





EVIDENCE FOR PREVENTION

A study on national
prevention strategies and
UNDP contribution to conflict
prevention

March 2026




The “evidence for prevention” initiative is a UNDP effort to document knowledge and lessons learned on conflict and crisis prevention. The study is composed of two parts: Part 1 reviews nationally led prevention and peace strategies in 15 countries with a specific focus on three cases, namely Mauritania, Norway, and Kenya. Part 2 reviews UNDP’s contribution to prevention efforts through programmatic support in eight country cases.

Drawing on diverse settings, the study illustrates how national prevention works in practice and what enables it to succeed. The qualitative evidence is not presented to define a universal blueprint, but to highlight and offer transferable principles and practices that can inform risk-informed development, peacebuilding, and governance reforms.

The study highlights how combining political inclusion, trusted institutions, socio-economic opportunity, and anticipatory governance can address structural and emerging drivers of instability.

By grounding prevention in empirical experience, this work aims to strengthen policy credibility, support adaptive programming, and make the case for scaling national prevention efforts a strategic investment, as highlighted in the Pact for the Future and the ‘twin resolutions’ on the 2025 Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture Review.



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EVIDENCE FOR PREVENTION

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PART 1

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The “Evidence for Prevention” study explores how nationally led prevention and peace strategies¹ operate in practice, providing an overview of 15 countries and empirical lessons from Mauritania, Norway, and Kenya. In doing so, the study explores how national strategies and infrastructures can effectively reduce the risk of violence and foster sustainable peace. In times of geopolitical fragmentation, declining trust in institutions and the rise of hybrid threats that blur domestic and international boundaries, the imperative for prevention has never been greater. Against this backdrop, prevention is reframed not as an aspirational goal but as a strategic, cost-effective necessity, as endorsed by Member States in the 2024 *Pact for the Future* and the 2025 UN General Assembly and Security Council ‘twin resolutions’ on the Peacebuilding Architecture Review.

The report highlights the complementary roles of national infrastructures for peace (i4p) – the ensemble of actors, resources, mechanisms, and processes to foster peace – and national prevention strategies (NPS) the roadmap providing vision, priorities, and coordination. Together, these elements create a comprehensive *prevention ecosystem* that moves countries from reactive crisis management to anticipatory governance. One of the key findings of the study is that prevention ecosystems are highly diverse as they adapt and reflect to the needs and assets of each country context.


The United Nations, including UNDP, plays a pivotal role in supporting national prevention frameworks, offering analytical, programmatic, and institutional support, and advocating for nationally owned, data-driven, and development-anchored approaches. Importantly, the report argues that prevention is a universal imperative, not limited to the Global South; even more developed countries face risks such as radicalization, polarization, and disinformation, and benefit from early detection and coordinated preventive action. Though prevention takes different forms depending on context, its underlying logic is universal.

The study analyzes the experience of 15 countries, applying criteria such as geographical balance, intensity of conflict, quality of the peace architecture, and practical lesson value, and highlights three case studies that represent different models and stages of prevention. Norway, a developed country, demonstrates that even relatively low-risk environments benefit from proactive, whole-of-society prevention frameworks, integrating early intervention, community engagement, and robust legal and operational measures to address complex risks, such as radicalization and violent extremism.

Mauritania, situated in the volatile Sahel region, exemplifies a layered approach that combines security-led deterrence, community-based policing, and anticipatory development programming. The approach is formalized in its 2025 National Strategy for Peace Consolidation and Social Cohesion, which emphasizes territorial inclusion, economic empowerment, environmental resilience, and decentralized governance.

Kenya’s national peace architecture, rooted in decentralization and inclusion-focused policy frameworks, links national, county, and community-level institutions, and has proven effective in reducing electoral violence and improving governance indicators through early warning and rapid response systems.

¹ In this study, national prevention and national peace strategies are used interchangeably.



Across these diverse contexts, the report identifies several common success factors: clear institutional mandates that anchor prevention efforts; early warning systems linked to actionable response; contextual tailoring of prevention mechanisms; and sustained political commitment and inclusion of civil society, women, and youth. Measuring the impact of prevention remains challenging, as success is often and wrongly equated to “nothing happens”. The study presents concrete examples and outcomes of prevention efforts to address some common skepticism and highlights structured frameworks that make prevention visible and accountable, enabling learning and expanded adaptation.

The report concludes that in an era of multiplying risks and increasing transnational threats, prevention should be recognized as a core pillar of modern statecraft adaptable to the realities of every society.

1. Introduction

The past decade has witnessed a marked transformation in the nature, scope, and geography of violent conflict. The number of active conflicts has reached its highest level since the end of the Cold War.² The post-2015 period, once expected to consolidate a “peace dividend”, has instead been characterized by the resurgence of protracted intrastate conflicts, fragmentation of armed actors, and regionalized instability.

Although state-on-state wars remain less frequent than internal or transnational conflicts, the trend shows renewed interstate confrontation driven by competing spheres of influence, military assertiveness, and the weakening of international norms. What is emerging is a hybrid landscape where domestic, regional, and global dimensions of violence are increasingly intersected and the notion that conflict is primarily a feature of the Global South is challenged. The conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Sudan, Ukraine, and Gaza illustrate a trend, where proxy dynamics and competing geopolitical interests have blurred the lines between domestic and international conflict.

Simultaneously, climate-related stressors, displacement, food insecurity, and economic inequality have intensified underlying grievances, particularly in fragile contexts across the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and parts of Latin America. Organized crime, violent extremism, and disinformation have further eroded state authority and public trust in governance. The result is a “polycrisis” of interconnected risks that transcend traditional peace and security frameworks.

In this context, conflict prevention has re-emerged as a strategic imperative rather than an aspirational goal. The human, economic, and political costs of violent conflict have proven devastating and enduring. According to IMF estimates, returns to prevention policies in countries that have not suffered recently from violence range from \$26 to \$75 per \$1 spent on prevention, and for countries with recent violence, the rate of return could be as high as \$103 per \$1 spent on prevention.³ Moreover, conflict prevention is also a development and governance imperative, as violence remains one of the main drivers of extreme poverty, food insecurity and humanitarian needs more broadly.

