establish a sustainable future where they currently live. This condition affects identity, belonging, political participation and access to rights across generations.

Displaced people (including refugees and internally displaced people) are often directly affected by the root causes of conflict and insecurity. As a result, their experiences can provide critical insights into peacebuilding, conflict resolution, social cohesion and reconstruction. Yet these groups are seldom included in peacebuilding and policymaking discussions, and the voices of young women are particularly underrepresented. The specific experiences and needs of young women living in protracted displacement should be understood as security concerns. When their perspectives are excluded from political discussions, their experiences risk being instrumentalised for political purposes, including anti-gender and discriminatory narratives that can further fuel conflict dynamics in the region.

Drawing on consultations with young Armenian, Azerbaijani, Georgian and Ukrainian displaced women, alongside a desk review of research and policy frameworks, this brief highlights the experiences of young, displaced women and proposes actionable policy recommendations for national governments, the European Union, regional and international organisations, and donors. The findings demonstrate that displacement is not a

temporary event but an ongoing condition, often characterised by unresolved trauma, gender-based discrimination, uncertainty, and challenges related to integration and belonging.

The consultation, conducted as a workshop, brought together 17 participants aged 18 to 35 from across the region. The primary objective was to create a safe and empowering space where young displaced women could share their experiences, have their voices heard, and contribute insights that can influence policies affecting women in peace and security contexts.

Participants brought a wide range of experiences of displacement, united by the fact that they were all young women whose lives had been shaped by conflict and displacement. Some had been born into displacement and inherited trauma from their parents and grandparents, including Azerbaijani participants whose families had been displaced from Nagorno Karabakh¹ during the first war in the 1990s. Others had been displaced from the same region to Armenia during the war in 2020 and in 2023, when Azerbaijan took control of the territory. Participants from Georgia had various experiences of displacement, with some having been displaced during the war in 2008, while others' parents had been displaced from Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region in the 1990s, and they had grown up in IDP settlements or more integrated into Georgian society. Ukrainian participants also had different experiences of displacement, with some being internally displaced within Ukraine and others having fled Ukraine, now living in Moldova, some had been displaced in 2014, while others have been displaced by Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. Some participants had experienced displacement more than once, while others had perspectives from both displaced and host communities.

The diversity of experiences represented in the workshop highlighted both the complexity of

¹ Nagorno Karabakh is a geographic region that currently has no political or economic status. Following the Second Karabakh War in 2020, Azerbaijan designated several new economic zones, including Karabakh and East Zangezur, which include the region in question, however, these are Azerbaijani domestic administrative units, and for the purposes of human security and conflict sensitivity, Nagorno Karabakh continues to be utilised by rights-based groups (see: <https://jam-news.net/karabakh-and-east-zangezur-economic-regions-are-created-in-azerbaijan/>)

displacement and the common challenges faced across different contexts. While participants came from different countries, conflicts and political realities, many recognised striking similarities in their experiences of loss, exclusion, adaptation and resilience.

It is important to acknowledge that the workshop was emotionally challenging for many participants. Strong emotions related to trauma surfaced throughout the discussions, and intellectual disagreements could at times be difficult, reflecting both the realities of participants coming from different sides of conflicts and the emotions that emerged when

recognising how much their experiences had in common. Listening to one another often revealed not only differences in perspective but also shared experiences that transcended conflict lines.

I spent my whole life in a place where I cannot go anymore. And some other participants in this workshop were really small when they were displaced and don't have any memories. And now they can go there.

In some cases, the names of towns and regions differ between the participants. We have left quotes from participants as they are.

What is displacement? Definition of internally displaced people (IDP), refugees and displacement

In this brief we highlight experiences of displaced young women, a majority of whom are internally displaced, while the others are externally displaced, some officially recognised as refugees while others are not. Throughout the brief the term “displaced” is used for both internally displaced and refugees.

Displacement refers to the involuntary movement of people from their homes, often caused by armed conflict and war, violence, persecution and human rights abuses, or natural disasters such as floods, droughts, earthquakes, and storms. Displacement can be temporary or protracted, lasting for years or even generations. It is not only a humanitarian issue but also a social, political, economic and security issue that affects both displaced people and host communities.

According to the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, IDPs are *persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence ... and who have not crossed an internationally recognised State border.*² IDPs have the same rights as other citizens and residents of their country, the state decides whether they are afforded any special status. They do not lose their citizenship because they have been displaced. The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement constitute the main international framework guiding their protection.

A refugee is someone who has fled their country to escape conflict, violence or persecution to seek safety in another country. They are protected under international refugee law (the 1951 Refugee Convention and related instruments). IDPs tend to receive less international attention and protection than refugees. Unlike refugees, IDPs do not cross an international border and therefore remain under the jurisdiction of their own state.

Women, girls, young people, older persons and persons with disabilities often experience displacement differently and may face heightened risks. Research emphasises that women and girls frequently encounter increased caregiving burdens, economic insecurity, and heightened exposure to gender-based violence during displacement.³

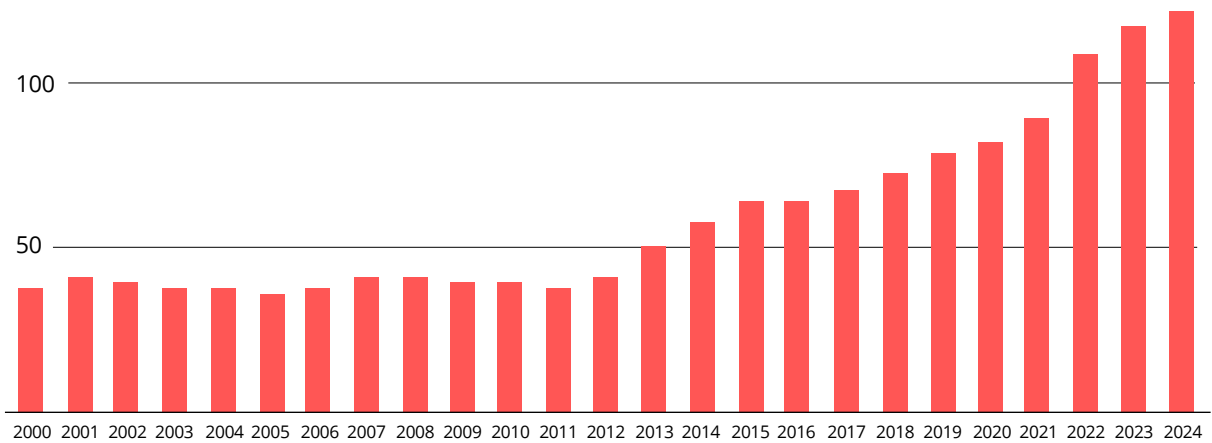
² OHCHR. (n.d). *International Standards*. International standards | OHCHR

³ UN Women. (2026). *Women on the Move in Europe and Central Asia*.

