



Strengthening Resilience, Mitigating Risks and Building Peace

UNDP's Framework for Conflict Prevention
and Peacebuilding in Europe and Central Asia

Summary Document



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Acknowledgments

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Foreword

In an era of unprecedented global uncertainty, volatility, and polycrisis, the need for proactive conflict prevention and sustainable peacebuilding has never been more critical. The Europe and Central Asia region is grappling with a complex landscape shaped by protracted conflicts, geopolitical tensions and emerging threats that are testing the resilience of its communities and institutions. The impact of the war in Ukraine and the escalation of both new and protracted conflicts across the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia, present complex challenges that require calibrated development and peace solutions. We are witnessing the erosion of social cohesion, fuelled by resurgent ethno-nationalism and other divisive narratives, the evolving threat of violent extremism, and the growing spread of mis/disinformation, leading to increasing polarization across societies. Yet, amidst these challenges, we see significant resilience and diverse opportunities for positive change, with vibrant youth, civil society organizations, women's groups, and community leaders mobilizing for accountability, justice, and inclusive peace and development.

Across the Europe and Central Asia region, UNDP's presence and work in conflict prevention and peacebuilding constitutes a significant share of our programmes. Drawing on our deep-rooted presence, extensive experience, and mandate within the UN system, we ensure that development interventions are both conflict-sensitive and peace-responsive. By addressing the root causes and symptoms of conflict, we aim to foster a lasting impact across local, national, transboundary, and regional levels.

This Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Framework helps UNDP shape its response to the evolving dynamics in a strategic manner. Born from a deep understanding of the region's unique context, it helps us shape nuanced and innovative approaches to fostering peace and stability. The Framework's four interconnected pillars reflect our commitment to advancing sustainable development, social equity, and trust within and between communities and institutions—a vision we pursue through close collaboration with governments, civil society, and communities across the region.

We apply advanced data analytics, foresight, and the strategic use of digital technologies to our conflict prevention and anticipation work. We foster dialogue and implement confidence-building measures to strengthen horizontal social cohesion across communities, particularly where they are divided along ethnic, cultural, or political lines. We prioritize strengthening of vertical social cohesion by promoting participatory governance, economic resilience, and institutional accountability.

Through tailored programming, we ensure that development interventions are adaptable to the complexities of the region's conflicts at every level, such as by integrating environmental peacebuilding strategies or leveraging trade and economic development for peace. Moreover, we are dedicated to advancing the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda, as well as the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda, recognizing the crucial role of these groups in sustaining peace.

This Framework is more than a strategy—it is a call to action. It challenges us all to be proactive in our pursuit of social cohesion and conflict prevention, to be innovative and holistic in our approaches, and to be unwavering in our commitment to sustainable peace and development. We see this framework as a basis for further engagement and dialogue with UNDP's diverse partners and other stakeholders in the Europe and Central Asia region.



Ivana Živković

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the Commonwealth of Independent States



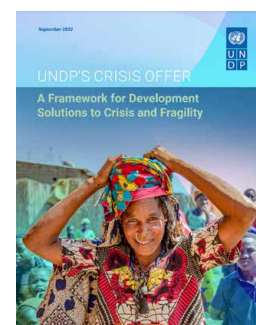
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Overview

The Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region has undergone profound transformations, compounded by a series of multifaceted crises in recent years. These developments have significantly reconfigured its geopolitical landscape, presenting new risks and opportunities for building sustainable peace. This Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding (CPPB) Framework has been designed to guide UNDP's strategic engagement, collaborating with countries and institutions, international partners, civil society, and communities in their efforts to preserve and expand achievements towards sustainable peace and development.

In line with the Sustainable Development Goals, the UN Secretary General's New Agenda for Peace and UNDP's Crisis Offer, the framework aims at fostering a culture of pro-activeness and prevention, supporting risk-informed and sustainable development. Due to the specificities of the ECA region, it specifically addresses both protracted and fragile contexts developing under the legacy of conflict, as well as informing and being informed by our work in situations of open conflict.



There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.

Agenda 2030
A/RES/70/1

“Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development.

[...] **SDG 16**

[The New Agenda for Peace] will take a holistic view of the peace continuum, from prevention, conflict resolution and peacekeeping to peacebuilding and sustainable long-term development.

UN Secretary General
13 February 2023

Crises, so often rooted in multidimensional development deficits, are ultimately development emergencies requiring integrated development solutions.

UNDP Administrator & UNDP Crisis Offer
September 2022

UNDP adopts a holistic and development-driven approach to prevent, address, and mitigate conflict dynamics within and across communities and divides in Europe and Central Asia, actively responding to both protracted and emerging threats.

