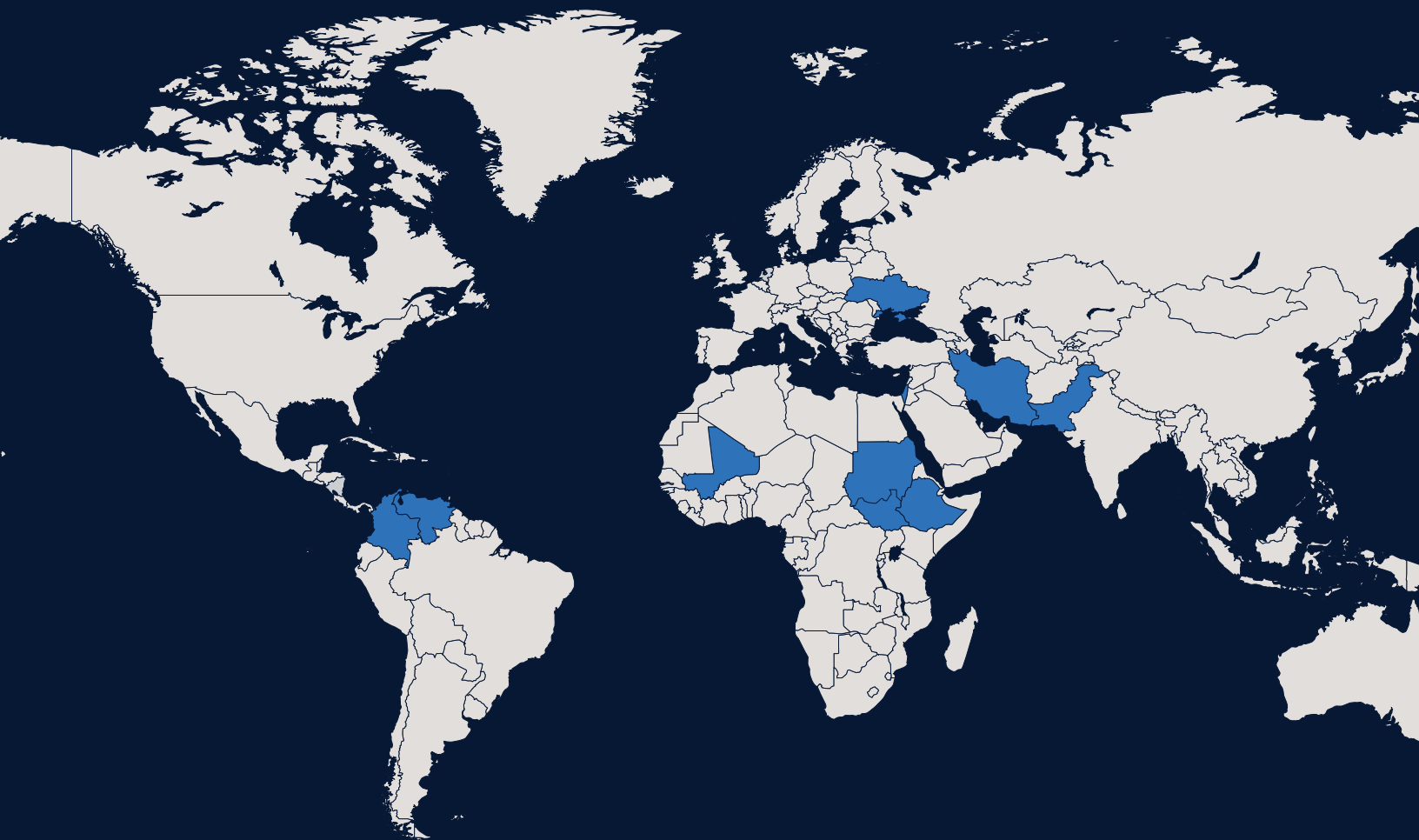




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Georgetown Institute for
Women, Peace and Security

Women, Peace and Security: Conflicts and Trends to Watch in 2026



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The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security

The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security seeks to promote a more stable, peaceful, and just world by focusing on the important role women play in preventing conflict and building peace, growing economies, and addressing global threats like climate change and violent extremism. The Institute aims to document the critical role women can and must play in peace and security, and ensure that evidence-based research is accessible to practitioners and policymakers. To do so, the Institute engages in rigorous research, hosts global convenings, advances strategic partnerships, and nurtures the next generation of leaders. The Institute is headed by former US Ambassador for Global Women's Issues Melanne Vermeer.

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Executive Summary

Entering 2026, the global security landscape is defined by record-high levels of armed conflict, democratic backsliding, geopolitical fragmentation, and an accelerating climate crisis—dynamics unfolding alongside unprecedented cuts to foreign aid and development assistance. These converging pressures are reshaping conflict environments in ways that disproportionately endanger women and girls while eroding the systems meant to protect them, even as women remain central actors in humanitarian response, peacebuilding, and civic resistance. *Women, Peace and Security: Conflicts and Trends to Watch in 2026* integrates gender-responsive analysis into conflict forecasting by drawing on insights from the Women, Peace and Security Conflict Tracker and expert consultations.

This report identifies three cross-cutting trends expected to shape conflict dynamics in the year ahead: the increasing weaponization of hunger as a tactic of conquest and control, with devastating gendered consequences; political transitions which intensify repression, violence, and women's exclusion at critical decision-making moments; and worsening climate shocks that compound displacement, insecurity, and economic loss for women and girls. The report also profiles ten settings—Colombia, Ethiopia, Iran, Israel & Palestine, Mali, Pakistan, South Sudan, Sudan, Ukraine, and Venezuela—where these dynamics are likely to be especially acute in 2026. By highlighting women's agency and centering gendered risks as indicators of instability, this report addresses a critical gap in mainstream conflict analysis and offers policymakers, donors, multilateral institutions, and civil society leaders a more inclusive framework for anticipating crises, protecting civilians, and advancing more durable and inclusive peace and security outcomes.

Introduction and State of the Field

This year begins amid record-high rates of armed conflict,¹ an increasingly fragmented geopolitical order, democratic backsliding, and intensifying attacks on human rights and gender equality, all unfolding alongside a worsening climate crisis.² At the same time, from Iran to Venezuela to cities across the United States,³ people are mobilizing to protect and defend their rights and demand more just and inclusive futures.⁴ The stakes are high, and so are the consequences for misreading risks.

Widespread cuts to foreign assistance have devastated the global humanitarian architecture, and major shifts in funding priorities toward defense spending are resulting in fewer resources for development, emergency response, and gender equality.⁵ Despite these challenges, women across the world are actively leading civil society organizations, serving in public office, documenting abuses, fighting for justice, and struggling to keep their families safe from harm. They do so while confronting rising rates of gender-based violence, increasingly sophisticated digital surveillance and disinformation, growing legal restrictions amid rising authoritarianism, and violent repression by both state and non-state actors.⁶ Against this backdrop, ignoring the critical roles of women in building peace and security and the gendered impacts of conflict—core tenets of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda—carries heightened strategic costs.

Each year, experts release global “watch lists” that provide essential insights into the contemporary conflict landscape. Yet mainstream analysis often overlooks gendered dynamics that drive unique vulnerabilities for women—risks that often serve as early indicators of instability: the erosion of women’s rights as a bellwether of democratic backsliding, violence targeting women leaders as a signal of shrinking civic space, and women’s exclusion from decision-making as a threat to the durability of peace.⁷ Without accounting for these factors, forecasting analysis remains incomplete.

To address this gap, the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security developed the first-of-its-kind Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Conflict Tracker,⁸ which monitors risks and opportunities for women across 27 conflict-affected contexts. This tool draws on 80 qualitative and quantitative indicators to provide timely insights into emerging dynamics, escalating danger, and openings to improve women’s status.