Global statistics from UNHCR

Forcibly displaced people in the world (as of December 2024)

Millions



Daria Kordonova participating at the workshop on the situation for young displaced women, which took place in Moldova June 2026.

Executive summary

**"Everywhere I am a refugee.
I am not at home anywhere."**

Young displaced women experience displacement at the intersection of gender inequality, youth exclusion and conflict-related trauma. Yet their specific experiences are often overlooked in displacement responses and peace processes, which tend to treat internally displaced persons (IDPs) as a homogeneous group. Being young, female and displaced creates multiple barriers to participation and representation, making it difficult for their voices to be heard. This, in turn, affects their ability to integrate into new communities while preserving their culture, identity and sense of belonging. Building sustainable peace with human security and gender equality at its core is therefore essential, not only for displaced communities but also for the societies that host them.

The experiences presented in this brief, collected at a consultation with young displaced women, reflect a broader body of regional and global research showing that displacement is not only a humanitarian crisis but also a long-term social and political process that reshapes identities, access to rights and opportunities for participation. A growing body of evidence demonstrates that displacement affects women and men differently and that age is a critical factor shaping both vulnerability and resilience. Research from the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe further shows that internally displaced persons continue to face significant challenges related to housing, employment, healthcare and social integration long after active conflict has ended.^{21 22}

THE CONSULTATION IDENTIFIED EIGHT INTERCONNECTED CHALLENGES FACING YOUNG DISPLACED WOMEN:

1. Displacement as an ongoing condition
2. Gender-specific discrimination and violence
3. Legal limbo and documentation barriers
4. Housing insecurity and inadequate services
5. Economic exclusion and loss of livelihoods
6. Social exclusion, misrepresentation and hate-speech
7. Ongoing trauma, loss of identity and belonging
8. Political exclusion from decisions affecting young women's futures

At the same time, the consultation revealed not only challenges but also considerable resilience, leadership and commitment to peacebuilding. Participants consistently demonstrated agency, political awareness and a strong desire to contribute to the decisions affecting their lives and communities. These findings suggest that policy responses must move beyond a narrow focus on protection and assistance. Instead, greater emphasis should be placed on supporting young displaced women as actors of change, ensuring their meaningful participation in policymaking, consultations, programming and budgetary decision-making processes.

²¹ Cardona-Fox. (2020). *Internal Displacement in Europe and Central Asia: A Review of the Literature*.

²² Sasse. (2020). *War and Displacement: The Case of Ukraine*.

Regional policy document and international agreements



Internally displaced people

Global level

UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998)

This is the single most important international framework on internal displacement. It provides the internationally accepted definition of an IDP, outlines the rights of displaced persons before, during and after displacement, and clarifies states' responsibilities. Although not legally binding, it is the principal global standard guiding governments, UN agencies and humanitarian actors.

UN Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement (2022)

This is currently the key policy framework for finding durable solutions to displacement. It focuses on: preventing displacement, responding to displaced populations' needs, and supporting durable solutions and self-reliance.

Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda

For young displaced women, the most important resolutions are: UNSCR 1325 (2000), UNSCR 1820 (2008), UNSCR 1889 (2009), UNSCR 2122 (2013), UNSCR 2467 (2019). They emphasise women's participation, protection from conflict-related sexual violence, and gender-responsive peacebuilding.

Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda

The YPS agenda establishes young people as agents of peace rather than merely beneficiaries

of assistance. It is highly relevant when discussing young displaced women and their participation in decision-making.

EU level

EU Gender Action Plan III (2021-2027)

GAP III requires a gender-transformative and intersectional approach in EU external action and explicitly prioritises women's rights, participation, protection from violence, and access to sexual and reproductive health services in fragile and conflict-affected settings. GAP IV is currently being developed.

EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security

Commits EU institutions and Member States to promoting women's participation in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. This document is currently being updated.

Eastern Partnership (EaP)

The Eastern Partnership serves as an important policy framework linking support for conflict-affected communities, social inclusion and institutional reforms.

OSCE / ODIHR level

The OSCE does not have a legally binding convention on IDPs. Its framework is based on human dimension commitments, conflict prevention, human rights protection and the application of the UN Guiding Principles.

OSCE Human Dimension Commitments

The broader OSCE human rights commitments provide the normative basis for protecting displaced populations, focusing on non-discrimination, human rights, democratic participation, rule of law, minority rights.

OSCE-UNHCR Protection Checklist

Explicitly builds on the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and outlines rights of IDPs, responsibilities of national authorities, protection standards during displacement, durable solutions.

ODIHR Human Rights Monitoring and Reporting

ODIHR regularly addresses displacement through human rights monitoring, conflict-related reporting, minority rights protection, gender-sensitive analyses of displacement impacts.

Refugees

Global level

The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

Defines who is a refugee, establishes refugee rights and state obligations and introduces the principle of non-refoulement (no forced return to a place where a person faces persecution).

The 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees

Removed the Convention's original temporal and geographic limitations (which were linked to post-Second World War displacement). Made the refugee protection regime globally applicable.

EU level

Common European Asylum System (CEAS)

The overarching EU framework for refugees and asylum seekers. CEAS establishes common standards across EU Member States regarding: asylum

procedures, reception conditions, qualification for refugee status and subsidiary protection, responsibility for examining asylum claims, rights of beneficiaries of international protection.

Pact on Migration and Asylum

The Pact is the EU's latest reform package and operational framework through which CEAS is implemented.

These refugee protection frameworks should be read alongside the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda, CEDAW, and the EU Gender Action Plan, which provide guidance on the gendered and age-specific dimensions of displacement and refugee protection.