Over the past decade, the United Nations and regional organizations have increasingly sought to embed prevention in policy architectures. The Secretary-General’s “New Agenda for Peace”, the African Union’s “Silencing the Guns” agenda, and the European Union’s Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises reflect a shared recognition that sustainable peace depends on tackling structural drivers of conflict—inequality, exclusion, corruption, and environmental stress—before they erupt into violence.

In the 2024 *Pact for the Future*, member states decided to “strengthen and implement existing national prevention strategies and approaches to sustain peace, and consider developing them where they do not

² According to data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) and the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).

³ [The Urgency of Conflict Prevention – A Macroeconomic Perspective.](#)

exist, on a voluntary basis and in accordance with national priorities, to address the root causes of violence and armed conflict.⁴ This recognition and commitment by member states comes against the background of decades of UN support, through advocacy, instruments and programming for effective prevention strategies. Since 2023, UN advocacy for national prevention strategies has intensified, culminating with the 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR) and the identical resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly and the Security Council.

■ Why prevention matters, now

Three global dynamics make prevention especially urgent and relevant in the current decade:

- 1. Geopolitical fragmentation and the erosion of multilateralism.** The re-emergence of great-power competition has paralyzed collective decision-making in key multilateral forums. In this fractured environment, early, preventive engagement can mitigate escalation in contexts where consensus for large-scale intervention is unlikely. Prevention thus becomes a pragmatic tool for conflict management in a divided world.
- 2. Societal fragility and trust deficits.** Across regions, public trust in political institutions has declined sharply, as seen in recent Gen-Z movements in Madagascar and Nepal, and with governance challenges in several Western countries.⁵ Polarization, misinformation and disinformation, and governance failures have deepened social fractures. Prevention strategies that emphasize dialogue, inclusion, and responsive governance are essential to rebuild legitimacy and avert violence rooted in grievance and exclusion.
- 3. Complex and interconnected global risks.** Climate change, pandemics, cyber threats, economic shocks, and migration pressures increasingly interact with local tensions, creating compounded crises that transcend national borders, with regional and global spillover effects. Multidimensional and integrated prevention approaches—linking peacebuilding, climate adaptation, and human security—provide valuable and more effective solutions than traditional political or security approaches.

■ Methodology

With this global picture and existing commitments, where do countries stand on the development of national conflict prevention strategies? And what evidence exists to measure effective prevention approaches?

The current study, looking at 15-sample countries, tries to examine these questions and where most countries stand on the development and implementation of approaches based on prevention. It highlights three country contexts as case studies to illustrate the various stages and models of addressing prevention.

4 United Nations Pact for the Future, https://www.diplomacy.edu/resource/265366-2/?utm_

5 **Edelman Trust Barometer (2024).** France has changed Prime Ministers three times in 12 months with an inability to reach consensus on the national budget putting the country in a de facto governance crisis.

The following criteria were applied to select countries during the case study exploration phase.

- **Geographical balance**
- **Conflict or crisis intensity**
- **Features of the peace architecture** (inclusivity, themes, implementation, impact)
- **Practical lesson value** (portability and specificity of takeaways for other contexts)

The exploration drew on consultations with UNDP Crisis Bureau and Regional Bureaux, the UN Peacebuilding Support Office of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), current and former Peace and Development Advisors, external peacebuilding experts, as well as open-source research and UN/regional reports.

■ What the research shows (15-country sample findings)

Several UN entities such as DPPA, PBSO/PBF, UNDP have supported prevention activities and helped institutionalize practices in many countries. The 2023 New Agenda for Peace elevated the call for national prevention strategies to the political level. Some countries have responded with new strategies; others have strengthened infrastructures. The uptake has been uneven. Reasons include political sensitivity (governments reluctant to acknowledge the existence of certain conflict factors or take accountability for policy vacuum linked to the prevention of conflicts), institutional fragmentation, donor fatigue, technical burden of producing another national plan, and competing national priorities.

Countries are applying different preventative approaches, reflecting a diversity of practices. Some do not have an explicitly formulated national prevention strategy, but active prevention is happening via other instruments or with a specific thematic focus (e.g. WPS National Action Plans). Others have recently developed national strategies (e.g. Papua New Guinea, São Tomé & Príncipe, Mauritania) that are mostly built on active prevention practice using elements of an existing peace architecture. Other countries do have prevention strategies but struggle with their implementation (e.g. Lebanon's PVE plan). Finally, a last group of countries have robust national infrastructures for peace without specifically labelled strategies (e.g. Malawi and Ghana) but with strong local-national vertical links and measurable evidence of success.

■ Prevention strategies and national infrastructures for peace: Complementary approaches for sustaining peace

Both national infrastructures for peace and national prevention strategies share the same goal – sustaining peace and preventing violent conflict – but they differ in nature, function, and institutional scope.

UNDP guidance on infrastructures for peace defines I4P as “a dynamic network of actors, structures, mechanisms, and processes, and associated skills, capacities, resources, values, and institutions for building and sustaining peace.” It emphasizes interconnectedness and interdependence among these elements to holistically address peace needs, including de-escalating violent conflict, resolving conflict to prevent recurrence, and transforming conflict to sustain non-violent sociopolitical relationships and structures.”⁶

6 UNDP, Embedding Peace, <https://www.undp.org/publications/embedding-peace-key-considerations-strengthening-infrastructure-building-and-sustaining-positive-peace-i4p> page 5.

According to several United Nations General Assembly and Security Council Resolutions as well as the Pact for the Future adopted in 2024, national prevention strategies can be articulated as “a nationally owned, government-led framework designed to identify, address, and reduce **the root causes of violence, conflict, instability, and human rights violations** before they escalate, through coordinated action across political, economic, social, and developmental sectors”.⁷ This means that a national prevention strategy, is a policy framework, specific to each context – a voluntary commitment that outlines what is to be prevented, why, by whom, and through what mechanisms and resources. It provides the political vision and strategic direction that guides preventive action across government and society. A strategy is therefore normative, political, and programmatic— setting priorities, coordination mechanisms, and accountability arrangements.