Leveraging UNDP's expertise in addressing sensitive and multifaceted conflict dynamics, this Framework highlights both direct and indirect strategies to manage conflict risks and capitalize on opportunities for sustainable peace across the region. Importantly, it is not confined to "violent conflict" contexts but tailors and delivers its preventive responses across all development settings. To achieve this holistic impact, the Framework organizes our efforts into four key pillars of intervention directed towards both internal (UNDP) and external stakeholders:

Pillar 1

Develop comprehensive, conflict-sensitive prevention capacities and promote early identification of new factors and triggers, through better use of data, foresight, and analysis.

Pillar 2

Strengthen horizontal social cohesion by fostering dialogue through confidence-building measures across divides and the reinforcement of civil society engagement.

Pillar 3

Strengthen vertical social cohesion, participatory governance, economic resilience, and institutional accountability to sustain peace.

Pillar 4

Cultivate pro-active peace leadership, diplomacy, and responsive partnerships to foster an enabling environment for sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding.



**Sustainable Peace
& Development**

Why

The Framework responds to rapidly evolving regional dynamics

The Framework is rooted in an analysis of signals from UNDP's 19 offices¹ across the region, and a regional macro analysis carried out to examine existing and emerging conflict prevention and peacebuilding trends. UNDP undertook an inclusive process to create this Framework to ensure coordinated, high-impact and multisectoral work to enable the building of sustainable peace, including in the region's most complex and sensitive areas. The analysis examined not only 'conflict factors' that pose risks to safety, security, and development across the region; but also 'peace factors' that present opportunities for stakeholders to engage with to build sustainable impact for the region. This analysis identified several common regional risks and opportunities, alongside specific trends impacting each sub-region, with some of these noted in the table below. The categorization in the following table is a regional synthesis intended to support the strategic framework; it is important to recognize that factors classified in one category may function differently in various contexts.

¹ Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus (project office), Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo [under SCR 1244], Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan



CONFLICT FACTORS

RISKS



Root causes

- Low trust in institutions and weak governance
- High levels of corruption
- Social inequality
- Marginalization of ethnic and identity groups
- Climate-induced security risks
- Unresolved past-conflicts and historical grievances
- Geopolitical interests and disputes



Intermediate/ proximate factors

- Backsliding in rule of law
- Violent extremism
- Mis/Disinformation
- Divisive narratives & hate speech
- Online violence and digital harms
- Proliferation of small arms and light weapons
- Gender based violence



Triggers

- Reduced civic space
- Political polarisation
- Rising cost of living
- Human rights violations
- State-led violence



PEACE FACTORS

OPPORTUNITIES



Transforming factors

- Economic resilience
- Medium to high capacity of governments
- Digital access and inclusion



Conciliating factors

- Active civil society
- Increasing levels of mobilization (particularly youth)
- Mediation capacities and networks
- Comparatively high digital literacy and diversity of access



Alleviating factors

- Improvements on democratization and corruption
- Youth and women engagement
- Minority rights and voice

Evolving Regional Dynamics

The region is currently grappling with a variety of conflict factors, marked by a surge in social tensions and polarization, often driven by identity politics. This situation is compounded by a significant erosion of the social contract and a concerning backlash against gender equality and civic space. These dynamics are exacerbated by the ongoing impacts of the war in Ukraine, widespread dissemination of mis/dis-information, and the misuse of technology, leading to increased cybersecurity concerns and digital harms. Additionally, sub-regions face unique challenges including strained relations between central and peripheral areas, cross-border skirmishes, violent extremism—including rising ethno-nationalism, 'peacebuilding fatigue,' and escalating tensions among refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and host communities.

These challenges are further intensified by external factors such as the slowing global economic outlook, geopolitical interests, and the conflict in Gaza, both of which threaten to deepen societal divisions and fuel disillusionment with institutional and governance structures.

The strategies and responses of development actors in leveraging their mandates to address conflict risks, harness peace factors across divides, and tackle the most pressing emerging challenges, will significantly shape the trajectory towards sustainable peace in the region.

Nevertheless, the region has also displayed strong resilience in certain areas through peace factors, presenting opportunities upon which further resilience can be built. Despite an aging population in some parts of the region, there is still a notable segment of the youth engaging in civic activism. Historically, the region had embraced egalitarian principles that boosted women's roles in decision-making within communities, government, and the private sector. However, recent trends indicate a decline in the percentage of women in government positions in several countries, partially due to a resurgence of traditional gender roles.