OSCE / ODIHR level

The OSCE does not have its own refugee convention or asylum system. Its refugee work is based on a series of political commitments and support for implementation of international refugee law, for example:

1. OSCE Human Dimension Commitments This is the overarching OSCE framework, including commitments to: protect refugees and asylum seekers, combat discrimination and xenophobia, uphold human rights, ensure access to protection and durable solutions.
2. Helsinki 1992 Commitments
3. Charter for European Security (Istanbul 1999)

Regional statistics

Georgia

Georgia has roughly 300,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), representing nearly 8% of the population. Around 53% of IDPs are women. Most displacement stems from 1990s conflicts in Abkhazia and in South Ossetia/Tskhinvali region, as well as the 2008 war with Russia. Internally displaced persons are recognised under the Law of Georgia on Inter-

nally Displaced Persons. Additionally, the country registers around 30,000 cross-border refugees.^{4,5}

Intersectional vulnerability of displaced women creates feminisation of poverty, increased risks of domestic violence, and other systemic problems. 78% women have no savings whatsoever, 67% unable to afford medical treatment, 63% believe inadequate childcare affects employment opportunities.⁶

⁴ UNHCR. (n.d). *Georgia*. Georgia | UNHCR

⁵ IDMC. (2026). *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2026*.

⁶ Estonian Refugee Council. (2024). *Understanding Displacement in Georgia: An In-Depth Analysis of IDP Needs*.

Armenia

Over 115,000 Armenians were displaced from Nagorno Karabakh following Azerbaijan's military offensive in September 2023. Additionally, over 26,000 Armenian people were displaced from Nagorno Karabakh by the war in 2020. Women, children, and older adults make up the vast majority of the registered population.^{7 8} 52% of all displaced were women and girls, and 31% were children.⁹

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenia has also hosted ethnic Armenian refugees from the various conflicts that erupted in that period, primarily those who fled the Azerbaijan SSR.

Armenia addresses the displaced community primarily through the 2008 Law on Refugees and Asylum, supported by Government Decree No. 1864-N (2023) which granted temporary protection status to the displaced people from Nagorno Karabakh.

Azerbaijan

Since 2023, the Azerbaijani government initiated a massive reconstruction and return programme termed the "Great Return" aiming to resettle displaced populations back into regained territories. Before the return programme, Azerbaijan hosted approximately 650,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), largely resulting from the protracted conflict with Armenia over the Nagorno Karabakh, originating from the 1988. The country also hosts roughly 6,000 refugees.^{10 11} IDPs and refugees are addressed primarily by the 1999 Law on the Legal Status of Refugees and Displaced Persons.

In addition to its IDP population, Azerbaijan also hosts ethnic Azerbaijani refugees from the conflicts that accompanied the collapse of the USSR, primarily those from the Armenian SSR.

Ukraine

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has triggered one of the largest displacement crises in modern history. Roughly 10 million people remain displaced, with an estimated 3.9 million internally displaced within Ukraine and nearly 5.9 million registered as refugees globally, primarily hosted across Europe.¹² Approximately 76% of refugees are women, children, and older persons, as military mobilisation rules require most Ukrainian men of service age to remain in the country.¹³

Ukraine has adopted the State Strategy on Internal Displacement (2026-2030). EU Temporary Protection Directive (2022-28) grants immediate residence, labour market access, housing, and medical care for Ukrainian refugees across EU member states.

Moldova

Moldova hosts around 140,000 displaced people from Ukraine, which is the highest number of Ukrainian refugees per capita.¹⁴ The vast majority are women, children, older persons, and individuals with specific health or support needs. The government has extended the temporary protection for Ukrainians until March 2028.¹⁵ This status allows displaced persons to legally reside, work, study, and access public medical and social services in Moldova. Many face critical economic hardship. Moldova itself deals with high poverty rates and inflation.^{16 17}

For break-away region Transnistria/Pridnestrovie: The post-Soviet conflict in Transnistria caused displacement, with unresolved documentation and statelessness as ongoing challenges.¹⁸ Moldova lacks a dedicated IDP protection law tailored to historical victims from the breakaway zone.¹⁹ Transnistrian identity papers are not internationally recognised, complicating freedom of movement, property rights, and access to official state support.²⁰

⁷ UNHCR. (n.d). *Armenia Refugee Situation Overview*. Country - Armenia

⁸ UNICEF. (2025). *Armenia Humanitarian Situation Report No.19*.

⁹ Women's Resource Centre Armenia. (2023). *Needs Assessment of Forced Displaced Women from Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) Residing in Shelters*.

¹⁰ UNHCR. (n.d). *Azerbaijan*. Azerbaijan | UNHCR

¹¹ JIPS. (2023). *Strengthening the Data Systems and Capacities of the IDP Committee in Azerbaijan*.

¹² UNHCR. (2026). *Ukraine Emergency*.

¹³ van den Boogaard, (2025). *Refugees and Internally Displaced People in Ukraine: What You Need to Know*.

¹⁴ Solf, B, O'Neill, C. (2025). *Moldova Shoulders Disproportionately Large Ukrainian Population, in the Shadow of the European Union and Russia*.

¹⁵ European Council. (2026). *EU countries agree to extend temporary protection for those fleeing Ukraine until March 2028*.

¹⁶ UNHCR. (n.d). *Republic of Moldova*. Republic of Moldova | UNHCR

¹⁷ UNHCR. (2026). *Four years since the full-scale invasion, refugees from Ukraine in Moldova still need protection and support*.

¹⁸ EGRIS. (n.d). *Capturing displacement and statelessness in the Population and Housing Census for inclusive policies and planning*.

¹⁹ Association Promo-LEX and International Federation for Human Rights. (2016). *Human Rights in the Transnistrian Region of the Republic of Moldova*.

²⁰ Just Society Trust. (2025). *Moldova: advocating for displaced people's rights*.

Key findings and policy recommendations



Displacement – an ongoing condition

"All conflicts in the region are unresolved, so people do not have a chance to find peace. The pain continues."

One of the strongest findings from both the consultation and the literature review is that displacement is not a temporary event but an ongoing condition. Displacement means being uprooted from one place to another, not by choice. It means living with uncertainty and struggling with questions of identity, whether as a first, second or even third generation displaced person. It also means living with the experience of being a stranger in a new community while remaining unable to fully return to the old one.