In short, **a prevention strategy is the roadmap, while I4P is the machinery to implement it.** One defines the purpose, timing, and coordination of actions; the other builds and enacts the capacities to act.

In countries that have invested in developing both instruments, the relationship between the two is functional and mutually reinforcing. A prevention strategy without an infrastructure for implementation risks remaining a paper commitment – politically symbolic but operationally weak. Without local mechanisms, early warning cannot translate into early response; and coordination structures cannot reach communities where tensions arise.

Conversely, as seen in some cases, an infrastructure for peace without a strategy can become fragmented, underfunded, and disconnected from national decision-making. Local peace committees may mediate effectively, but without policy backing or institutional recognition, their impact stays localized and temporary.

When combined, the two create a comprehensive prevention ecosystem. Together, they ensure that prevention is both systemic and sustainable— strategic at the top, participatory and responsive at the grassroots.

Evidence from the study suggests that a country that combines a national infrastructure for peace and a national prevention strategy moves from reactive crisis management to anticipatory governance. The infrastructure provides the social and institutional muscle; the strategy provides the policy brain and political will.

■ Does the absence of a “national prevention strategy” mean prevention is not happening? And why do we need evidence of prevention?

In most countries, prevention is not absent—it simply happens without being named as such. Ministries of interior, justice, education, or social affairs regularly undertake measures that reduce tensions, strengthen inclusion, or resolve disputes before they escalate. Community leaders, local NGOs, and religious institutions often act as early mediators or buffers in times of strain.

Prevention is often embedded in sectoral or legacy instruments (e.g., PVE strategies, Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans, peace accords, county peace forums, DDR continuums, Transitional Justice, Security Sector Governance and Reform (SSG/R) etc.) that deliver prevention in practice. In some cases, national infrastructures for peace (institutions, county forums, community monitors, mediation teams, early warning systems etc.) frequently do the day-to-day prevention work. Kenya and Ghana are examples where infrastructures (in absence of a single strategy document) have produced measurable prevention activities.

⁷ See A/RES/70/262 (GA) and S/RES/2282 (SC) and Pact for the Future.

However, these initiatives may be **isolated, reactive, and short-term**, driven by immediate needs or donor priorities rather than by a shared national vision. As a result, efforts remain fragmented across sectors and institutions, with limited coordination or sustainability.⁸

A national prevention strategy does not replace what already exists; it organizes and amplifies it. It gives coherence to multiple preventive efforts by defining a common framework, shared priorities, and mechanisms for coordination and accountability. A national prevention strategy institutionalizes foresight – helping authorities to anticipate, prepare for, and mitigate emerging threats rather than improvising responses once tensions erupt.

Strategically, this means shifting from reaction to anticipation. However, the absence of a prevention strategy does not mean prevention is not happening – but it does mean that it is happening in a uncoordinated way.

Moreover, having a strategy can facilitate the documentation of evidence. Clear evidence of conflict prevention is crucial for demonstrating both the *effectiveness and necessity* of preventive action. Prevention, by nature, often lacks visibility which is a challenge: when crises do not occur, success can appear intangible or anecdotal. Documented evidence—whether qualitative or quantitative—helps make prevention visible, credible, and accountable.

Evidence allows policymakers and practitioners to identify which measures effectively reduce risks, build social cohesion, or address structural drivers of conflict. It supports learning and replication, enabling national and international actors to prioritize interventions that have proven impact.⁹

The bottom line is that while a national prevention strategy is not the only proxy for meaningful prevention, it can help generating political will and capital, support coherence and financing as well as the documentation of evidence for prevention.

■ UN/UNDP support options and instruments to develop prevention frameworks

The United Nations has worked on prevention themes and supported countries to develop effective prevention frameworks for decades. More recently, the UN’s engagement expanded from financing and programmatic support (PBF, UNDP projects, programmatic assistance) to stronger normative advocacy for the development of a labelled national strategy—an evolution rather than a brand-new agenda.

UNDP’s approach to prevention is anchored in the principle that **sustainable peace and sustainable development are mutually reinforcing**. Prevention is not treated as a stand-alone activity but as a continuous, integrated function across UNDP’s work in governance, rule of law, justice, security, human rights, livelihoods, gender equality, and climate resilience. Guided by its developmental mandate, UNDP focuses on tackling the **structural drivers of conflict** – inequality, exclusion, weak institutions, and erosion of trust –before they escalate into crisis, and during crises to prevent conflicts from escalating or reoccurring.¹⁰

8 See PBF project evaluation reports, MPTF gateway.

9 Embedding Peace: Key considerations for strengthening an infrastructure for building and sustaining positive peace (i4p) September 2025.

10 See UNDP’s approach to prevention, September 2025.

At the core of this approach lies a strong emphasis on **national ownership and whole-of-society engagement**. To help countries develop or strengthen their prevention frameworks, UNDP offers a comprehensive **service package** combining analytical, programmatic, and institutional support.

This approach directly operationalizes the **commitment of the Pact for the Future**, which calls on the UN system to “provide assistance to States, upon their request, to build national capacity to promote, develop and implement their nationally owned prevention efforts.” UNDP’s work gives substance to this commitment by helping governments turn prevention from a normative aspiration into an actionable, measurable, and sustainable national policy. Through capacity-building, inclusive policy design, and evidence-based programming, UNDP ensures that prevention efforts are **anchored in national systems, informed by credible data, and responsive to citizens’ needs**.¹¹

In doing so, UNDP bridges the global and local dimensions of the sustaining peace agenda. It helps countries move from fragmented responses to **strategic, whole-of-government prevention frameworks** that strengthen social contracts, promote inclusion, and protect development gains. In a global context marked by polarization and rising fragility, this model of prevention—nationally owned, data-driven, and development-anchored—offers a pragmatic pathway to realizing the vision of the Pact for the Future: a world where peace is not simply restored after conflict but sustained and built by societies themselves.

A key enabler of this vision and nationally-led approaches is the **Joint UNDP-DPPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention**. Launched in 2004 as a joint initiative of UNDP and then Department of Political Affairs (now DPPA), the Joint Programme combines the strengths of the UN’s peace and security and development pillars to support nationally led efforts to prevent conflict and sustain peace. The programme supports countries through the deployment of Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs), who provide analysis and advice to support national peace architectures and prevention efforts.

