

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

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 2026.¹ Climate shocks amplify existing gender inequalities, with women and children a staggering 14 times more likely to die from natural disasters than men.² 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 competition³—which fuel armed conflict, while communities already affected by conflict⁴ are often the most vulnerable to natural disasters⁵ which deepen food insecurity, livelihood loss, and instability.⁶

These compounding pressures will fall disproportionately on women and girls,⁷ 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.⁸ 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.⁹

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.¹⁰ An estimated 75 percent of those displaced live in areas with high to extreme exposure to climate-related risks.¹¹ Women and girls face an acute threat nexus,¹² 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.¹³ 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.¹⁴ As climate change amplifies risks for displaced persons in places such as Sudan,¹⁵ Myanmar,¹⁶ and Yemen,¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ Global demand¹⁹ 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.²⁰ Women—particularly Indigenous women²¹—are on the frontlines of protecting their land and resources from corrupt, extractive, and harmful practices despite rising digital²² and physical threats.²³ In areas opened for mining, women are disproportionately impacted by loss of economic opportunity, exposure to toxins, and trafficking and exploitative labor practices,²⁴ yet are often targeted and silenced in retribution for advocating on behalf of their communities.²⁵ 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.²⁶ Widespread impunity²⁷ for such abuses coincides with growing backlash to gender equality, multiplying risks to women environmental activists in the coming year.²⁸

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.²⁹ Emboldened by recent rollbacks³⁰ of environmental protections and US withdrawal³¹ from international climate institutions, countries, and corporations may expand their exploitation of already-limited laws and protections for defenders.³² 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.³³

However, historic rulings in 2025 by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights³⁴—which explicitly recognizes the critical role of Indigenous women in protecting resources and building resilience—and the International Court of Justice³⁵ offer frameworks for advancing global climate justice, determining that states and corporations have specific obligations related to climate change.³⁶ Though not legally binding, these rulings have the potential to shape jurisprudence globally³⁷ and could bolster efforts by climate activists to seek justice in the coming year.³⁸ However, devastating cuts to global aid, particularly funding for women’s organizations,³⁹ and sweeping environmental rollbacks threaten to constrain the implementation of gender-responsive climate initiatives.⁴⁰ In 2026, the impacts of this seismic shift and worsening climate crisis will be felt most acutely by women and children.⁴¹

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<https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/conflicts-and-trends-to-watch-in-2026/>



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