This understanding is strongly supported by existing research, highlighting that displacement should be understood as a social and political process rather than solely a humanitarian issue. Research also highlights how prolonged displacement reshapes identities, social relations and perceptions of belonging long after the initial crisis has passed.^{23 24} Participants' experiences closely reflected these findings. They described the ongoing uncertainty of where to build a future, the inability to return home, and the trauma associated with knowing that places of memory have been destroyed, including homes, religious and cultural buildings, parks and the graveyards of loved ones. Many also spoke of the lack of closure that comes from living with unresolved conflicts.

Participants repeatedly emphasised that displacement involves the loss of much more than a physical home. It also means losing connections to

identity, belonging, future plans, and community networks. As one participant expressed: *It feels like our future was taken away from us.*

The long-term effects of displacement were particularly evident in discussions about trauma. Participants described how trauma remains present decades after displacement and is often transmitted across generations. Recent studies among displaced Ukrainians similarly show that repeated displacement and prolonged uncertainty fundamentally shape emotional attachments to place and understandings of what constitutes "home".²⁵ These findings closely mirror participants' accounts of inherited trauma, prolonged uncertainty and the burden of carrying the consequences of conflict across generations.

Many young women described not only living with their own experiences of displacement but also carrying the unresolved trauma of parents and grandparents. Several expressed frustration with this intergenerational burden and a desire to break the cycle. As one participant explained:

Many young people feel that they have to bear their parents' and grandparents' trauma and experiences of war on their shoulders. They are tired of that.

Participants also emphasised that, as long as conflicts remain unresolved, the psychological impacts of displacement will continue. One participant from South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region reflected on the fragile nature of so-called frozen conflicts: *We are still sitting on a bomb. It is said that the war is frozen, but people are still arrested at the border, and no one knows what will happen tomorrow.*

²³ Cardona-Fox. (2020).

²⁴ Sasse. (2020).

²⁵ Howlett, Dvornichenko. (2025). *Losing and finding home twice: Ukrainian women's experiences of secondary internal displacement.*

A similar sentiment was expressed by participants from Nagorno Karabakh in relation to recent peace negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. As one participant noted, referring to the feeling shared by many that not being able to return home means that the trauma from war continues: *War has not ended, and signing some piece of paper will not bring peace.*

Questions of identity and belonging emerged throughout the discussions. Many participants described living in a state of uncertainty about where they belong, feeling connected both to places they had never known and to communities where they were not fully accepted. One participant whose parents had been displaced from Abkhazia before she was born explained that she grew up surrounded by stories, memories and identities connected to Abkhazia. Yet she often struggled to explain to friends and colleagues where she was from. As she described it: *I felt lost, not being from Abkhazia but also not being local. I am living a double life.* She added that her

friends, in an effort to make the situation feel lighter, had jokingly replaced her status as an IDP with the title “Internally Displaced Princess.”

This feeling of existing between different places, identities and futures was echoed by other participants. One young woman reflected on how displacement initially felt temporary, making it difficult to invest in her new surroundings: *We all thought we would be in displacement for a couple of weeks, so I don't need to engage with the local community. After four years, I feel I am sort of integrated, but my knowledge of the language is not enough to get a good job... I am sort of in between.*

These experiences illustrate how displacement is not simply about movement from one place to another. It is an ongoing condition that shapes identity, belonging, aspirations and perceptions of the future, often across multiple generations.

Policy recommendations

- National displacement policies must move beyond emergency responses and adopt long-term and gender-sensitive approaches that recognise displacement as a protracted condition and is based on consultations with displaced people.
- National displacement policies and responses should be informed by age- and gender-disaggregated data.
- Ensure recovery processes are inclusive, gender-responsive and shaped by the experiences of women affected by displacement and prolonged insecurity.

2

Gender-specific discrimination and violence

"I grew up hearing stories of displacement from my mother and grandmother."

Displacement affects women and men differently, alongside other factors such as age, ethnicity and sexual orientation. It often transforms traditional social structures and gender roles, requiring women

to assume additional responsibilities as both providers and caregivers. Entrenched patriarchal norms increase women's unpaid care burden and constrain their economic and social participation. In Ukraine, many young internally displaced women are highly qualified but are forced to stay home or accept low-paid jobs because kindergartens in their new cities are either closed for safety reasons, due to the lack of shelters, or already overcrowded. Since

displacement takes women away from their communities, they are also unable to access informal childcare, such as from parents/grandparents, or other family and community members. According to participants, there is a critical lack of government programmes in Ukraine to support childcare for young children.

These challenges are compounded by broader structural and institutional gaps. Weak domestic violence legislation, the absence of women border officers and limited institutional responses reinforce insecurity for displaced women. Many are required to take on new roles in unfamiliar social and economic settings while navigating heightened risks. Although everyone in displacement settings is exposed to violence due to ongoing conflict, women also experience structural and interpersonal violence. Existing literature clearly demonstrates that conflict tends to intensify pre-existing gender inequalities by increasing women's caregiving responsibilities, economic insecurity and exposure to violence.²⁶

Age further shapes how displacement is experienced. Global research shows that young women and girls face specific risks affecting different areas of

their lives, including interruptions to education, dependence on family members, limited opportunities to achieve economic independence, early marriage, restricted access to reproductive healthcare, and exposure to sexual harassment and violence. Conflict-related forced displacement exacerbates these challenges, primarily due to weakened social protection systems, reduced community support and limited economic independence.²⁷

The consultation findings reinforced these patterns and confirmed that young displaced women experience displacement differently from men, boys and older women. Participants reported pressure to care for family members and described significant challenges related to interrupted education, barriers to employment and economic dependency. They also noted that women often become primary caregivers when men migrate for work, while continuing to shoulder domestic responsibilities and contribute to household income generation. Discrimination and harassment, online hate-speech and online gender-based violence emerged as common barriers across conflict contexts, as did limited or non-existent participation in political and peacebuilding processes.

Policy recommendations

- National displacement strategies should be in line with or integrate the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda. UN Security Council Resolution 2467 emphasises survivor-centred approaches in the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence, while Resolution 2250 recognises young people as active agents in peacebuilding rather than passive beneficiaries. Applying these frameworks together can help address the double discrimination experienced by young displaced women.