The region benefits from a highly educated population, which is a significant asset in addressing contemporary challenges. Widespread internet and social media access are reshaping social dynamics, creating both opportunities and challenges. Despite the risks, digital technologies have the potential to positively impact relationships within and between communities and governments. Emerging technologies can enhance connectivity, improve governance, and advance data collection and analysis. However, they must be carefully managed to prevent exacerbation of existing tensions, respect human rights, and maximize their positive impact on peacebuilding efforts.

These conflict and peace factors are shaped by a wide range of sectoral actions that extend beyond traditional conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts. From addressing climate change and fostering livelihoods development to advancing digitalization and reforming public sectors, the strategies adopted by development actors play a crucial role. How development actors plan and respond to changes in these areas can significantly influence the trajectory towards sustainable peace.

What

UNDP's Approach to Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in ECA

This Framework guides UNDP in leading knowledge-driven interventions and supporting partners to collectively address evolving conflict and peace dynamics in the region. Given the entrenched nature of conflict in many areas, this approach is designed to engage with and address specific challenges on multiple levels:



The root causes of conflict



**The intermediate &
proximate factors of conflict**



The triggers of conflict

By tackling these three core elements of conflict in the region, UNDP leverages its position as the SDG integrator within the development system, and its pivotal role across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus, while operationalizing a shift towards more proactive and pre-emptive Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding (CPPB) strategies and measures. The Framework reflects UNDP's comparative advantages, experiences, and expertise in dealing with these issues, highlighting where UNDP can have a multiplier effect on programming and add value to otherwise disparate interventions, while at the same time recognising that no single actor can fully address these three elements alone.

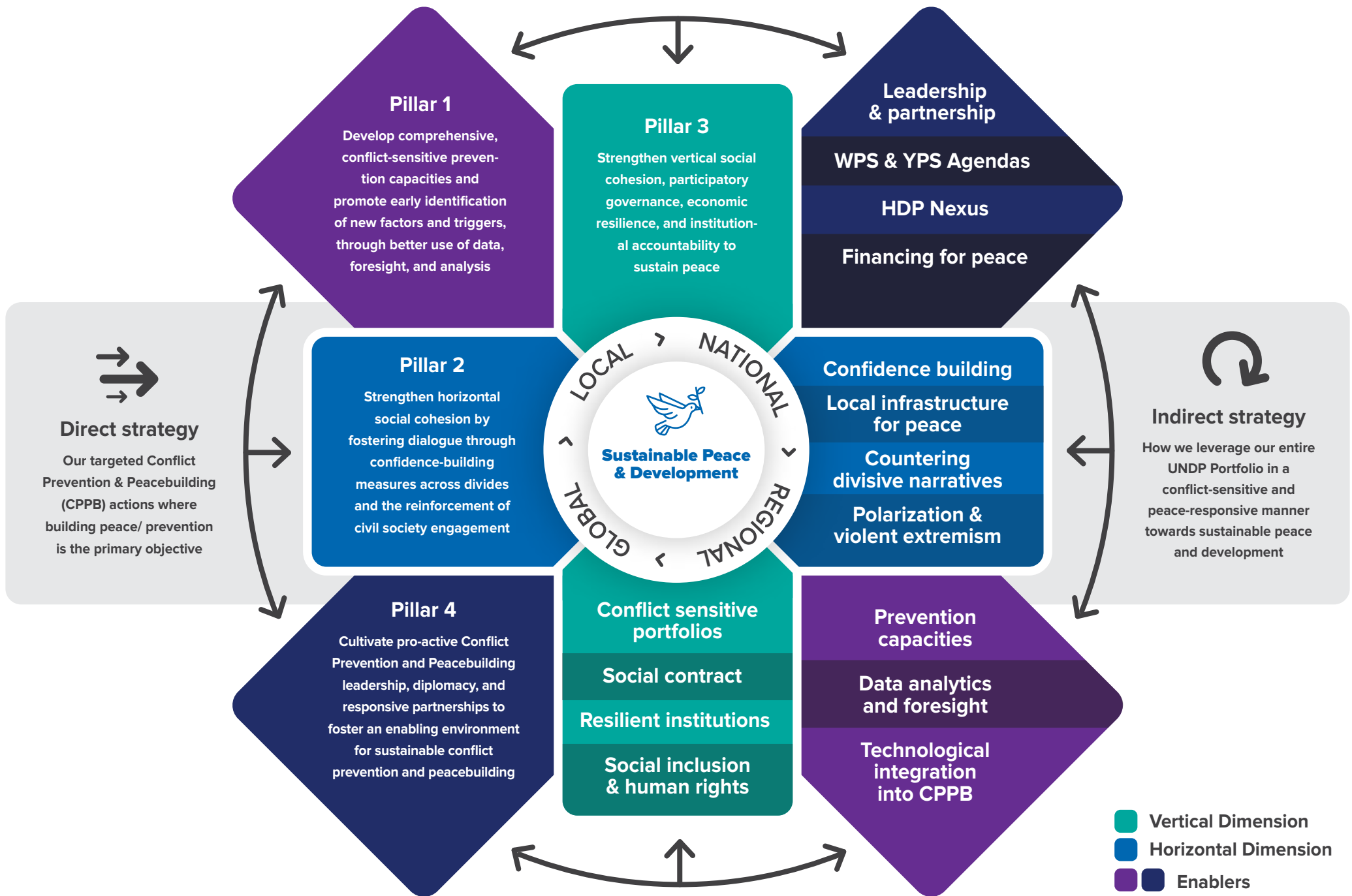
In our region, the concept of 'peace' has evolved to encapsulate nuanced and sometimes sensitive dimensions. This is influenced by phenomena such as peacebuilding fatigue and reluctance by some governments to recognize existing conflicts, as well as a prevailing interpretation of peace that narrowly focuses on the cessation of war rather than embracing a broader, positive peace-encompassing internal dynamics and social well-being. To effectively navigate these complexities, UNDP has adopted the framework of 'Social Cohesion' to support our broader peacebuilding efforts. While not exclusive, this strategic framing allows us to engage meaningfully with both vertical dimensions (institutional trust and governance) and horizontal dimensions (inter-community relationships), thus fostering a more comprehensive approach to sustainable development and peace that resonates with local dynamics and perceptions.