■ **Current prevention landscape: Three scenario types**

This study identified three scenarios and case studies drawn from the current landscape of different approaches to prevention and varying stages of prevention architecture and policy document development.

Scenario A. No single national prevention strategy – prevention via other instruments. Here, Norway is examined as a case study. The country does not have a prevention strategy, but prevention is effective through its PVE strategy and other approaches.

Scenario B. Recent national strategies (PNG, Mauritania). Here, Mauritania is examined. It has recently developed its national conflict prevention strategy with UN’s support, but through a prevention practice tailored to its national context.

Scenario C. Strategies or architectures with tangible, replicable implementation lessons. For this scenario, Kenya, with its strong infrastructure for peace, was the selected case study.

¹¹ Ibid.

2. Norway case study

Prevention via other instruments

Introduction – context

Norway is a wealthy, democratic NATO member state whose security and conflict environment is shaped by three long-running features. First, geography – a long, Arctic coastline and a land border with Russia. Norway’s long northern coastline, its Exclusive Economic Zone and Svalbard status place it on the maritime frontline of the High North – an area where Russian and Western interests meet. This geography has historically produced both cooperation (joint fisheries management) and strategic rivalry.¹² Second, resources – oil, gas, fisheries and subsea infrastructure that are strategically valuable. Petroleum and fisheries have brought prosperity but also strategic dependencies (energy export routes, offshore infrastructure) that create potential pressure points in crises. Economic ties and shared management in the Barents Sea moderated tensions historically but are now under strain. Third, history – World War II and Cold War legacies make Norway both cautious about militarization near its border and committed to alliance deterrence. German occupation in World War II and a proximate Soviet border during the Cold War shaped Norway’s foreign policy: NATO membership paired with a tradition of carefully calibrated bilateral relations with Russia to avoid escalation.

Since 2022, the war in Ukraine has raised the salience of state-level threats (military, intelligence and hybrid threats). The Norwegian security services place Russia and hybrid interference at the top of the risk list, with cyber, sabotage and economic-security vectors receiving increased attention.¹³ The Arctic has seen a return of great-power posture (naval, air and missile systems) and increased NATO activity, hence a militarization of the High North. That raises the baseline risk of incidents, miscalculation or pressure on maritime routes and maritime responses. Cyber and critical infrastructure vulnerability is also an increased threat.

At the same time, traditional non-state risks (terrorism, radicalization) remain persistent and changing in form (online radicalization, lone-actor violence etc.). Violent Islamist extremism is judged moderate probability. More broadly, in Europe, the rise of far right and associated transnational risks are also persistent concerns. Since the late 2010s and accelerating through 2022–2024, Europe has seen a renewed rise in far-right extremist activity across several dimensions: electoral/political-normalization of extreme-right actors in some countries, a measurable increase in hate-motivated violent crimes and attacks and continued online radicalization that feeds real-world violence. Europol and other international bodies note that

¹² Andreas Østhagen, *Managing Conflict at Sea: The Case of Norway and Russia in the Svalbard Zone*, *Arctic Review on Law and Politics* Vol. 9, 2018, pp. 100–123, https://icsid.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/parties_publications/C8394/Claimants%27%20documents/BK%20-%20Exhibits/BK-0021.pdf?utm_

¹³ Norway Police Security Service (PST), National Threat Assessment 2025, https://www.pst.no/globalassets/2025/nasjonal-trusselvurdering-2025/_nasjonal-trusselvurdering-2025_uu-engelsk.pdf?utm_

far-right motivated terrorism and violent extremism are a growing concern alongside jihadist threats, with incidents and arrests recorded across multiple member states.¹⁴

The key drivers of far-right extremism in Europe include political mainstreaming and polarizing migration debates that have created permissive political climates in which extremist narratives gain wider exposure.¹⁵ Digital ecosystems and cross-border networks is also a potential driver. Social media, encrypted messaging and gaming platforms continue to be vectors for recruitment, accelerationist discourse and operational coordination of far-right activities. Analysts document growing transnational linkages between far-right groups, including cross-border influencer networks and content amplification.¹⁶ Finally socio-economic grievances, localized insecurity and cultural anxieties create receptive audiences for exclusionary, conspiratorial narratives that the far right weaponizes.¹⁷

Norway illustrates the dual nature of violent extremism and the state response. The 2011 attacks by a far-right extremist (Utoya/Oslo) remain the reference point in national memory and policy; since then, Norway has continued to face threats from multiple extremist streams. The Norwegian Police Security Service (PST) places both extreme-Islamist and right-wing extremism among the principal terrorist risks and in its 2024–2025 national threat assessments, warns of an «even chance» of attempts by either stream.¹⁸



In addition, the War in Gaza has led to a rise in antisemitism and hate speech issues with a social media dimension to it, which the country is actively monitoring.

While state-level risks are becoming more acute, the current case study focuses specifically on Norway's prevention framework with regards to traditional non-state threats, in particular violent extremism and radicalization. Given the reality of geopolitical developments increasingly feeding into national issues, particularly in Europe, references will be made to the state level and the geopolitical threat picture when necessary.