²⁶ Berman. (2023). *The effects of displacement on rural women's lives: The case of [Ukraine and the book of Ruth]*. Koroutchev. (2023). "Ukrainian migration during the first year after the beginning of the Russian armed conflict in 2022".

²⁷ Gururaja. (2000). *Gender dimensions of displacement*.

3

Legal limbo and documentation barriers

"I am considered a refugee in Armenia but not in other countries. I cannot open a bank account in Europe since I don't have an address [formally anywhere]."

Across all contexts, participants described how they face inconsistent policies, non-recognition of documents, and gaps in legal status that limit access to basic rights such as mobility, banking, education, and political participation. It also creates difficulties for receiving for example child support. Participants described how passports and documents are not recognised, sometimes due to the fact that the issuing body or municipality no longer exists or has changed names, or how the requirements for recognised stamps on documents might be very hard to meet when the issuing body is situated in a city with difficult access for the document holder.

Access to documentation and legal protection is repeatedly identified in the literature as a key determinant of displaced women's ability to access healthcare, education, employment and justice. Notes that lack of legal documentation often prevents women from accessing support services or reporting abuse, while bureaucratic barriers is identified as a major obstacle to long-term integration. In previous research by Kvinna till Kvinna on Nagorno Karabakh, we have seen that it often falls on women to do the administration work, wading through the bureaucracy, standing in queues, etc. The legalisation processes to obtain required documents are often both difficult, lengthy and costly. For many participants, the institutions that issued their original documents no longer exist, leaving them in prolonged legal limbo. One participant explained that in the context of Nagorno Karabakh, the names of the places and the borders are not the same as when she was born, and to get new documentation she would

have to pay for the process which is a problem for many displaced persons that have no jobs and thus no money. The irony is of course that if you do not have your documents in order, you cannot apply for job. Another participant told the story of how her parents were "re-married" by Armenian authorities since the original marriage certificate was issued by Nagorno Karabakh, and Armenia does not have the right to authorise it.

For young students displaced from Ukraine it is often possible to continue with university education from a distance, but participants highlight that they sometimes are obliged to travel to Ukraine for exams or for documentation procedures, which might be linked to considerable risks.

These problems with documents, certificates and passports make it difficult or impossible for displaced young women to travel, to open bank accounts and to access education. It can also mean you lose your rights to vote, which again decreases the voice and agency of displaced people in their host communities. *The fate of my people is decided by other people who are allowed to vote*, as one participant put it.

Many young women in the region would like to study or find a living in other parts of Europe when being displaced from their homes, and the problems with for example providing birth certificates makes it challenging to obtaining legal residence abroad.

*When our documents are annulled because the place that issued them no longer exists, then it is very hard for us to live and study in Europe and have legal status as refugee. As we now have Armenian passports, we are not considered refugees.*³⁰

Different groups are subject to different legal rules and obligations depending on whether they are internally displaced persons or refugees in another country. However, the challenges described by

³⁰ It has been standard practice for Armenians from Nagorno Karabakh to travel internationally on passports issued by the Republic of Armenia, which appear practically identical to those issued to citizens of Armenia, but bear the '070' issuing authority code. Following Armenia's granting of collective temporary protection to Nagorno Karabakh Armenians following the mass displacement in 2023, it has become increasingly difficult for Karabakh Armenians to access key benefits and services with these passports, which do not automatically grant voting rights or land ownership. Armenians from Nagorno Karabakh can apply for Armenian citizenship, which often involves lengthy and ambiguous legal procedures to replace documents lost during the displacement, such as birth and marriage certificates, and which sometimes creates misunderstandings in terms of the right to return.

participants demonstrate how unresolved questions of documentation and legal identity continue to undermine rights decades after displacement. The documentation issue is also closely linked to housing, which is discussed below. The loss of access

to proper documents and protection of housing, land and property rights were mentioned by several participants, as well as the lack of mechanisms for the documentation of these rights and frameworks for compensation and restitution.

Policy recommendations

- National governments should make restoration of official documents free of charge for IDPs and improve legal aid and awareness services, in line with the 1998 UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which emphasise non-discrimination and equal access to rights, documentation and durable solutions for IDPs.
- National governments should facilitate registration procedures in obtaining IDP/refugee status and access to relevant benefits. Registration procedures should be simplified and available in accessible formats.
- EU should expand and facilitate mobility, education and scholarship opportunities for displaced youth within the European Union and make sure information on opportunities is accessible.

4 Housing insecurity and inadequate services

"Losing your home is losing a bit of your identity."

Housing emerged as one of the most universal concerns across contexts. State support is inadequate and insufficient, and housing insecurity turns out to be closely linked to exclusion, unemployment and mental health. While some policy improvements exist, access remains uneven and often tied to unclear eligibility systems or long waiting lists. Living conditions in displacement settings are frequently inadequate, with limited water and sanitation facilities, healthcare, and transport, accessibility barriers, and overcrowded settlements, reinforcing structural inequalities and affecting long-term wellbeing. Women, traditionally seen as responsible for caring for the extended family, bear a heavy burden. Participants highlight the stress on mothers when the family has to leave their house and instead share a one-bedroom apartment in a settlement or event

share living space with other families since rent is not affordable.

The below quote mirrors one of many gendered aspects of displacement:

My mother was responsible for packing and unpacking suitcases during three years in Nagorno-Karabakh, it was her responsibility to make sure we got everything with us when we would have to leave.

Research demonstrates that housing cannot be understood separately from economic and physical security, social integration and wellbeing. Studies from Ukraine show that unstable housing and repeated relocation increase dependency, limit access to employment and contribute to psychosocial distress.³¹ Participants described how home is closely linked to your identity and how they see parents and grandparents nourishing their hope to sometime go back. One participant described how it was her grandfather's dream to one day

³¹ Malynovska & Yatsenko. (2023). *The impact of war-induced forced migration abroad on the state of Ukraine's labor potential in the context of social sustainability*. Howlett & Dvornichenko. (2025).

see Aghdam in Nagorno Karabakh again,³² where he had to leave his home in the 1990s, but he died before being able to do so. She visited with her mother and brought a bit of soil back to put on his grave. On the spot, her mother found an old pot that she remembered using for cooking. She said it was *a small thing that proved it (the displacement) actually happened*. Another participant described the frustration of living so close to one's home yet not being able to go there. She added: *My parents hurt more than me, they lived there – I only heard about the place. They know what they lost*.