We were motivated to launch our own annual forecasting report to ensure gendered risk analysis is integrated into global conflict forecasting. Drawing on our ongoing tracking, this report identifies three cross-cutting trends shaping conflict environments in 2026 and profiles 10 settings where our experts predict

the impacts of conflict on women will undergo substantial transformation or be most acute in the year to come.

The link between women's inclusion in peace negotiations and enduring peace is well established, yet conflict analysis continues to sideline gendered dimensions of risk and the role women can and must play in building a more peaceful world.⁹ The challenges highlighted in our analysis—the weaponization of hunger, political instability and marginalization, and climate change—not only contribute to the persistence of armed conflict, but also impede women's ability to contribute to building stable, just, and prosperous futures. Notably, many of these dynamics are also visible beyond these countries, including in settings which are not considered to be traditionally conflict-affected. We offer this report to policymakers, multilateral institutions, donors, and civil society leaders seeking to better anticipate threats, protect civilians, safeguard human rights and democracy, and develop more effective, inclusive interventions for conflict prevention and response.

Methodology

This report utilizes a desk-based qualitative research methodology, drawing from analysis of secondary sources—including news articles, publicly available data, academic journals, and government and nongovernmental organization reports—as well as original insights generated by the WPS Conflict Tracker. Consultations were also conducted on a non-attribution basis with experts on each setting featured in the report. Experts held a range of roles, including as civil society members, aid workers, researchers, and advocates. We thank everyone who generously provided their time and reflection in support of this report.

The 10 countries featured in this report were identified from the set of countries monitored by the WPS Conflict Tracker. Featured countries are at risk of, currently experiencing, or transitioning away from armed conflict. The WPS Conflict Tracker monitors and analyzes conflict and security dynamics through a Women, Peace and Security lens to identify relevant risks and opportunities for women and girls in 27 conflict-affected settings. To stay up-to-date, visit the WPS Conflict Tracker website and sign up to receive GIWPS updates.

Cross-National Trends

The issues that will define 2026 are not confined by national borders. Rather, the countries monitored by the WPS Conflict Tracker grapple with shared challenges reflected across geographically diverse settings. These trends shape both unique internal outcomes and cross-national instability while compounding overall conflict and insecurity. In this section, three key issues for 2026 are explored: the weaponization of hunger, political transitions and related instability, and climate change events.

Armed Groups and Authorities Increasingly Weaponize Hunger

Blockades, sieges, and other attacks on food access and infrastructure are increasingly used against civilians as a weapon of conquest and control, depriving women and girls of basic nutrition and causing immense suffering.^{i 10}

The increased weaponization of food in conflict settings drives this trend, while preexisting food insecurity enhances the tactic's lethality.¹¹ Women and girls around the world often eat “last and least,” leaving them more exposed to higher levels of malnutrition and food scarcity compared with males. With worsening conflict and climate change further disrupting access to agriculture and markets, hunger will continue to be an increasingly deadly weapon in 2026. Pregnant and lactating women are especially vulnerable, perpetuating intergenerational harm through reproductive health complications like low birth weights, inability to produce milk, and stillbirths.¹²

Amid such circumstances, women—who comprise the majority of primary caregivers—have reported starving themselves in order to feed their children; in Gaza, for instance, mothers have gone up to 72 hours without food to ensure their children can eat.¹³ During the siege of Tigray, women also described being forced to choose which of their children to feed, a dilemma that may exacerbate long-term trauma.¹⁴ Blockades are also often accompanied by attacks on aid workers, hospitals, and other public centers, preventing treatment for malnutrition and hunger and amplifying harm. Although forced starvation is considered a war crime under international law, the multilateral system's fragmentation may further impede enforcement of this provision and create an even more permissive environment for these tactics in 2026.¹⁵

ⁱ This pattern is observable across diverse conflict settings, including Sudan, Gaza, Myanmar, Mali, Haiti, Yemen, Ethiopia, Ukraine, Syria, and many more.

The toll of weaponized starvation will be compounded by gendered patterns of food allocation and aid access during crises. Women-headed households are often systemically excluded from available aid, and women frequently face particular hardship and threat while traveling, waiting in long lines, and accessing aid drops to secure food. After armed gangs blockaded fuel and cut off food access in Haiti, women and girls searching for food and water were frequently targeted and attacked by fighters.¹⁶ These challenges are further magnified for women and girls with disabilities, who face additional barriers to accessing resources, are frequently overlooked in humanitarian response plans, and have, on average, higher preexisting levels of food insecurity.¹⁷ The devastation of global aid infrastructure following foreign aid cuts in early 2025 and the weakening of the global humanitarian architecture has further undermined overall food security and capacity to respond, sharpening intersectional inequalities.

Hunger will drive desperation and trigger harmful responses, which undermine the short- and long-term well-being of women and girls. Hunger quickly leads to a surge in early and forced marriages, as families are forced to procure marriages for their daughters as a source of income, to reduce the number of mouths to feed, or in hopes that a new spouse can better provide.¹⁸ Even when food access resumes, girls who married early are unlikely to return to school and are more likely to experience domestic violence and dangerous pregnancy complications.¹⁹ Women and girls are also often pushed into survival sex or exploitative relationships, including with peacekeepers and aid workers, to access food for themselves and their families.

Blockades additionally risk disrupting long-term food systems, including by interrupting planting and harvesting cycles and by triggering mass displacement. As a result, it becomes harder to reestablish food security even after conflict ends, devastating women and girls who rely—in many countries, disproportionately—on agriculture for subsistence and income.²⁰ Hunger is also a motivating factor for both male and female recruits into armed groups, contributing to cycles of conflict and putting women and girls at greater risk of exploitation and trafficking long-term.²¹ This weaponization of food insecurity can thus drive violence and instability which prolong humanitarian crises and further undermine women's ability to engage in public life.

Political Transitions Intensify Insecurity and Marginalization

Political transitions in 2026 will heighten instability, deepening gendered insecurity across multiple regions. For many countries monitored by the WPS Conflict Tracker, 2026 will be marked by elections, constitutional reforms, and negotiated transitions that are expected to intensify volatility, worsen repression, and narrow civic space. These dynamics forecast rising gendered insecurity: Women and girls are likely to face increased political violence and continued exclusion precisely as decisions with lasting implications for governance and recovery are being made.²²

Electoral volatility will intersect with armed conflict and weak governance, creating sharp gendered risks. Haiti's plan to hold its first presidential elections since 2016 illustrates the instability expected across many 2026 transitions: a vote scheduled amid state collapse, widespread gang control, and acute insecurity for women.²³ Similar dynamics will emerge across WPS Tracker countries holding national-level elections or experiencing contested power transitions. Some states will use elections to consolidate authoritarian rule;²⁴ others will hold nominally pluralistic votes amid armed-group interference and political manipulation that weakens competition.²⁵ Libya's long-delayed elections, if held in 2026, could create both an opening for political inclusion and a flash point for renewed violence as rival factions jockey for influence.²⁶

Against this backdrop, women engaging in public life—including organizers in Colombia's conflict-affected regions, activists under Myanmar's junta, and political candidates in Haiti and Libya—are already facing escalating threats, digital harassment, and community pressure designed to deter their participation.²⁷ Pakistan's 2024 general elections previewed this trend: gender-based disinformation campaigns delegitimized female candidates and flooded online spaces with sexualized harassment, pushing many women out of public discourse.²⁸ Furthermore, in governance vacuums such as those in Haiti, Libya, and parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo, armed actors are increasingly determining who can safely participate in civic and political life, with women and girls facing disproportionate risks that sharply narrow their ability to engage at all.