Norway's prevention framework on violent extremism and radicalization

While there is no single overarching conflict prevention strategy in place, several instruments collectively make up Norway's prevention framework when it comes to violent extremism and radicalization. These include the **Action Plan against Radicalization and Violent Extremism** which offers a practical, operational set of measures focused on prevention, early intervention and coordination across ministries and

14 European Union, Terrorism Situation and Threat Report, 2025, pp 13-17, https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/EU_TE-SAT_2025.pdf?utm_

15 Reuters, Germany's far-right AfD harbors growing number of extremists, Spy agency reports, June 2025, https://www.reuters.com/world/germanys-far-right-afd-harbours-growing-number-extremists-spy-agency-2025-06-10/?utm_

16 Kacper REKAWEK, Thomas RENARD & Barbara MOLAS, Russia and the Far-Right, Insights from Ten European countries, International Center for Counterterrorism, 2024, https://icct.nl/sites/default/files/2024-04/Russia%20and%20the%20Far-Right%20Insights%20from%20Ten%20European%20Countries%20-%20A4%20e-book_0.pdf?utm_

17 Karolina Adamcova, Russell Burrell, *The Rise of Far-Right Violence in Europe*, European Liberal Forum Publications, December 2022, https://liberalforum.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/WEBSITE-2022-The-Rise-of-Far-Right-Violence-in-Europe.pdf?utm_

18 Norwegian Ministry of Culture and Equality, *Prevention of Extremism*, Report to the Storting (White Paper), 2024-2025, https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/67103c98eb2e4f2cb61aee062fad1f41/en-gb/pdfs/meld_st_13_eng.pdf?utm_

agencies to reduce radicalization—especially among youth—and to strengthen community resilience and preventive outreach. It lays out measures for education, outreach to vulnerable groups, cooperation with civil society, and a law-enforcement footprint adapted to prevention.¹⁹ Developed in 2014 and anchored at the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, the Action Plan which remains a reference document, shows Norway’s early engagement on the prevention of violent extremism and radicalization.

More recently in 2021, the country developed its **National Counterterrorism Strategy** also anchored at the Ministry of Justice and Public Security. It was revised in 2022. The document is a strategic, whole-of-government framework that balances prevention with preparedness and response. It reaffirms that counterterrorism must prevent radicalization and violent extremism while also being ready to manage and respond to attacks, all under the rule of law and human-rights constraints. It sets national priorities for intelligence, policing, legal tools and international cooperation over a multi-year horizon.²⁰

A 2024 independent commission report – “**Joint efforts against extremism: Better conditions for preventive work**” diagnoses strengths and gaps in Norway’s prevention ecosystem and recommends institutional reforms to improve coordination, quality assurance, and conditions for preventive work—emphasizing cross-sector collaboration, local capacity building, and standards for evaluation and ethical practice in prevention. It stresses whole-of-society approaches and improving the enabling environment for local actors.²¹

Finally, a 2024 Government white paper of extremism commits to revising the national Counterterrorism strategy and updating the 2014 Action Plan, setting out priorities for strengthening democratic resilience, community prevention, and international cooperation. It explicitly links prevention policy to legislative, educational and social measures.²²

Taken together, the Action Plan, the National Counterterrorism Strategy, the report of the Independent Commission, and the Government white paper form a mutually reinforcing prevention ecosystem against violent extremism and radicalization: operational measures are given strategic direction, independent review strengthens institutional quality and ethics, and political endorsement via the white paper allows for resourcing and legal alignment. The result is a more institutionalized, rights-based and evidence-informed prevention architecture that aims to avoid past blind spots—notably: fragmented practice, insufficient evaluation, and the risk of securitizing prevention at the expense of community trust and resilience.

Given that the external threat environment (the war in Ukraine, hybrid influence, transnational dimension of violent extremism) makes domestic resilience and counter-extremism more complex, Norway is guarding against both transnational extremist flows and extremist narratives that incite violence. In that regard, the Government’s 2024–25 white papers and security documents states how international conditions and conflicts influence the national threat landscape. Attention should be put at long-term ramifications which should be at the center of strategic thinking, including with regards to the prevention of violent extremism at home. For instance, attention should be given to the conflict in Gaza and its impact on the rise of antisemitism and associated hate narratives in Norway.²³

19 Ministry of Justice and Public Security, Action Plan against Radicalization and Violent Extremism, 2014, https://www.regjeringen.no/en/documents/Action-plan-against-Radicalisation-and-Violent-Extremism/id762413/?utm_

20 Ministry of Justice and Public Security, **National Counterterrorism Strategy**, updated 2022, https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/a74960882df34d28a5e272071b4e7d80/national-counterterrorism-strategy.pdf?utm_

21 <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/64e56fe2ff764014b2ed4b833f09f664/en-gb/pdfs/joint-efforts-against-extremism.pdf>

22 Norwegian Ministry of Culture and Equality, *Prevention of Extremism*, Report to the Storting (White Paper), 2024–2025, https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/67103c98eb2e4f2cb61aee062fad1f41/en-gb/pdfs/meld_st_13_eng.pdf?utm_

23 Conversation with Elin Solberg, Policy Director, Norway Ministry of Justice and Public Security, November 2025.

Strengths of Norway's prevention approach against violent extremism and radicalization



A holistic perspective

Norway's prevention instruments and approach adopt a holistic approach focusing on all form of extremism, whether Islamist, far right extremism or other. Also, it adequately aims to integrate state-level and transnational ramifications into national drivers of extremism, thus avoiding a silo approach and potential blind spots. Given the quality of relevant national institutions such as security and intelligence services, the holistic approach benefits of accurate data and evidence-based threat assessments that facilitate policy discussions and decisions.²⁴



Whole-of-society PVE and early-intervention

Norway's national instruments emphasize prevention first: community engagement, education, social services, local authority interventions and civil-society mobilization are key to reaching at-risk people early rather than relying purely on intelligence services and information exchanges at the national and regional levels. The long-running Action Plan against Radicalization and Violent Extremism frames PVE as a multi-sector responsibility.²⁵



A legal and operational counter-terror framework that embeds prevention

The National Action Plan explicitly links prevention of radicalization/violent extremism to counter-terrorism tasks, while underscoring adherence to rule of law and human rights. The strategy stresses preparedness to both prevent attacks and manage incidents when they occur. Operational agencies (police, PST/intelligence, Correctional Service) are given clearer roles in prevention, risk-assessment and returnee management.



Education, health and local services as vectors of resilience

The policy mix includes democratic education, teacher awareness, mental-health and social-welfare measures as part of a resilience toolbox – an approach that has attracted both praise for prevention and critique for possible securitization of ordinary public services (e.g., schools). Currently this approach has positively contributed to reinforcing resilience of communities in the fight against violent extremism and radicalization by making all actors of social services at national and local levels aware of the threat, thus able to identify and help address it.²⁶

24 Norway Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, *Joint efforts against extremism: Better conditions for preventive work*, Report from a commission appointed by Royal Decree of 10 June 2022. Submitted to the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion on 1 March 2024, <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/documents/joint-efforts-against-extremism-better-conditions-for-preventive-work/id3050497>.