Participants describe how they feel unseen and unheard when decisions on their housing are made. Often housing is provided in shelters far from where most job opportunities are, and with rental costs that are not affordable for the displaced people. For elderly people and people with disabilities, housing is inaccessible and there is a general lack of social housing. Participants from Azerbaijan returning to Nagorno Karabakh say that consultations on the needs of the population moving back is non-existent and how housing is constructed without regard to, for example, disability needs and elderly people's needs. It is also not in keeping with their cultural norms. People who lived in

villages and separate houses are being moved to apartments. They don't have their own gardens or houses, they are often not moving back to their original villages, let alone their actual homes. There is also a lack of healthcare and transport to hospitals. Previous research by Kvinna till Kvinna has also shown how people with disabilities who have managed to live outside of institutions are often re-institutionalised during displacement against their will.³³

One issue that was touched upon by participants is the problem with social segregation between displaced communities and host communities, a segregation that in many cases can last for decades. Participants' experiences also reflect findings that displacement often creates tensions between host and displaced communities, reinforcing social exclusion over generations. This point is raised by many participants, who described how IDP settlements are built in isolation from host communities. *We have our own community*, one participant said, *everyone around you is an IDP as you are, but we can't be part of a bigger community*. Another participant agreed: *The IDP settlement we live in is separate from the rest of the community. Many view us as aliens, as foreigners. It affects us*.

Policy recommendations

- National governments need to make sure that the people concerned, including young displaced women, are consulted in housing decisions. There is a special need to include intersectional perspectives in housing decisions, such as the need of caregivers and childcare, in housing and social protection policies.
- National governments should develop disability-inclusive housing standards and expand affordable social housing programmes; provide accessible services to ensure proper integration of displaced young people with disabilities in communities; and ensure that they benefit from all services and protection mechanisms available.
- National governments should create compensation and restitution mechanisms for lost property, and establish mechanisms for documenting housing, land and property rights.

³² Aghdam was completely destroyed by Armenians forces during the first war in the 1990s.

³³ The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation. (2025). *Nothing about us without us - disability, gender and security*.

5

Economic exclusion and loss of livelihoods

"People from my region worked with agriculture. In the settlement there was no place for agriculture, a lot of women did not know what to do. Their job was working in the garden, growing and selling vegetables. In settlements that was not possible."

Displacement disrupts livelihoods, especially for women whose skills are not always easily transferable, for example, as the above quote illustrates, when displaced women who were used to agricultural settings find themselves in urban communities, their skills are difficult to apply. Economic exclusion emerged as a key driver of vulnerability for displaced women. Unemployment among young displaced persons is a major challenge, sometimes linked to difficulties with diploma validation and the non-recognition of educational qualifications. Displaced people often have weak professional networks, and many women who were employed in the public sector before displacement find that these opportunities are no longer available after displacement. Participants also highlighted the need for better specific support to navigate labour markets. For example, one participant described how, after being displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh, where the labour market functions in a more informal way, it was difficult to understand formal job application procedures, including CV writing and recruitment processes, in Armenia.

These barriers are further compounded by deep-rooted patriarchal norms that continue to define women's roles in the region. For young displaced women, in particular, it can be difficult to gain professional experience, access career development opportunities, and find employment that enables them to become financially independent. Economic dependence often limits young women's

ability to make their own choices and decisions regarding education, housing, mobility, and their future, therefore limiting their meaningful participation. As one participant said:

When discussing education, mobility, or trauma, economic independence often remains in the background. However, in reality, it determines the extent to which a young woman can make independent decisions about her own life.

Women are often expected to manage domestic chores and care for children, while a lack of childcare services creates significant obstacles to seeking employment. Research on global level has shown that caregiving responsibilities restrict women's participation in the labour market, forcing many into informal, low-paid or precarious work.³⁴ Lack of childcare services, non-recognition of qualifications and bureaucratic barriers therefore represent major obstacles preventing displaced women from achieving economic independence. Many participants also mentioned the language barrier, where not being fluent in host community language or speaking a different dialect make them subject to discrimination in the job market.

Participants repeatedly described how women are left to care for children and relatives when men leave in search of work. As a result, women must balance caregiving responsibilities with efforts to generate income and sustain their households. Research from Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova similarly shows that displaced women frequently become both primary caregivers and providers due to the absence, unemployment or migration of male family members.³⁵ Economic dependency on family members or partners further increases women's vulnerability to gender-based violence.

Participants also highlighted concerns about the relevance of available vocational training programmes. Many argued that the training provided is not aligned with labour market demands. As one participant noted, there is a limit to how many young women can make a sustainable living from

³⁴ Baumann & Archer. (2026). *Experiences of externally displaced Ukrainian women: a longitudinal study of financial resilience recovery, economic behavioral decisions, and financial inclusion in displacement.* Koroutchev. (2023).

³⁵ Berman. (2023).

activities such as manicures or hairdressing. One young woman from Georgia summed up this frustration by observing that *there was lots of training but no jobs*.

As the example above indicates, vocational training opportunities are often severely gendered. While this is a way to respond to skillsets that women already possess in the communities and to ensure

uptake, it also keeps them in 'feminised' roles that reinforce stereotypes. On the other hand, demand for 'feminised' jobs often stems from assessments conducted within communities, where women often will request jobs they see other women doing, especially if they can be done in the home, so there is less of a need for childcare. Thus, the problem is both economic and cultural.

Policy recommendations

- The EU needs to push for the implementation of the Gender Action Plan and associated Country-level Implementation Plans (CLIPs), which identify women's economic empowerment and labour market integration as a core pillar and promotes targeted support for vocational training, employment and the removal of structural barriers faced by displaced women.
- National governments should align vocational training and employment programmes with labour market needs, including in terms of facilitating access to digital skills needed for remote work, expand internship and mentoring programmes, and incentivise private sector recruitment and support of displaced women.
- National governments should improve and facilitate recognition of diplomas and qualifications; and support the implementation of targeted economic inclusion programmes given the disproportionately high unemployment rate among displaced women.
- National governments and local authorities should increase childcare provisions for displaced mothers in order to lessen the double burden of women and increase their possibilities to find work.