Women's exclusion from negotiations and governance processes will continue to adversely shape political outcomes and forecast long-term instability. Many of 2026's most consequential political developments will occur through negotiations and transitional arrangements rather than elections, with women's participation likely to remain limited and largely symbolic.²⁹ Across anticipated processes—from negotiations in Ukraine³⁰ to fragile dialogue pathways in South Sudan³¹—women's ability to influence outcomes is constrained by insecurity, shrinking civic space, entrenched gender norms, and outright exclusion.³²

Myanmar illustrates how exclusion from negotiations translates into concrete risks for women in 2026. As resistance movements and ethnic armed organizations advance transitional proposals, women remain largely absent from formal negotiations, limiting the integration of civilian protection, accountability, and gender-responsive governance provisions.³³ Under continued militarized rule, this exclusion is likely to produce transitional arrangements that deprioritize women's needs and perpetuate insecurity.³⁴ Gaza also underscores these patterns of exclusion: Although women disproportionately bear the burdens of bombardment, hunger, and displacement, they remain largely outside ceasefire negotiations and recovery planning, increasing the likelihood of gender-blind

post-conflict arrangements.³⁵ Evidence from past peace processes further suggests that agreements shaped without women's broad participation tend to produce narrower mandates, weaker accountability mechanisms, and lower local legitimacy—conditions that heighten the risk of breakdown during implementation.³⁶

Shrinking civic space and the malign use of technology are poised to accelerate gender-targeted repression throughout 2026, with distinct consequences for women's political participation and leadership.

Governments and security actors are likely to expand surveillance, targeted arrests, and restrictive legislation to preempt dissent during elections and transitions, with women human rights defenders and journalists facing disproportionate targeting.³⁷ In contexts where legal frameworks or social norms already restrict women's behavior, these measures are frequently reinforced through moralized accusations or reputational attacks. Digital repression will be a defining trend of political transitions and instability, with specific consequences for women. Gender-based discrimination, online harassment, surveillance, nonconsensual image sharing, and deepfake technologies—already visible in Iran,³⁸ Nigeria,³⁹ Pakistan,⁴⁰ and Venezuela⁴¹—are expected to intensify as political actors exploit AI-enabled tools to intimidate or silence women candidates, police women's public presence, and manipulate public debate.⁴² These tactics disproportionately target women, leveraging gender norms to undermine credibility and deter women from running for office, sustaining campaigns, or emerging in visible leadership roles. At the same time, stagnating funding for civil society is eroding women-led organizations that provide essential protection, mediation, and early warning—removing critical safeguards against gender-targeted repression both online and offline.⁴³

In response to shrinking civic space, women human rights defenders and activists are increasingly building cross-issue and cross-community coalitions to sustain influence and mitigate risk.⁴⁴ These often-informal networks enable continued organizing and action despite surveillance⁴⁵—underscoring that even as repression intensifies in 2026, women will remain central actors in identifying openings for collective action and political resilience.⁴⁶

Climate Change Creates and Amplifies Threats

Climate change is not gender neutral; women and girls face compounding threats as the climate crisis is projected to worsen in 2026.⁴⁷ Climate shocks amplify existing gender inequalities, with women and children a staggering 14 times more likely to die from natural disasters than men.⁴⁸ Extreme heat, droughts, floods, and environmental degradation are expected to intensify in the coming year. Climate change events and armed conflict often mutually reinforce one another by amplifying threats and triggering cascading crises. Climate shocks can exacerbate stressors—like agricultural failure and resource competition⁴⁹—

which fuel armed conflict, while communities already affected by conflict⁵⁰ are often the most vulnerable to natural disasters⁵¹ which deepen food insecurity, livelihood loss, and instability.⁵²

These compounding pressures will fall disproportionately on women and girls,⁵³ who often shoulder primary responsibility for unpaid care burdens—such as securing food, water, and energy—while having the fewest protections or resources to adapt.⁵⁴ In conflict-affected settings, where governance and social services are already strained, climate impacts will prolong insecurity and constrain recovery, even as women and girls—often under-resourced and excluded from formal decision-making spaces—lead community-level climate response, adaptation, and resilience efforts.⁵⁵

More women and girls will be displaced by climate events in 2026, compounding vulnerabilities and long-term, intergenerational impacts.

Since 2009, the number of countries reporting both conflict and disaster displacement has tripled, with women and girls making up half of displaced persons globally.⁵⁶ An estimated 75 percent of those displaced live in areas with high to extreme exposure to climate-related risks.⁵⁷ Women and girls face an acute threat nexus,⁵⁸ with gender inequalities, climate, and conflict heightening vulnerabilities, including lack of access to healthcare, loss of education and livelihoods, and heightened exposure to gender-based violence.⁵⁹ As conflicts surge and the climate crisis worsens, the number of women and girls forced to flee their homes is expected to rise significantly in 2026, with sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and the Middle East projected to see the greatest increases.⁶⁰ As climate change amplifies risks for displaced persons in places such as Sudan,⁶¹ Myanmar,⁶² and Yemen,⁶³ women continue to serve as the primary providers of essential services to their communities by organizing care, sustaining households, and leading mediation efforts.

Competition over land, natural resources, and critical minerals—driven by new technologies—will increase hazards for local women and girls and heighten danger for female environmental defenders.⁶⁴

Global demand⁶⁵ for critical minerals and rare earth minerals that power renewable batteries, artificial intelligence, and other emerging technologies is soaring, and many of the world's largest known mineral reserves are in conflict-affected and climate-vulnerable regions where women and girls already face greater risks.⁶⁶ Women—particularly Indigenous women⁶⁷—are on the frontlines of protecting their land and resources from corrupt, extractive, and harmful practices despite rising digital⁶⁸ and physical threats.⁶⁹ In areas opened for mining, women are disproportionately impacted by loss of economic opportunity, exposure to toxins, and trafficking and exploitative labor practices,⁷⁰ yet are often targeted and silenced in retribution for advocating on behalf of their communities.⁷¹ In Colombia—the deadliest country for land defenders worldwide—violent clashes between armed groups over contested territory illustrate the climate-conflict nexus, with women

environmental defenders likely to face heightened risks in the coming year as conflict intensifies.⁷² Widespread impunity⁷³ for such abuses coincides with growing backlash to gender equality, multiplying risks to women environmental activists in the coming year.⁷⁴