“By adopting a dual approach that addresses both conflict dynamics directly, and integrates peace-responsive strategies across development programming, while fostering trust at both institutional and community levels, UNDP's efforts aim to support comprehensive and sustainable pathways towards peace in even the most complex and high-risk contexts.”

Additionally, to address the region's complex sensitivities and leverage our entire UNDP portfolio for peace, the Framework adopts a dual approach: directly tackling conflict dynamics through targeted CPPB initiatives, and, indirectly, by incorporating peace-responsive approaches and ensuring conflict sensitivity into broader development programming.

This dual approach ensures strategic leverage of our portfolios for peace—both within UNDP and with our partners—and enables engagement at the national and sub-regional levels on the region's most pressing challenges. By establishing a foundation for dynamic and multilayered engagement by UNDP and its partners, the Framework facilitates enhanced impact in the region's most complex and high-risk contexts. This includes engagement in contested territories, addressing hate speech and divisive narratives, combating violent extremism, supporting confidence building measures, reducing polarization, easing inter-community tensions, and mitigating conflicts over natural resources and environmental challenges.

Moreover, many of the region's pervasive challenges necessitate a broad, coordinated response that transcends borders and boundaries, engaging decision-makers as well as diverse groups, including urban and rural communities, women, youth, minorities, and displaced people. To effectively manage these complexities, the Framework promotes a flexible approach that enables sub-regional collaborations tailored to shared challenges and fostering national and local interventions to pre-empt and prevent specific conflict risks.



How

Achieving Targeted Impact through 4 Interconnected Pillars

To ensure UNDP and our partners remain proactive and responsive to the evolving crisis landscape, the Framework channels its objectives through four interconnected pillars. By integrating actions across identified approaches—from direct interventions to capacity building and advocacy—these pillars provide a robust foundation for navigating and addressing the complex challenges of the region; while also laying the groundwork for comprehensive engagement and collaboration, reinforcing results with governments, international bodies, development stakeholders, civil society partners, and communities.

Pillar 1

Develop comprehensive, conflict-sensitive prevention capacities and promote early identification of new factors and triggers, through better use of data, foresight and analysis

Pillar 1 utilizes advanced digital technologies, data systems, and thorough conflict analysis to identify emerging issues and promote systematic early identification of new CPPB trends in the region and its sub-regions. This pillar aims to bolster the analytical capacities of national and institutional counterparts, adopting a cooperative approach to conflict-sensitive and risk-informed development. Key efforts include enhancing foresight capabilities, the use of behavioural insights, enhanced social cohesion and social tensions monitoring tools, institutionalizing evidence-based decision-making, and integrating early-warning systems.

UNDP capitalizes on its extensive global experience and strong regional presence to develop comprehensive training programmes and employ innovative tools that support both internal capacities and those of governments and institutions across the region. Tools like the Crisis Risk Dashboards, alongside advanced data, and analytics systems, enhance our collective ability to understand and respond to conflict dynamics more effectively. We also harness digital technologies, including AI and machine learning, to refine our approaches to understanding, preventing, and managing conflicts and polarization.