25 Norway Ministry of Culture and Equality, Government White Paper to Parliament: Prevention of extremism. Safety, trust, cooperation and democratic resilience, <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/documents/summary-of-meld.-st.-13-2024-2025-report-to-the-storting-white-paper-prevention-of-extremism-safety-trust-cooperation-and-democratic-resilience/id3098117>.

26 Synne Wekre Kvistad, *Prevention of radicalization and violent extremism in Norwegian upper secondary schools*, 2021, <https://nva.sikt.no/registration/0198edbc6a5f-0b820a23-1b9d-4857-b130-71937905c4b4>.



An inclusive approach to the development of prevention instruments

The development of the National Counterterrorism Strategy was an inclusive process. There were 09 ministries involved in addition to the Prime Minister which signals political leadership and national ownership on the issue of prevention.²⁷ Broad consultation was also held at local level. Academics, civil society, were consulted and roundtables, annual meetings with relevant ministries are organized to gather lessons learned.²⁸ There was also a broad and inclusive process in developing the Counterterrorism Strategy.



National ownership and political leadership

In 2024, Norway presented and discussed its prevention framework at the Peacebuilding Commission in New York, along with Kenya and Timor-Leste. The initiative was a voluntary effort to confront Norway's prevention framework with that of other country contexts, with a view to learning lessons and practices that might be relevant for the Norway context. The demarche signals national ownership and an active leadership on prevention issues.

Impact: evidence of success



Increased awareness on prevention and effective deradicalization

While extremist activity in Norway appears modest compared to larger conflict zones such as the Middle East, the Sahel or the horn of Africa, there are some documented cases such as the 10 August 2019 Bærum mosque attack; the 25 June 2022 mass shooting in Oslo targeting the Oslo Pride event which left two people dead and 21 wounded; or the 24 August 2025, Oslo stabbing by a right-wing extremist targeting a 34 year old Muslim woman.²⁹

National interlocutors interviewed for the study confirm that having a Counterterrorism strategy proved important as a communications tool to sensitize key ministries and services on the need to pay attention and to prioritize prevention. Norway being a safe and peaceful developed country with few active extremist activities, some members of national authorities feel that injecting resources into the prevention of violent extremism is unnecessary and that the country's crisis response capacities, with strong institutions and an effective rule of law, are sufficient to manage the risk. However, the preventive approach in a developed country demonstrates a forward leaning vision that integrates the evolving threat environment (national and geopolitical) and allows early intervention and tailored follow-up to reduce long-term risk. More specifically, the Counterterrorism strategy guarantees that resources are dedicated to support customized individual case management to prevent potential extremists turn to criminal activity. This has proven to

27 Ministry of Justice and Public Security, Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, Ministry of Children and Families, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Health and Care Services, Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, Ministry of Culture and Equality, Ministry of Education and Research, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

28 Conversation with Elin Solberg, Policy Director, Norway Ministry of Justice and Public Security, November 2025.

29 The 10 August 2019 attack in Bærum near Oslo, involved a young man who shot at worshippers inside the Al-Noor Islamic Center Mosque. The incident was investigated as an act of terrorism motivated by far-right extremist ideology. https://www.euronews.com/2019/08/10/norway-mosque-shooting-one-injured-suspect-in-custody?utm_. Norwegian authorities classified the 2022 Oslo Pride shooting as an "act of Islamist terrorism." https://www.euronews.com/2022/06/25/oslo-pride-cancelled-after-shootings-kill-two-and-injure-dozens-more?utm_. On the 24 August 2025 incident, Norwegian prosecutors described it as a religiously and racially motivated extremist attack with alleged right-wing and Islamophobic motives. https://www.newsinenglish.no/2025/08/25/norway-shaken-by-new-terrorist-attack/?utm_.

be more cost effective in the long run. A 2022 survey involving more than 2,500 upper secondary school students to assess their attitudes towards violence confirm the positive impact of prevention efforts, particularly with the youth.³⁰



More accountability towards prevention

With more awareness and dedicated resources to prevent violent extremism and radicalization comes more accountability of national institutions. Norway's prevention instruments contributed to define roles and responsibilities on the prevention front and to keep actors accountable. This led to more information sharing across sectors of the government, increased knowledge about all types of extremism and the need to focus on them equally.³¹

Gaps and risks

Despite its overall coherence, Norway's prevention framework on violent extremism and deradicalization contains a few gaps. In addition, several geopolitical risks may impact the efficiency of the prevention framework on violent extremism.

1. Resource and priority crowding – rising defense budgets and focus on deterrence (NATO commitments, new procurements) risk crowding out funding and political bandwidth for long-term PVE programming if not carefully balanced.
2. Securitization of social services – policies that make teachers, social workers or health professionals de-facto gatekeepers against radicalization can appear to strain trust with communities and may risk stigmatizing vulnerable groups.
3. Complexity around foreign fighters/returnees – European experience shows returnee policy requires calibrated mixes of prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration. Norway's frameworks and case reviews point to ongoing work to refine risk assessment and reintegration pathways. Failure to get this balance right can create security risks or human-rights problems.

30 Håvard Møkleiv Nygård, Tore Bjørgo, and Eivind Normann Reite (2022), "Are Norwegian Youth Becoming More Tolerant of the Use of Political Violence?" – C-REX Centre for Research on Extremism, University of Oslo, <https://www.sciencenorway.no/extremists-violence-youth/have-norwegian-youth-become-more-tolerant-of-the-use-of-political-violence/2068747>.