6

Social exclusion, misrepresentation and hate-speech

"You as a displaced person is the person who should stand up, be the one to share information, the educator. But you are still carrying the trauma."

Young women repeatedly described feeling like outsiders, aliens or strangers in their new environments. Even those who were born into displacement described this feeling. Common experiences included bullying, discrimination, hate speech,

stigma associated with displacement status, disinformation, tensions between displaced and host communities, social exclusion and language-based discrimination.

Participants also raised concerns about stereotypes of young women in social media and the high prevalence of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV). According to participants, there is also widespread misunderstanding and disinformation about displaced communities and living conditions in settlements.

In contexts of protracted and unresolved conflict, displaced and conflict-affected communities may be particularly exposed to competing conflict narratives, politically instrumentalised information, and war- or peace-related propaganda. This can further reinforce insecurity, deepen social polarisation, reproduce conflict-related fears and trauma, and potentially undermine trust in dialogue and peacebuilding processes. These experiences reflect broader patterns identified in existing research. Increasingly, studies show that displacement affects not only economic wellbeing but also social identity, belonging and community connections. Research on displaced Ukrainians has documented how displacement disrupts social ties and alters perceptions of home, identity and social acceptance.³⁶ The persistence of hate-speech, exclusion and polarised narratives highlighted by participants demonstrates how the social consequences of conflict continue long after physical safety has been secured. Thus, information security and resilience to disinformation should also be viewed through the prism of human security and conflict prevention.

Several participants shared personal experiences of hostility and discrimination. One participant described how difficult and unexpected the hate-speech she encountered was. Members of the host community would call her names intended to humiliate her, often linked to her specific dialect. Another participant noted that hateful rhetoric sometimes came from high-level politicians, further fuelling hostility towards displaced people and legitimising discriminatory attitudes.

I had to change my school in Ivano-Frankivsk when I moved from Luhansk. I was bullied because we spoke Russian. I moved at six years old to Lymansk [...]. I lived in Nikolaev³⁷ and then moved to Donetsk and Dnipro and then to Ivano-Frankivsk. My adaptation skills are on a very high level.

Participants stressed that what displaced communities need is empathy, not pity. Many criticised the way media coverage often focuses almost exclusively on trauma and suffering while failing to ask displaced people about their current realities, aspirations and hopes for the future:

Journalists come to the settlement asking about war and trauma, but they are not trying to show people what challenges you have, what is important now. They are only interested in your childhood trauma, old pictures, etc.

This focus on past trauma rather than present realities, ongoing challenges and personal agency contributes to stereotyping and obscures the structural issues affecting displaced communities. Participants expressed a strong demand for self-representation and for narratives that reflect lived experiences, resilience, aspirations and political realities rather than reducing displaced people to victims of conflict.

The discussion around representation also extended to how conflicts themselves are understood and remembered. Many participants highlighted the need for deeper and more nuanced understanding of the root causes of conflicts in the region, as well as greater attention to recent history within educational systems. In Georgia, participants described how school textbooks provide little information about conflict regions and how academics and historians remain deeply polarised regarding the events of the 1990s. Participants also noted that many documents that could shed light on recent history remain inaccessible. One participant reflected on the challenges of discussing conflict and trauma openly:

There is a feeling that if we raise these issues again there will be a new war. But trauma has not healed. We need peace education, but today it is dangerous to work in Georgia on critical thinking issues.

Against this backdrop, many participants emphasised the importance of fostering more constructive public narratives, both around displacement and as part of broader peacebuilding efforts. They highlighted the need to counter dis- and misinformation, challenge hate-speech and promote conflict-sensitive approaches to communication. As one participant stated: *We need positive narrative campaigns to counter hate-speech, by influencers, in theatres and media. We need to train journalists and public officials on conflict-sensitive information.*

³⁶ Howlett & Dvornichenko. (2025).

³⁷ In Russian the city is called Nikolaev. In Ukrainian and for the international community it is called Mykolaiv.

Policy recommendations

- Regional and international donors should support grassroots initiatives on positive narrative campaigns, including in terms of addressing displacement-related stigma and stereotypes, and trainings of journalists and public officials in conflict-sensitive communication.
- Regional and international donors should invest in youth-led media initiatives and fund dialogue programmes between youth in host and displaced communities; as well as prioritise digital and media literacy and security programmes for young women from displaced communities, who are identified as both especially vulnerable to and potentially powerful allies against disinformation
- The EU Eastern Partnership framework, the EU External Action Service, the European Commission, and the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus should strengthen support to countering identity-based disinformation and strengthening women-led civil society organisations.

7

Ongoing trauma, loss of identity and belonging

"I would love for people to understand that I have a reason to be angry. My European friends say I am an angry person and that it is destructive. But I did not choose the anger, it was put on me."

Beyond immediate humanitarian needs, displacement creates profound and long-term psychological and identity-related impacts. The loss of home is deeply connected to identity, belonging and memory, while ongoing uncertainty and trauma affect relationships, aspirations and everyday life. These dimensions of displacement are often poorly reflected in policy responses, which tend to treat displacement as a temporary rather than an ongoing condition. The separation of families was a recurring theme throughout the workshop.

One participant, for example, described how her father's family remained in South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region because they did not want to leave their home. Since then, she has been unable to see her relatives. The sorrow linked to not being able to visit your loved ones' graveyards was also mentioned by many participants.

The long-term psychological consequences of displacement are increasingly documented in literature. Research among displaced Ukrainian women has found exceptionally high levels of stress, anxiety and psychosocial distress linked to prolonged uncertainty, disrupted social ties and repeated displacement.³⁸ Studies further demonstrate that displacement reshapes emotional attachments, perceptions of home and feelings of belonging, often producing impacts that persist across generations.³⁹ War and displacement reshape women's lives, affecting their social relationships, sense of security and future prospects, making the effects of trauma particularly long-lasting.⁴⁰

³⁸ Tashkinova. (2024). *The Family Situation of Ukrainian Female Forced Migrants in Poland*.

³⁹ Howlett & Dvornichenko. (2025).

⁴⁰ Thakur. (2023). *War, women and forced displacement*.

The experiences shared by participants closely reflected these findings. Young women consistently highlighted the enduring psychological impacts of displacement, including PTSD, anxiety, grief, inherited and intergenerational trauma, loss of belonging and a lack of long-term support. One participant shared how deeply traumatic it was for her mother to return to her hometown because she still carried vivid memories of seeing dead bodies in the streets when the family was forced to flee.