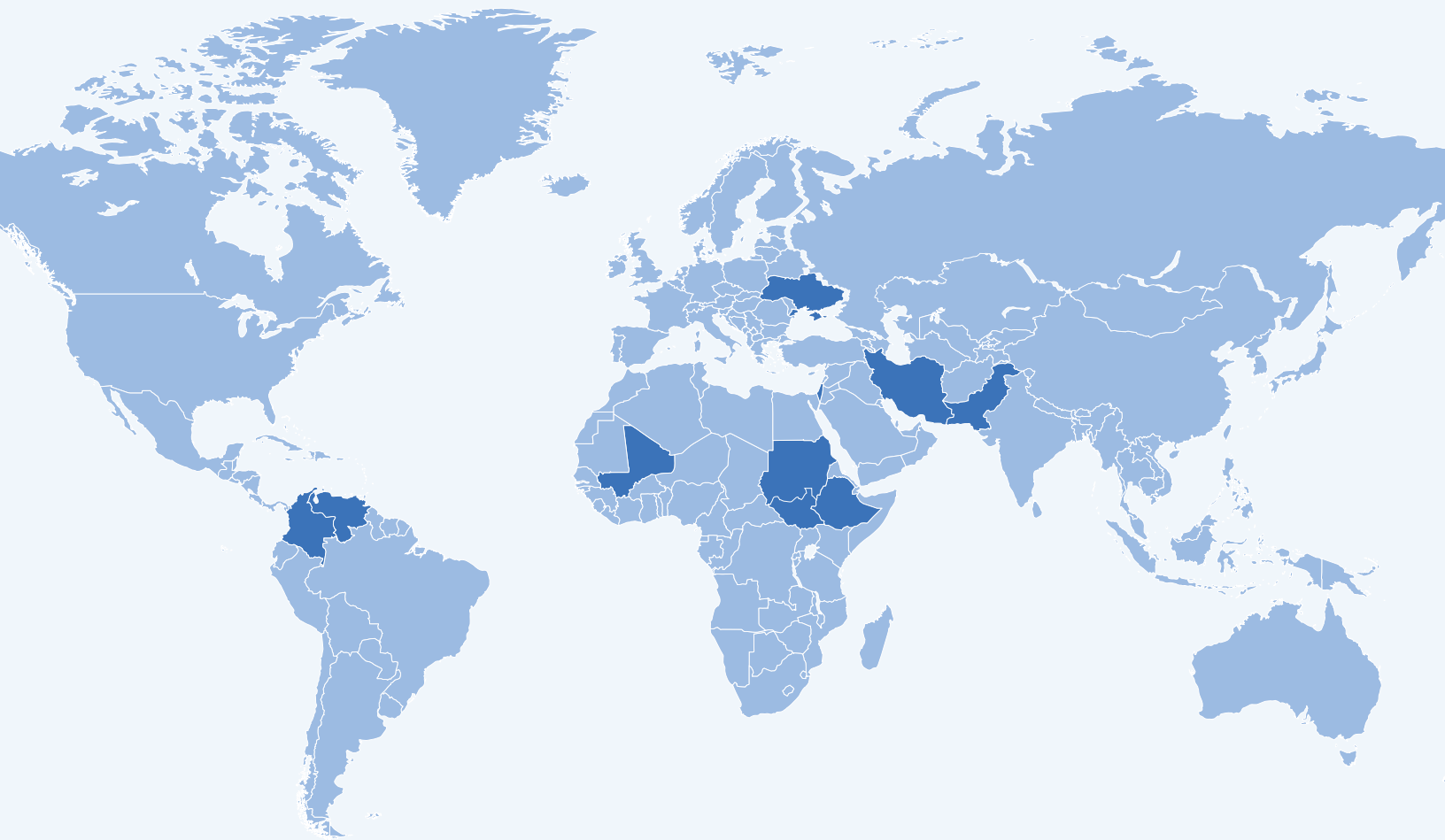
Governments are retreating from gender and climate commitments and cutting financial resources just as the climate crisis is reaching irreversible levels of harm. The Belém Gender Action Plan adopted at the 30th session of the United Nations (UN) Climate Change Conference outlines priorities for the next decade, but fails to require funding mechanisms or quotas, leaving implementation dependent on the political will of cash-strapped governments and organizations.⁷⁵ Emboldened by recent rollbacks⁷⁶ of environmental protections and US withdrawal⁷⁷ from international climate institutions, countries, and corporations may expand their exploitation of already-limited laws and protections for defenders.⁷⁸ Women also remain overlooked and disadvantaged in terms of access to financing for climate change adaptation and mitigation, leaving them more susceptible to the effects of climate shocks. Just 0.01 percent of global financing goes to projects addressing climate and women's rights.⁷⁹

However, historic rulings in 2025 by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights⁸⁰—which explicitly recognizes the critical role of Indigenous women in protecting resources and building resilience—and the International Court of Justice⁸¹ offer frameworks for advancing global climate justice, determining that states and corporations have specific obligations related to climate change.⁸² Though not legally binding, these rulings have the potential to shape jurisprudence globally⁸³ and could bolster efforts by climate activists to seek justice in the coming year.⁸⁴ However, devastating cuts to global aid, particularly funding for women's organizations,⁸⁵ and sweeping environmental rollbacks threaten to constrain the implementation of gender-responsive climate initiatives.⁸⁶ In 2026, the impacts of this seismic shift and worsening climate crisis will be felt most acutely by women and children.⁸⁷

Countries to Watch

While the three challenges highlighted in the previous section spill across national borders, individualized analysis of specific countries provides deeper insight into the ways conflict and compounding crises will impact Women, Peace and Security aims in 2026. This section highlights settings expected to face crises that particularly threaten the safety and status of women and girls. Countries are included not only due to general conflict and security concerns but also because of the scope, scale, and impact of conflict-related threats and opportunities pertaining to women. While these are by no means the only settings facing immense turmoil, the selected countries provide a snapshot of the key issues likely to define this year.

- Colombia
- Ethiopia
- Iran
- Israel & Palestine
- Mali
- Pakistan
- South Sudan
- Sudan
- Ukraine
- Venezuela



COLOMBIA



Tensions are likely to rise in 2026 as aid cuts fuel illicit economies and heighten risks for women and girls in vulnerable communities.⁸⁸ Fragmented armed groups⁸⁹ are regaining influence in rural areas and clashing over contested land, causing a surge⁹⁰ in violence that has displaced⁹¹ more than one million people and exposed women and girls to trafficking, exploitation,⁹² and confinement.⁹³ The US decertification⁹⁴ of Colombia as a drug control partner and sweeping foreign aid cuts to programs providing humanitarian relief, gender-based violence services, and economic opportunities may further fuel illicit economies⁹⁵ in the coming year, leaving women and girls vulnerable to violence and forced labor.⁹⁶ Risks will be especially acute for Indigenous and Afro-Colombians in rural communities—78 percent⁹⁷ of whom live in areas under the influence of at least one non-state armed group—as well as the nearly 1.5 million⁹⁸ Venezuelan women and girls in the country who relied on US funded programs for basic needs and services prior to cuts.⁹⁹

Peace and security are on the ballot, as the fragility of the 2016 Peace Agreement may lead to resurgent conflict in 2026.¹⁰⁰ Slow and uneven progress¹⁰¹ on implementing the agreement, including its 100-plus gender provisions, threatens to further undermine public trust in the 2016 peace process between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia.¹⁰² Additionally, weak implementation of President Gustavo Petro's "Paz Total"¹⁰³ policy, escalating armed-group violence, and regional instability are likely to amplify the vulnerability of women and girls in marginalized communities, putting them at particular risk of physical harm and forced displacement.¹⁰⁴ The Paz Total Plan sought to engage broadly in simultaneous negotiations with armed actors to advance peace through judicial leniency and other incentives, yet has been criticized for failing to generate sustained ceasefires or peace processes.¹⁰⁵

National elections could prompt a political shift toward a more militarized approach to security as candidates seek to distinguish themselves and project a 'law and order' platform. This risks diverting resources away from social programs, triggering further abandonment of the 2016 peace agreement, and jeopardizing gains for women's participation in peacebuilding and transitional justice,¹⁰⁶ particularly amid lagging implementation¹⁰⁷ of Colombia's Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan.¹⁰⁸ Reduced political support and shrinking federal protections risk compounding the impact of foreign aid cuts and threaten to undermine the work of diverse networks of women's organizations on the frontlines of building and sustaining peace, just as rising conflict heightens women's risks of displacement, gender-based violence, and exclusion from decision-making.¹⁰⁹

Polarization in the lead-up to Colombia's May 2026 presidential election threatens women's participation in public life and political spaces.

The spread of online disinformation, government influence¹¹⁰ over public broadcasting, and normalization of extreme rhetoric surrounding political discourse has undermined the Colombian public's trust in the media.¹¹¹ Together, these risks may jeopardize recent legal advances¹¹² aimed at protecting women's political engagement ahead of a key election year.¹¹³ Online platforms are becoming the primary source of news globally, putting women community and political leaders—including several Colombian presidential and mayoral candidates¹¹⁴—at heightened risk of technology-facilitated gender-based violence.¹¹⁵ The country's history¹¹⁶ of political violence and persistent inequality¹¹⁷ further elevates the potential for polarization¹¹⁸ surrounding the 2026 election to exacerbate digital and physical threats, including voter intimidation.¹¹⁹ Women and girls in rural areas are particularly vulnerable given limited access to services—which was worsened by recent cuts to humanitarian aid—and patterns of exclusion and underrepresentation.¹²⁰

ETHIOPIA



Ethiopia is poised for a deeper humanitarian and protection emergency in 2026 as expanding conflict, climate shocks, and state fragility converge.