31 Conversation with Elin Solberg, Policy Director, Norway Ministry of Justice and Public Security, November 2025.

■ Transferable lessons

- **A wealthy and stable developed country still builds preventative structures:** A key insight from Norway is that being a stable developed country and having a relatively low threat level is not a reason to delay prevention – it is the ideal environment to build it. Other developed countries can adopt this mindset.
What Norway does well: Even though Norway faces relatively low rates of violent extremism, it maintains a forward-leaning prevention approach. Prevention is part of everyday governance, not a response to crisis. The prevention framework emphasizes community trust, human rights, and proportionality—values that resonate strongly in open democracies.
Why this is transferable: Countries with similar profiles (high stability, strong local government, high social trust) can use Norway’s approach as evidence that prevention is healthiest when it is not crisis-driven. It allows institutions to build durable routines, avoid over-securitization, and maintain public legitimacy.
- **Early intervention and tailored follow-up reduce long-term risk:** developed countries should invest in pre-emptive, individualized intervention, as other countries—before radicalization leads to criminal behavior.
What Norway does well: case management teams (often municipal) coordinate customized interventions: mentoring, mental-health support, family counselling, employment pathways. The focus is on risk reduction, rather than punishment: helping individuals disengage safely rather than pushing them into clandestine spaces. This approach reduces the likelihood of violent escalation and is cost-effective in the long term.
Why this is transferable: countries with strong social services and the administrative capacity to run tailored programmes can use Norway’s model to de-escalate risks early. This approach shows that early support is far cheaper and more effective than late enforcement.

3. Mauritania case study

Prevention as conceived, implemented and translated into policy

Introduction and context

Mauritania's geopolitical position at the nexus of the Maghreb and the Sahel places it in a complex security environment shaped by internal structural challenges, tensions and regional instability. Ethno-racial divisions, historical injustices, and governance issues intersect with contemporary regional dynamics, including the spread of Sahelian insurgencies and the militarization of migration management.



Ethno-racial cleavages and slavery legacy

The roots of Mauritania's internal tensions lie in its colonial and post-colonial social stratification.³² Following independence in 1960, the state pursued an Arabization policy that deepened the marginalization of non-Arabic-speaking communities.³³ The legacy of slavery and servitude remains central to Mauritania's conflict profile. Although slavery was formally abolished in 1981 and criminalized in 2007, Haratin (descendants of enslaved people) continue to experience economic and political exclusion.³⁴ Activist repression and limited representation of Haratin in public institutions underscore the persistence of this structural inequality.³⁵ The management of ethno-diversity at political and institutional levels is a challenge deeply affecting national cohesion and unity.



Border and inter-ethnic conflict

The 1989–1991 Mauritania–Senegal border crisis also referred to as the 'humanitarian legacy' marked one of the most violent episodes in the country's modern conflict history. Triggered by disputes over grazing and land rights along the Senegal River Valley, the conflict escalated into widespread ethnic violence and forced displacement of tens of thousands of Black Mauritians. These events entrenched deep mistrust between ethnic groups and underscored the weakness of Mauritania's social contract.

32 French colonial administration reinforced hierarchies between Arab-Berber (Beydane) elites and Black African populations – Hal-pulaar, Soninké, and Wolof – through indirect rule and uneven access to education and administration (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), 2012.

33 GSDRC, *Conflict Analysis of Mauritania*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 2015.

34 UNPO, *Wave of Repression Targets Anti-Slavery Activists and Haratin Community*, 2022.

35 UNPO, *IRA-Mauritania Convenes Anti-Slavery Movements from Across West Africa and the Sahel*, 2023.



Political instability and governance issues

Mauritania's political history has been characterized by repeated coups and a dominant military elite. Since the first coup in 1978, the armed forces have remained the primary arbiter of political power.³⁶ Nominally democratic transitions—such as those following the 2005 and 2008 coups—have not dismantled the underlying military structures.³⁷ Tensions related to electoral governance also contribute to political instability.



Counter-terrorism and border management

Since the early 2010s, Mauritania has positioned itself as a proactive actor in Sahelian security. Its strategy combines robust border control, socioeconomic development, military reform, community engagement, and religious dialogue to prevent jihadist infiltration.³⁸ Unlike Mali or Burkina Faso, Mauritania has not suffered major terrorist attacks since 2011. Nonetheless, the threat remains latent. The southern and eastern regions bordering Mali and Algeria are vulnerable to infiltration by jihadist elements while the northern region bordering Algeria and Morocco are vulnerable to trafficking networks.³⁹ The 2023 prison break and attack in Nouakchott, attributed to Al-Qaida (AQIM) linked militants, underscored this ongoing risk.



Migration, trafficking, and peripheral fragility

Mauritania's vast desert borders and Atlantic coastline make it a key node in trans-Saharan migration and smuggling routes. The intersection between irregular migration, trafficking, and state security has become increasingly prominent. While partnerships with organizations such as the EU on migration bolster Mauritania's international standing, they risk securitizing migration governance and sidelining development priorities. In addition, human mobility issues including refugees from neighboring countries or Mauritanian returnees (who previously left during the events of 1980) add an additional layer of fragility at the periphery.



Socioeconomic and environmental pressures

Climate change exacerbates livelihood stress in Mauritania's semi-arid regions. Desertification and irregular rainfall intensify competition over scarce water and grazing resources, fueling localized conflicts between herders and farmers (African Union, 2023). Rising youth unemployment and uneven access to services heighten the risk of radicalization, particularly in marginalized communities along the Senegal River Valley.

Overall, Mauritania's conflict profile is defined by a convergence of historical injustices, governance fragility, and regional security pressures. Its success in avoiding major insurgency reflects effective state control and an approach to conflict prevention that has so far contributed to maintaining Mauritania as a relative 'island of stability' in the turbulent Sahel. Recently, in the context of the Secretary General's New Agenda for Peace and with UNDP's support, the country has captured its prevention practice and approach into a structured strategy.

36 Power in Mauritania is triangular, involving the military, religious authorities, and the tribes. The military – mostly made up of White Moors – dominates, and this dominance relies on a religious norm that helps structure the political sphere, along with tribal alliances that determine the composition of the government.

37 **Governance and Social Development Resource Centre** (GSDRC), *Conflict Analysis of Mauritania*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 2015.

38 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *The Drivers of Insecurity in Mauritania*, Washington, D.C., 2012.

39 African Union, *Report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on the Situation in the Sahel*. Addis Ababa: AU Peace and Security Council, 2024.