Many participants also questioned the effectiveness of short-term psychosocial interventions. They criticised counselling programmes that provide only one or two sessions, arguing that such approaches can reopen traumatic experiences without offering the sustained support needed for recovery. Participants further described feeling pressure from both society and authorities to focus on healing, while many felt that they had not been given adequate space to process loss and grief.

As one participant explained: *It is all about healing now. But that does not let you grieve properly. Grief comes in waves, it comes and goes, but it is not possible to heal.*

Discussions about healing also highlighted the importance of preserving cultural identity, language and dialect. For many participants, displacement involved not only the loss of a physical home but

also the loss of personal memories and connections to their past. One participant described not having a single photograph from her childhood. Participants stressed that while younger generations may not always have direct memories of their places of origin, this makes it even more important to create opportunities for positive connections to their heritage through education, cultural initiatives and historical programmes.

At the same time, participants described how displacement continues to shape their sense of belonging in everyday life. As young women, many spoke about feeling different from their peers and struggling to form close relationships with people who had not experienced displacement. Feelings of non-belonging were particularly evident in discussions about dating, friendships and emotional intimacy. Gendered expectations and traditional gender roles also dictated their sense of exclusion from multiple spaces. Participants explained that building relationships and communicating personal experiences can be difficult when others do not share the experience of displacement, loss, and uncertainty.

In addition, being labelled as 'victims of conflict' and viewed solely through their experiences of displacement, further stripping young women of their agency, sometimes forces them to proactively choose to conceal their backgrounds and experiences, in a bid to express their professional, social, and political interests.

Policy recommendations

- National governments and donors should support access to mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS) and ensure that women's rights organisations receive adequate resources to provide trauma-informed care to communities.
- National governments and local authorities should address stigma surrounding mental health and support creative healing approaches through storytelling, art and cultural activities.
- Regional and international donors could promote and support organising of festivals and activities that can benefit positive memories of identities and traditions, and at the same time increase empathy, understanding, a sense of belonging, and interaction between communities.
- Regional and international donors should resource safe spaces for young women to gather together and freely speak about their own experiences, and stories, focusing not only on trauma, but on civic, social, and political roles, and opportunities.



Political exclusion from decisions affecting young women's futures

"People not being heard is the root of the problem."

Perhaps the most forward-looking finding concerns participation. Participants consistently reported that decisions are made about them rather than with them. Despite possessing direct expertise on displacement and its consequences, they often feel invisible in policy and decision-making processes.

At the same time, many participants demonstrated strong leadership aspirations and a clear desire to shape the policies and programmes that affect their lives. Several shared examples of creating their own platforms for representation and advocacy. One participant described how, feeling the need to speak from within her community rather than as an outsider, she turned to communication and filmmaking to tell her community's story. Beyond raising awareness, she explained that filmmaking is also a way of preserving memories and identity. As she reflected: *Artsakh⁴¹ disappears more and more. Making films about it makes it more present.*

However, meaningful participation remains constrained by both social and structural barriers. Displaced communities are often physically and socially isolated, limiting interaction with broader society and reinforcing stereotypes and stigma. Young women face challenges integrating into education systems, labour markets and social networks, while simultaneously being excluded from the decision-making processes that shape their futures. Participants also noted that displaced communities are sometimes politically instrumentalised, for example as voting blocs or as part of political narratives and propaganda, rather than being recognised as active stakeholders with valuable expertise and perspectives.

The exclusion described by participants stands in direct contrast to both research findings and international policy commitments. Studies demon-

strate that women's participation in humanitarian responses and policymaking improves access to services, strengthens protection mechanisms and contributes to more sustainable integration outcomes.⁴² Research further highlights that successful integration policies depend on the active engagement of displaced people themselves rather than top-down approaches that treat them as passive recipients of assistance.⁴³

These principles are explicitly reflected in both the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agendas, which emphasise the meaningful participation of women and young people in peacebuilding, governance and decision-making processes. Rather than being viewed solely as beneficiaries of support, young women should be recognised as important actors in shaping more inclusive and sustainable responses to conflict and displacement.

Participants from Nagorno-Karabakh described how young displaced people remain politically isolated and highlighted the urgent need to invest in the next generation of leaders among young internally displaced women. They called for greater access to training opportunities, leadership development initiatives and formal mechanisms through which displaced young people can engage directly with policymakers. One participant proposed:

We could have a displaced youth assembly to meet regularly and present recommendations to the Armenian parliament and international organisations. Many projects ask women what they need but not where the money goes. We need to let displaced women both identify the problem and help decide on budget. We need to shift power to young people.

This perspective captures a broader message emerging from the consultations: young displaced women do not simply want to be consulted. They want meaningful influence over decisions, resources and policies that affect their communities and futures.

⁴¹ An Armenian name for Nagorno Karabakh.

⁴² Gururaja. (2000).

⁴³ Cardona-Fox, G. (2020).

Policy recommendations

- Regional and international donors could support the creation of and financing of youth displacement assemblies and platforms for dialogue between displaced communities and host communities.
- Local authorities should establish local councils of displaced women with budgetary influence and support fellowships for young displaced women in public institutions.
- National and local authorities must ensure meaningful participation of young displaced women in all displacement-related policymaking and peacebuilding processes.
- EU needs to strengthen work on participation in the EU Strategic Approach to WPS and address gender gaps in peacebuilding: Address gender gaps by ensuring women's meaningful participation in all stages of peacebuilding and mediation, including by actively drawing on women's expertise, conflict analysis and early-warning insights. Engagement should be regular and inclusive of women from diverse backgrounds, including displaced women, grassroots activists and women human rights defenders. Ensuring women's participation is a core requirement for inclusive and sustainable peace processes.
- Support and strengthen targeted civic and voter education – including in accessible formats – for young displaced women. This should be done in consultation with and through support to relevant women's rights organisations, who have trusted local channels and community outreach.



Neli Imnadze at the workshop on the situation for young displaced women in Moldova June 2026.

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Kseniia Polishchuk participating at the workshop on the situation for young displaced women, which took place in Moldova June 2026.

**For all women's rights,
in every corner of the world.**