Core Thematic Entry Points



Pillar 2

Strengthen horizontal social cohesion by fostering dialogue through confidence-building measures across divides and the reinforcement of civil society engagement

Pillar 2 aims to enhance horizontal social cohesion by fostering dialogue and implementing confidence-building measures across societal divides. This pillar emphasizes empowering youth and women, leveraging their roles as catalysts for change within CPPB-relevant domains.

To combat rising polarization, including across boundaries and borders, UNDP is intensifying its efforts in confidence-building measures. These initiatives focus on fostering dialogue across ethnic, cultural, and political divides, addressing issues such as hate speech, divisive narratives, and violent extremism. Additionally, the efforts support inter-community dialogue in regions with latent and protracted conflicts and bolster local infrastructures for peace, facilitate transitional justice and addressing gender-based violence. Comprehensive assessments are employed to pinpoint specific risks and opportunities for peace, tailoring interventions to the nuanced needs of these communities. At the same time, conflict-sensitive and peace-responsive programming ensures that all development interventions strengthen social cohesion across these divides and contribute to sustaining peace.

Core Thematic Entry Points



Pillar 3

Strengthen vertical social cohesion, participatory governance, economic resilience, and institutional accountability to sustain peace

This pillar focuses on transformative actions relating to governance, strengthening the social contract, participation, the management of climate-related risks and economic and social inclusion. It involves both tackling the existing fault lines of vertical social cohesion, which correlate to conflict and instability, as well as ensuring that conflict prevention and peacebuilding, through a peace responsive approach, are integrated within UNDP's broader governance, inclusive growth and environment and climate portfolios. Additionally, investing in core government functions and fostering more responsive, accountable, and inclusive institutions, with a strong emphasis on the protection of human rights, will significantly contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

To maximize impact, UNDP is leveraging digital technologies to sustain peace through the development of inclusive and accessible communication channels between people and both central and local government. Efforts across the region aim to protect and expand civic space and public engagement, ensuring that digitalization remains conflict sensitive. This involves using digital platforms to facilitate transparent governance and support civic engagement initiatives that enhance institutional accountability and participatory governance, particularly in high-risk environments.

Core Thematic Entry Points



Pillar 4

Cultivate pro-active peace leadership, diplomacy and responsive partnerships to foster an enabling environment for sustainable conflict prevention and peacebuilding

Effective CPPB interventions require buy-in at the leadership level across governments and development stakeholders to ensure that policy reforms are implemented, and investments are sustained. This pillar leverages various capabilities and resources of organizations engaged in CPPB, enhancing joint platforms and networks for peace, especially along the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus.

To strengthen leadership and diplomacy skills necessary for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, UNDP collaborates with a wide array of partners, including think tanks and regional institutions, to develop capacities among leaders and stakeholders, including in highly political contexts. Additionally, UNDP builds preventive national capacities through the advisory support of our country offices, targeted support from the Istanbul Regional Hub, and, where relevant, the deployment of Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs), ensuring that governments and stakeholders are equipped to manage conflict risks proactively, including through cross-border and cross-boundary initiatives. UNDP also fosters the development of networks of CPPB champions at both the leadership and community levels. This approach not only supports direct engagement with CPPB initiatives but also promotes upstream policy reforms crucial for sustainable peace.

Through these efforts, UNDP ensures that development interventions are not only responsive but also consider political processes and policy frameworks, creating a holistic and inclusive environment conducive to peacebuilding.

Core Thematic Entry Points



Operationalising the Framework

UNDP is actively operationalising the framework, which not only aligns with existing policies and programmes but is also designed to develop tailored programmes that meet the prioritised needs of our partners. This includes initiating region-wide and sub-regional programmes aimed specifically at addressing distinct conflict and peace factors, alongside advocacy and strengthened cooperation with the broader UN system. To ensure these strategies are effectively localised, UNDP utilises a diverse array of methods, capitalising on our regional presence and employing dedicated funding mechanisms that facilitate timely and targeted deployment of resources for preventative and peacebuilding efforts.

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Our Partners in Peace

UNDP's Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding efforts in Europe and Central Asia are made possible through collaborative partnerships and the generous support of numerous stakeholders at local, national and regional level. We express our profound gratitude to all our partners and host governments across the region for their trust, cooperation, and shared commitment to sustainable development and peace. Their leadership and partnership are fundamental to the success and sustainability of our work. UNDP also extends its appreciation to its sister UN agencies, funds, and programmes, with whom we implement numerous joint initiatives that are crucial for promoting sustainable peace in the region.

Among our top contributors through various funding mechanisms are:





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