Intensifying violence across the Amhara, Oromia, Afar, and Somali regions—combined with recurrent droughts and flash floods¹²¹ and mounting economic pressures—is pushing food and nutrition insecurity toward emergency levels.¹²² Shrinking access to affected communities and funding shortfalls are expected to further constrain aid delivery, with women and girls facing the greatest risks as displacement rises and livelihood options collapse.¹²³ Existing assessments already link these pressures to increases in gender-based violence, child marriage, and sexual exploitation, particularly in insecure and underserved displacement sites.¹²⁴ With humanitarian operations heavily restricted in contested zones and large-scale returns planned for Western Tigray, 2026 is likely to bring an increasingly severe gendered humanitarian crisis.¹²⁵

Fragmentation and polarization are likely to worsen, despite a tentative December 2025 ceasefire agreement in Amhara.

¹²⁶ Armed actors—including remaining Fano elements and Oromo Liberation Army factions in Oromia—remain active, with competing territorial claims expected to continue shaping the conflict environment.¹²⁷ Rising tensions with Eritrea heighten the risk of rapid regional escalation and large-scale conflict that would further constrain women's already limited access to humanitarian assistance, medical care, and justice mechanisms.¹²⁸ In Tigray, ongoing clashes are prolonging displacement and driving continued reports of rape, forced marriage, and discriminatory property

practices that undermine women's recovery and livelihoods heading into 2026.¹²⁹ A tightening civil society crackdown—including mass arrests, intimidation of journalists, and expanded media controls ahead of the June 2026 general elections—will further impede women's access to information and political participation.¹³⁰ These dynamics suggest that 2026 political processes may produce fragile, exclusionary outcomes disconnected from community needs.

Atrocity risks remain elevated heading into 2026, shaped not only by current violence but also the unresolved legacy of the war in Tigray. Mass killings, systematic conflict-related sexual violence,¹³¹ and ethnic cleansing committed during the war in Tigray were never followed by comprehensive accountability or psychosocial recovery for victims, particularly women and girls, even after large-scale hostilities formally ended in 2022. UN investigators and independent monitors continue to document conflict-related sexual violence, ethnic targeting, forced displacement, and humanitarian obstructions—patterns that mirror earlier atrocity dynamics.¹³² Many sexual violence survivors face stigma, untreated trauma, and economic exclusion, conditions that increase exposure to exploitation, abuse, and renewed violence.¹³³ Civilians in Amhara and Oromia also face indiscriminate attacks by state and non-state actors, while disputes over land, administrative boundaries, and displacement sites heighten the risk of localized massacres or mass expulsions that disproportionately expose women and girls to displacement, sexual violence, and loss of livelihoods.¹³⁴ In the absence of meaningful accountability, sustained humanitarian access, and substantive inclusion of women in ceasefire and recovery processes, Ethiopia enters 2026 with a credible risk that past atrocities will be repeated rather than prevented, reinforcing and renewing cycles of gendered violence and instability.

IRAN



Women have once again been at the forefront of massive anti-regime demonstrations, sparking hope for future change despite a deadly crackdown and growing regional volatility.¹³⁵

Initially sparked by economic grievances¹³⁶ following record currency depreciation, the demonstrations have broadened to encompass demands for fundamental political change, including the expansion of women's rights and freedoms.¹³⁷ The protests' scale has reinvigorated hopes for new leadership after decades of repression under the Islamic Republic, despite regime security forces responding with extreme violence.¹³⁸ Thousands¹³⁹ have been killed in the streets—including women shot at close range—and many more have been arrested by security forces,¹⁴⁰ with detained protestors at risk of torture, sexual violence, and execution.¹⁴¹ Now, the possibility of US intervention¹⁴² creates further uncertainty; although some protestors have reportedly demanded US action, military response could trigger broader regional conflict

and bolster the regime's claims of foreign interference.¹⁴³

Iran's recent security losses¹⁴⁴—including damage to its nuclear program, the collapse of allies¹⁴⁵ in Syria and Lebanon, and deaths of top military leaders—have further isolated the country amid rising economic, diplomatic, and military pressures.¹⁴⁶ Historically, the Islamic Republic has responded to external pressures by constraining civic spaces and tightening social restrictions, particularly on women's dress and right to participate in public life.¹⁴⁷ Additional sanctions¹⁴⁸ imposed on the country in response to the regime's brutal crackdowns on protesters also risk exacerbating the ongoing economic collapse.¹⁴⁹ Women may be particularly impacted given already-low workforce participation rates¹⁵⁰ compared with men and links between sanctions and backlash to women's rights.¹⁵¹

Mass killings of protesters signal a trend of rising state repression that is likely to persist as the Iranian regime seeks to maintain control, threatening recent progress on women's social freedoms.¹⁵² Given mounting stressors and systematic oppression,¹⁵³ women are likely to see their rights constrained further this year, despite the apparent easing¹⁵⁴ of some social restrictions in 2025—including reduced enforcement of mandatory hijab laws—which activists warned was a calculated distraction from political repression.¹⁵⁵ Internet blackouts,¹⁵⁶ digital surveillance, detentions,¹⁵⁷ and lethal force against demonstrators follow a recent surge in executions, which reached record numbers in 2025.¹⁵⁸ The passage of a bill expanding the use of the death penalty for broadly defined espionage offenses risks further enabling large-scale executions of arrested protesters, including women,¹⁵⁹ under the guise of national security.¹⁶⁰

Regardless of Iran's political future, entrenched climate crises—including a devastating water shortage—will continue to amplify economic and protection risks for women and girls. Iran is on track to experience another year of crisis-level water and energy shortages,¹⁶¹ particularly in the capital city of Tehran,¹⁶² fueled by climate change¹⁶³ and decades of mismanagement of the country's water supply.¹⁶⁴ As a result, the water infrastructure in Iranian cities is teetering on the edge of collapse, with Tehran and other areas experiencing regular cuts.¹⁶⁵ The drought—emblematic of unfolding “water bankruptcy”¹⁶⁶—undermines women's and girls' access to potable water for basic needs and exacerbates socioeconomic stressors which drive gender-based violence and early marriage.¹⁶⁷ Climate impacts may catalyze further backlash to women's rights, particularly since clerics have blamed the ongoing drought on the easing of social restrictions.¹⁶⁸ Any political future which fails to center the social, political, and economic participation of women and girls risks continuing the cycle of instability and undermining prospects for durable political change.

ISRAEL & PALESTINE



Despite the current ceasefire, Palestinian women and girls will continue to face acute and compounding risks in 2026. Near-daily Israeli violations¹⁶⁹ of the ceasefire and ongoing aid restrictions suggest that civilian deaths will

continue to rise, particularly among women and children, who already make up nearly half¹⁷⁰ of the more than 70,000 Palestinians killed in Gaza since October 7, 2023.¹⁷¹ UN bodies and independent commissions of inquiry determined that Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip constitute genocide, citing patterns of violence targeting women and girls that include starvation, killing, and deprivation of access to sexual and reproductive care.¹⁷² Even as the ceasefire tentatively enters its second phase, the catastrophic humanitarian crisis is likely to persist.¹⁷³ Additionally, the potential for renewed hostilities involving Israel, Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, and the Houthis may further exacerbate instability and deepen women's protection risks across the region.¹⁷⁴

Settler violence in the West Bank reached the highest levels ever recorded in October 2025 and shows no signs of abating in the coming year. Palestinian women and girls are unlikely to see a reprieve from violence in 2026,¹⁷⁵ as tensions continue to heighten amid Israel's de facto annexation of the West Bank and expanded approvals of settlement construction.¹⁷⁶ Attacks—which are largely met with impunity¹⁷⁷—disproportionately affect Palestinian women by destroying water infrastructure, schools, homes, and livelihoods such as olive groves, while restricting movement through road blockades that prevent¹⁷⁸ pregnant women and the elderly from accessing urgent medical care.¹⁷⁹ Israel's revocation of thousands of Palestinians' work permits¹⁸⁰ has further constrained economic opportunities, pushing families into financial vulnerability and heightening stressors that contribute to surges of gender-based violence.¹⁸¹ The potential for Israel's far-right to gain seats in this year's parliamentary election may further embolden those pushing for formal annexation of the West Bank,¹⁸² leaving Palestinian women and girls at risk of worsening displacement, mobility restrictions, and violence.¹⁸³

Humanitarian aid access remains tightly controlled and insufficient compared with the staggering need, jeopardizing recovery efforts for Palestinian women and girls in the coming year.¹⁸⁴ Nearly 60,000 households in Gaza are female-headed, and most are still living in overcrowded, flood-prone shelters with limited access to essential services or economic opportunity, leaving them vulnerable¹⁸⁵ to disease and exploitation.¹⁸⁶ Despite ceasefire requirements, Israel has continued to restrict the flow of aid, depriving Palestinian women and girls of basic needs and hindering recovery efforts.¹⁸⁷ The conflict's effects will be generational, particularly for the hundreds of thousands¹⁸⁸ of girls who have lost more than two years of schooling, heightening risks of early and forced marriage.¹⁸⁹

While some universities¹⁹⁰ in Gaza recently resumed in-person classes for the first time since October 2023, Gazan women are likely to face greater obstacles to resuming their studies due to expanded caregiving responsibilities and lasting trauma from gender-based violence, rates of which have skyrocketed during the war.¹⁹¹ The reopening of the Rafah border crossing for medical evacuations offers hope for women and girls seeking to reunite with family and receive urgent medical care, yet many Palestinians fear that if they leave Gaza, they will not be allowed to return and may face permanent displacement.¹⁹²

If negotiations around a transitional governing authority in Gaza continue, they are likely to advance within political contexts that marginalize women on all sides. For Palestinian women, entrenched gender inequality, historical patterns of exclusion,¹⁹³ and shrinking civic space will likely continue to limit women's influence in formal political and recovery processes.¹⁹⁴ In Israel, efforts¹⁹⁵ to weaken legal protections and democratic safeguards¹⁹⁶ ahead of this year's legislative election coincide with a deadly year for Israeli women,¹⁹⁷ and a potential shift to the right may further constrain gender equality.¹⁹⁸ Together, these dynamics risk reinforcing security-first approaches that sideline protection and gender concerns in any transitional arrangements, particularly for Palestinian women. Without sustained pressure to protect women human rights defenders, ensure representation, and align funding with gender-responsive priorities, transitional arrangements in 2026 risk entrenching exclusionary power hierarchies and deepening gendered insecurity, with lasting consequences for women's access to services, livelihoods, and political voice. Israeli and Palestinian women's organizations continue to call for women's meaningful participation in any future talks.

MALI



Mali will face heightened security challenges in 2026 as extremist groups expand their reach and flex greater operational capacity. Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), an al-Qaeda affiliate composed of several subgroups, will likely continue expanding its control over new villages and territories, threatening the safety of women and girls.ⁱⁱ Clashes between JNIM, Malian authorities, and Russian Africa Corps mercenaries supporting the government put civilians in the crossfire.¹⁹⁹ All parties to the conflict have been accused of sexual violence against women and girls, with Africa Corps in

ⁱⁱ JNIM is the most prominent extremist group currently active in Mali. However, other groups continue to maintain a foothold in both Mali and the broader Sahel region. See UN Security Council, "November 2025 Monthly Forecast," <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2025-11/west-africa-and-the-sahel-15.php>.

particular implicated in widespread rapes.²⁰⁰ Survivors report fearing reprisal and struggling to access sufficient medical care. Anger at violence perpetrated by Africa Corps could also bolster JNIM's recruitment and local support.²⁰¹ Alarms have been raised about the potential for atrocity crimes in 2026, particularly against members of marginalized ethnic groups.²⁰² Armed groups will also likely continue to capitalize on climate shocks—which reduce available food and income sources—to increase recruitment and consolidate territorial control.²⁰³

Women and girls face growing repression exacerbated by armed conflict and the mounting influence of armed groups. In JNIM-administered areas, gender-based measures target women and girls, banning them from working and driving, governing their dress and behavior, and imposing corporal punishment.²⁰⁴ Although JNIM does not yet appear capable of seizing and controlling Mali's capital, Bamako, civilians—particularly in rural and periphery areas—remain at risk of escalating violence, economic warfare, and creeping non-state governance, including repressive gender-based policies.²⁰⁵ The government's crackdown on media and political dissent, as well as reduced connectivity during blackouts, will also likely continue to impede the monitoring of violence and repression against women and girls throughout Mali in 2026.

Mali's fuel blockade has exacerbated scarcity and increased the risk of catastrophic hunger, with women and girls especially impacted. Beginning in September 2025, JNIM imposed a fuel blockade around major cities, choking off highways that move up to 95 percent of the country's fuel.²⁰⁶ Although the blockade eased in December 2025 and January 2026, sporadic attacks on fuel shipments have since resumed. Blockades lead to blackouts and impede transportation, preventing women and girls from accessing healthcare and food markets, moving safely in their communities, and fleeing encroaching violence.²⁰⁷ Mali is projected to face catastrophic hunger in 2026, with armed conflict and climate change worsening conditions through May.²⁰⁸ Fuel shortages also force schools to close,²⁰⁹ imperiling girls' access to education as they are less likely than boys to return to the classroom after disruptions.²¹⁰

Aid will remain insufficient amid shared regional difficulties. Mali's challenges reflect those in neighboring countries, with the Sahel now the deadliest place for violent extremism globally.²¹¹ Climate change events, particularly recurrent droughts, are also a major driver of migration and suffering in Mali.²¹² Although data is limited, women and children comprise the reported majority of Malians newly displaced to neighboring countries, where severely under-resourced refugee and displacement camps expose arrivals to crowding, poor sanitation, and sexual exploitation and violence.²¹³ Nearly 80 percent of registered forcibly displaced persons across the Sahel are women and children. Although Mali's partnership with Niger and Burkina Faso through the Alliance of Sahel States has led to a joint military force and the new Sahel Investment and Development Bank, these changes are unlikely to generate short-term, transformative economic or

humanitarian relief that directly benefits Mali's civilians.²¹⁴ Foreign aid cuts have further decimated available resources to respond to conflict and climate shocks, with Mali's humanitarian response plan the least-funded in Africa at just 18 percent.²¹⁵ However, women continue to lead efforts to provide food, midwifery and medical care and will remain vital to maintaining humanitarian response efforts in 2026.²¹⁶

PAKISTAN



Pakistan will enter 2026 in a state of overlapping climate, migration, and security crises, with women and girls bearing the most acute impacts. Among the countries most affected by climate change, Pakistan is likely to face another volatile monsoon season, widening water scarcity, accelerating glacial melt, and driving record-breaking temperatures.²¹⁷ These shocks will most heavily impact rural women, who already experience chronic water scarcity, limited mobility, and almost no access to formal relief. As drought, soil degradation, and declining crop yields are predicted to intensify in 2026, the loss of arable land, livestock, and farm income will deepen economic insecurity for women-headed households, leaving them without the resources—or institutional support—needed to recover.²¹⁸ Damaged clinics, contaminated water sources, and weakened local health systems will further restrict displaced women's access to routine treatment, menstrual hygiene supplies and reproductive health services while increasing their risk of infection, unsafe childbirth, and untreated medical conditions.²¹⁹

Escalating insecurity in border regions will intersect with migration pressures and civic repression to produce compounded gendered risks in 2026. In Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provinces, persistent border closures, intermittent clashes along the Afghan border, and intensified security operations are likely to continue disrupting humanitarian corridors and civilian movement.²²⁰ For women and girls in these regions, heightened militarization is expected to restrict mobility, limit access to healthcare and markets, and increase exposure to harassment, violence, and arbitrary detention at checkpoints, particularly in conservative rural areas.²²¹ These dynamics are unfolding alongside a broader civic clampdown following the November 2025 passage of the 27th Amendment to Pakistan's Constitution, which expanded federal security powers and further constrained operations of civil society and human rights defenders.²²² In Balochistan, security actions are likely to coincide with continued enforced disappearances, with women—especially mothers and wives of missing men—bearing the burden of navigating militarized institutions to seek information and accountability.²²³

Security conditions are also likely to deteriorate, with disproportionate consequences for women's safety and public participation, following a marked escalation in militant activity in late 2025. October 2025 saw 89 militant incidents—more than any other month last year—and decade-high militant losses, underscoring intensified confrontation between state forces and extremist groups, including Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan affiliates, Islamic State - Khorasan Province, and Baloch separatists.²²⁴ Although Pakistan and Afghanistan reached a temporary ceasefire in October, renewed attacks in December indicate that cross-border violence could accelerate in 2026.²²⁵ This threat environment is expected to entrench securitized governance, expand counterterrorism operations and surveillance,²²⁶ and further restrict protest and media. These pressures will shrink civic space and disproportionately expose women journalists and human rights defenders to harassment and surveillance.²²⁷

SOUTH SUDAN



Conflict in neighboring Sudan is expected to increasingly converge with tensions in South Sudan, escalating violence—including sexual crimes.²²⁸ South Sudanese nationals have been captured and killed while fighting in Sudan and accused of supporting Sudanese armed actors.²²⁹ The cross-border movement of fighters has strengthened South Sudanese armed opposition groups, community militias, and criminal gangs and is expected to further destabilize the country. As a result, gender-based violence will likely continue to surge,²³⁰ with reported conflict-related sexual violence already increasing by 147 percent in 2025 compared with the same period in 2024.²³¹ Cases remain significantly underreported due to stigma and fear. Abductions and attacks, including of girls on their way to and from school, are also expected to escalate amid worsening mistrust, intercommunal tensions, and insecurity.²³² Not only does this expose girls to violence and trauma, but school-related attacks can obstruct girls' education as families choose to keep daughters at home. South Sudanese authorities are also conducting a violent roundup of alleged gang members, with accusations of arbitrary detention, torture, and rape of female detainees since emerging.²³³ Amid this deteriorating security landscape, however, women have led peace mediations and will continue to play a role in resolving and mitigating community conflicts.²³⁴

Tensions will be further exacerbated by political and economic precarity and exclusion. Government officials have sought to suppress opposition,²³⁵ further entrenching political division and increasing the potential for clashes ahead of long-delayed elections now scheduled for December 2026.²³⁶ Despite a 35 percent quota for female representation in political processes, women have been largely excluded from decision-making.²³⁷ This trend is expected to persist, even

with the reported adoption of a new digital registration system to track women's participation.²³⁸ The removal of a provision in the 2018 peace agreement which predicated elections on the completion of a permanent constitution may also cause further uncertainty, while implementation of the agreement's power-sharing and security commitments continues to stall.²³⁹ Conflict in Sudan has also undermined South Sudanese oil exports, which comprise 90 percent of government revenue.²⁴⁰ As a result, many salaries are unpaid and public services unfunded—a trend likely to endure.²⁴¹ Women and girls already face greater difficulty accessing education and income-generating activities, leaving female-headed households at greater risk of poverty amid ongoing economic volatility.²⁴²

Humanitarian need—driven by conflict and climate change—will continue to increase, with women and girls disproportionately harmed. More than half of South Sudan's population is projected to face acute food insecurity during the 2026 lean season from April to July, with at least 1.15 million malnourished pregnant and lactating women anticipated through June 2026.²⁴³ Women will remain particularly exposed to harms caused by climate change and extreme weather events, as they are more likely to work in high-heat exposure roles like agriculture and be responsible for outdoor tasks like fetching water, while displacement from natural disasters—including massive flooding in 2025—heightens gender-based protection risks.²⁴⁴

Healthcare infrastructure in South Sudan remains perilously weak and understaffed, while continued attacks by armed groups on healthcare facilities further hinder access to medical services.²⁴⁵ A shortage of providers trained on the clinical management of rape, few available reproductive health services, and insufficient trauma and psychosocial support remain ongoing challenges.²⁴⁶ These dynamics will continue to be exacerbated by foreign aid cuts, with many relief organizations forced to reduce food rations and services.²⁴⁷ Already-limited access to food and healthcare will be further strained by continuing arrivals of Sudanese refugees, leading to greater scarcity and growing tensions in 2026.

SUDAN



Brutal conflict will likely continue, with violence increasingly falling along ethnic lines. As Sudan approaches three years of war, civilians—particularly women and girls—continue to suffer amid intense fighting, political fragmentation, and humanitarian catastrophe. Violence increasingly targets ethnic minorities and

is characterized by sexual and reproductive attacks, with the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) armed group credibly accused of genocide against non-Arab populations in Darfur,²⁴⁸ mirroring a prior genocide carried out by the RSF's predecessor organization in Darfur in the early 2000s.²⁴⁹ Humanitarian access also continues

to be weaponized. The RSF seized El Fasher following a ruthless 500-day-siege, with remaining civilians struggling to survive without food, water, or shelter.²⁵⁰ Fighting between the RSF and Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) has drawn in local Sudanese armed groups, regional actors, and foreign mercenaries, expanding fighting to areas previously spared from violence.²⁵¹ Despite continued calls for a ceasefire, meaningful negotiations to end conflict remain unlikely.²⁵² Women—despite their demonstrated leadership²⁵³—have been largely sidelined from past talks and continue to be marginalized in decision-making, meaning efforts to end fighting will risk overlooking the needs of women and girls. The threat of state collapse looms, an outcome which would entrench piecemeal armed-group control, further obstruct services and aid delivery, and shut women out of any approximation of long-term governance.²⁵⁴

Famine is projected to persist in 2026, with women and girls on the frontlines of need and response.²⁵⁵ In 2025, famine was declared in North Darfur’s El Fasher and South Kordofan’s capital, Kadugli; famine-like conditions are present in other areas, but insufficient data prevents outside monitors from making an official determination. Women and girls, who eat last and least, will remain most exposed to hunger; nearly three-quarters of women already lack necessary dietary diversity and are at heightened risk of malnutrition.²⁵⁶ Women have also been key leaders of response efforts, including community kitchens; however, foreign aid cuts have now forced up to 80 percent of these kitchens to close.²⁵⁷ Aid delivery is further complicated by restrictions on international organizations working in RSF-governed areas, further cutting off women and girls from resources and forcing them to undertake perilous journeys into SAF-held territory to access resources. Women-headed households—nearly one-third of households as of December 2025—are more vulnerable to water deprivation, food insecurity, and financial exclusion compared to those led by men while being more concentrated in conflict-affected areas.²⁵⁸ These challenges will continue to push women and girls toward negative responses like transactional sex and early marriage.²⁵⁹

Increasing sexual and gender-based violence will continue to cause immense suffering while support for survivors shrinks due to financial, operational, and security constraints. Armed actors—primarily the RSF—continue to perpetrate conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence at staggeringly high levels.²⁶⁰ The most commonly reported violation is rape, although reports of trafficking women for sexual slavery and exploitation are climbing in RSF-held territories.²⁶¹ Women and girls who experienced sexual violence continue to die from injuries, infection, and suicide due to insufficient medical treatment and trauma care.²⁶² Sudan’s healthcare system is teetering on the edge of collapse, with even relatively secure regions struggling to accommodate the needs of displaced persons—many of whom have endured sexual assault.²⁶³ Healthcare workers and first responders also continue to be harassed and killed by combatants, further reducing available support for survivors.²⁶⁴ More than 9.3 million people are now internally displaced and lack adequate shelter, sanitation, and privacy, conditions

that further drive sexual violence and exploitation.²⁶⁵ Evidence now reveals that armed groups are attempting to hide sexual crimes in order to evade long-term justice efforts.²⁶⁶ Without a negotiated solution or meaningful accountability, sexual and gender-based violence will likely continue to rise in 2026 as resources for survivors diminish.

UKRAINE



Without robust security guarantees from its allies, Ukraine is likely to remain in a state of war in 2026, even if frontlines shift or a partial ceasefire is reached. Intensifying Russian attacks on energy, transport, and social infrastructure combined with high civilian casualties in frontline oblasts are expected

to deepen winter vulnerabilities, disrupt informal economies, and drive further livelihood loss for women-headed households.²⁶⁷ Power, heating, and water outages²⁶⁸ are sharply increasing women's unpaid care work, creating serious health risks²⁶⁹ for pregnant women, infants, and elderly dependents during blackouts, and causing girls to miss school due to lack of electricity.²⁷⁰

Large-scale internal displacement will continue to strain housing, public services, and labor markets, with women—who constitute over half of internally displaced people²⁷¹—facing heightened exposure to gender-based violence and exploitation during displacement.²⁷² Returns to heavily mined and damaged areas are likely to remain dangerous as demining processes typically move slowly.²⁷³ These risks are particularly acute for women caring for children, older relatives, or people with disabilities, who face additional barriers to safe mobility, income generation, justice, education, and reliable sanitation access.²⁷⁴

Prospects for negotiations to end the war in 2026 remain uncertain, and women—who hold significant political positions—continue to be largely excluded from formal peace diplomacy. Draft proposals advanced by the US and Russia in late 2025 drew criticism for failing to include any security guarantees for Ukraine and for proposing territorial concessions, particularly in light of documented abuses in Russian-occupied areas.²⁷⁵ At least 365 survivors of conflict-related sexual violence—nearly two-thirds of them women—have been identified in occupied territories, although the true scale is widely considered far higher due to underreporting and access constraints for human rights monitors.²⁷⁶ Civilians in these areas also face forced Russification, coerced documentation, arbitrary detention, economic exclusion,²⁷⁷ and the abduction,²⁷⁸ transfer, and forced adoption²⁷⁹ of children. Any agreement that legitimizes Russian control over these areas would deepen these harms, erode access to justice, and increase conflict-related sexual violence. While several women leaders in the government hold influential positions²⁸⁰—including as Prime Minister²⁸¹—and

exert meaningful sway over decision-making, they remain outside the official negotiation teams. Furthermore, the absence of systematic and meaningful consultation with Ukrainian women's organizations risks producing a narrow, elite-driven settlement that overlooks accountability and fails to address the needs of displaced women weighing return or resettlement.

Recovery and reconstruction planning in 2026 will unfold amid ongoing war and constrained public finances, shaping uneven and gendered outcomes.

Recovery needs now exceed \$520 billion²⁸² and significant financing gaps remain.²⁸³ In this context, competition over funds, corruption risks, and elite influence are likely to continue to sideline local women's organizations and frontline communities.²⁸⁴ External constraints—including the dismantling²⁸⁵ of international aid infrastructure—are further affecting the overall funding landscape and reducing the efficiency²⁸⁶ and reach²⁸⁷ of recovery financing. Including women's voices is particularly vital given they form the backbone of Ukraine's wartime economy, with women founding 61 percent of new private enterprises in 2024.²⁸⁸ Steps taken to strengthen women's participation in donor conference decisions are promising and may help support more inclusive decision-making and a more gender-responsive recovery going forward.²⁸⁹ However, if recovery is highly centralized, donor-driven, or narrowly focused on hard infrastructure over social protection and psychosocial support, it may struggle to address the cumulative impacts of displacement, trauma, and care burdens on women and girls. Reconstruction efforts risk reproducing gender-blind priorities and entrenching gendered inequality if women are not meaningfully included in recovery decision-making and if justice for conflict-related harms—including sexual violence—remains limited.

VENEZUELA



Although hope for regime change persists, mounting political instability and the likelihood of regime consolidation threatens women's security and rights. Following the US seizure of President Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela's political future remains unclear. The US has seemingly dismissed María Corina

Machado, the opposition leader whose movement is widely believed to have won the 2024 election, while Venezuela's high court named Vice President Delcy Rodríguez as interim leader. Under these conditions, the regime's structure will persist, continuing Maduro's legacy of oppression and preventing free and fair elections. The state has stepped up its repression of dissent and increasingly targeted journalists, human rights defenders, and those who have celebrated Maduro's removal—a trend expected to worsen.²⁹⁰ Women are key pro-democracy and opposition leaders and thus likely targets in this ongoing crackdown.²⁹¹ Armed militias are now patrolling the streets and stopping civilians at checkpoints,

increasing the risk of harassment, violence, and forced conscription while impeding women's mobility.²⁹² Although an estimated 300 political prisoners have been released in January 2025, any remaining female political prisoners and detainees held by Venezuelan authorities face gendered risks, given past reports of sexual violence, torture, harassment, and exploitation.²⁹³ Should the current trajectory continue, autocratic rule and repression may become further entrenched while armed groups leverage instability to expand their control both in Venezuela and in neighboring Colombia.²⁹⁴ However, a narrow window of opportunity for democratic transformation remains, particularly as Machado continues to retain broad support at home and abroad.

Without transformation, Venezuela will likely endure continued economic collapse which uniquely affects women and girls. Since 2013, Venezuela has experienced what has been called the most extreme economic crisis outside of wartime in modern history, characterized by falling oil production, economic sanctions, and hyperinflation.²⁹⁵ As a result, poverty has skyrocketed. Women have been pushed to become primary income earners—disproportionately in low-wage, informal work²⁹⁶—while still fulfilling traditional caregiving and domestic roles.²⁹⁷ Access to medicine and other healthcare remains sparse and often compounds poverty and displacement, with many women compelled to flee Venezuela to give birth safely.²⁹⁸ Contraception shortages over the last five years have also prevented family planning and curtailed women's access to education and employment.²⁹⁹ Now the US has announced its intent to jump-start oil production, imposing a blockade and advocating for the removal of restrictions on foreign operators.³⁰⁰ Most women and girls are unlikely to benefit from increased oil production, given there is no clear plan yet for how subsequent profits—expected to take years to materialize³⁰¹—would fund public services or boost civilian income. Furthermore, the rapid expansion of oil extraction without safeguards risks increasing trafficking and sex work, with women and girls forced by armed actors or compelled by poverty to participate in illicit economies associated with drilling and mining.³⁰²

Venezuela's migration crisis—one of the world's largest—is likely to worsen, with women and girls facing heightened dangers. An estimated 8 million refugees and migrants have already fled the country,³⁰³ with political and economic volatility now expected to push more Venezuelans to leave. Women and girls face enormous risks when choosing to migrate, including sexual assault, exploitation, forced labor, and trafficking, including through false job postings and kidnapping.³⁰⁴ Further militarization triggered by political uncertainty may also push women to migrate in order to escape harm; following domestic violence, organized crime remains the second largest driver of violence against women, often targeting women working in illicit economies, female community leaders, and women related to gang members.³⁰⁵ After massive foreign aid cuts in 2025, neighboring countries are ill-equipped to handle new Venezuelan arrivals, meaning women and girls on the move will likely lack adequate access to privacy, sanitation, menstrual supplies, and sexual and reproductive healthcare.

Conclusion

Amid global insecurity, women are demonstrably on the frontlines of social movements, humanitarian response, and human rights advocacy. Yet they continue to bear the greatest burdens of armed conflict—often in the shadows. This report centers women and girls in forecasting for the crises likely to define the year ahead. In doing so, it addresses a long-standing gap in conflict and security analysis and enables richer, more complete understanding and response. As these crises unfold, the experiences of women and girls will not only illuminate the human cost of conflict but also reveal obstacles and opportunities to advance sustainable peace and security.

To stay up-to-date on these crises—and all 27 settings monitored by the WPS Conflict Tracker—[sign up](#) to receive our monthly updates in your inbox and visit the [GIWPS](#) website.

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