■ Prevention in practice – what prevention looks like in Mauritania



The approach

Mauritania's resilience in a turbulent Sahel stems from a layered prevention approach that mixes: (1) security-led deterrence and border control; (2) localized, community-based policing and customary mediation; (3) targeted development and anticipatory humanitarian programming. These elements are neither perfect nor evenly implemented but the combined mix of instruments has helped limit large-scale insurgency and large-scale communal breakdown to date.



Security led deterrence and proactive border control

Given its geography and regional instability context, territorial control is a central element to Mauritania's prevention approach. This is done through the army, gendarmerie, and maritime surveillance, to deter cross-border movement of armed groups and smugglers. It is reinforced by bilateral and multilateral assistance including through the European Peace Facility (EU/EPF), to deter trafficking and irregular migration and to protect coastal routes. EU/EPF measures in 2024–2025 combined with NATO/Western security cooperation for intelligence gathering and sharing increased maritime and land surveillance capacities. These capabilities make rapid external spillover more difficult and easier to deter for preventive action when required.⁴⁰



Localized, community-based policing and customary mediation

The state uses adapted community policing, Meharist units, which are specialized desert units that conduct mobile patrols, provide presence in remote areas, engage communities, gather local intelligence and combine policing with limited-service delivery (health, water) to build legitimacy. These patrols deter violent actors and reduce community grievances by providing state contact points. Their camel-mounted/remote posture is tailored to the Sahara environment.

Traditional mediation and local chiefs/ulama, typically customary elders and religious leaders remain first-line mediators in land and inter-communal disputes. Alongside the local chiefs/ulamas are the Mourchidates, women religious guides, who work to deconstruct radical rhetoric arguments used by extremist groups and prevent violent extremism. Their critical role in promoting peace, through an innovative pilot initiative supported by PBF and implemented by UNODC and UNESCO has been recognized by the Mauritanian Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Original Education (MAIEO).⁴¹ The state often leverages these existing social institutions to resolve disputes before they escalate to courts or unrest. These mechanisms are central across Sahelian countries, including Mauritania.⁴² In addition, Women's networks consisting of gender focal points, and women's associations, are now institutionalized and contribute to lifting structural barriers regarding women's participation and rights.

40 European Council, *European Peace Facility: Council adopts third assistance measure in support of the Armed Forces of Mauritania*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/03/24/european-peace-facility-council-adopts-third-assistance-measure-in-support-of-the-armed-forces-of-mauritania/>, March 2025.

41 Lila Pieters Yahia, UN Resident Coordinator in Mauritania, *What does Prevention look like in Mauritania?*, <https://www.un.org/peace-building/es/content/what-does-prevention-look-mauritania>, 11 April 2023.

42 Martha Mutisi and Kwesi Sansculotte-Greenidge, *Integrating Traditional and Modern Conflict Resolution: Experiences from selected cases in Eastern and the Horn of Africa*, African Center for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), 2012 https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/146648/ACCORD-monograph-2012-2.pdf?utm_



Developmental and anticipatory measures

Mauritania combines development investments, civil-registration drives and anticipatory humanitarian protocols (drought/inundation early action, food security monitoring) that reduce the social conditions – food insecurity, loss of livelihoods or statelessness – that typically convert grievances into violence.⁴³ Large external funding packages (for migration management, livelihoods and security) also reduce immediate destabilizing pressures. Humanitarian and development actors (Red Cross, FAO, UN) and national authorities develop early-action protocols (for droughts, locusts, floods, pastoral activities) to trigger assistance before livelihoods collapse. These reduce shock-to-conflict pathways in rural areas.⁴⁴ These actions prevent desperation that fuels radicalization or violent resource.

For example, in Bassikounou, in Hodh el Chargui region, the influx of Malian refugees and Mauritanian returnees from Mali since 2012 as a result of the deteriorating security situation there, has led to a stress on pastures and water resources for herds of livestock. This raises concerns for cohesion between refugees, returnees and host communities. Several UN peacebuilding fund projects have helped to anticipate and contain tensions through effective management of scarce natural resources, enhancing economic development, and supporting village committees in resolving conflicts.⁴⁵ As for early action protocols, Mauritania has developed pastoral codes that regulate pastoral rights. Implementation of these pastoral regulations prevents seasonal grazing disputes from escalating into communal violence. Where these institutions work, contestation is negotiated locally rather than militarized.⁴⁶

Mauritania also benefits from donor packages, mostly from the European Union that combine development, border control and job-creation initiatives to remove economic push factors and secure borders.⁴⁷ This type of migration management alleviates economic conflict drivers amongst migrant communities and are particularly critical for Mauritania which is at the nexus of migratory routes in the Sahel.

These three lines – security, local mediation, and anticipatory development/humanitarian – operate together: security reduces immediate armed threats; local mediation reduces grievance escalation; anticipatory action reduces shocks that could trigger conflicts.

43 Taazour: Un nouvel élan pour le développement urbain et l'inclusion sociale, February 2025.

44 Anticipation hub, Mauritania country profile, https://www.anticipation-hub.org/experience/anticipatory-action-in-the-world/mauritania?utm_ October 2025.

45 PBF/IRF-249: 112871 Renforcement des capacités locales pour la prévention des conflits dans la Moughataa de Bassikounou PBF/MRT/A-1: 123888 Consolidation de la paix à travers l'engagement des femmes et de la jeunesse et le renforcement des capacités des communautés dans la région frontalière du Hodh El Chargui.

46 Hans-Werner Wabnitz, The Code Pastoral of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, World Bank, Washington D.C., January, 2007, https://conservation-development.net/Projekte/Nachhaltigkeit/CD2/Mauretaniens/Links/PDF/Wabnitz_2007_Code_pastoral.pdf?utm_

47 AP News, The EU announces 210 million euros in aid to help Mauritania curb migration, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/mauritania-migration-spain-canary-islands-eu-energy-c51c121cfb42181636358e76b9241dbd>.



Early warning tools

Mauritania operates several sectoral and multi-actor early-warning mechanisms for prevention purposes.

The disaster & climate early warning (SAP / EAP): is a community-based early warning system for climatic hazards (drought, floods, locusts) integrated into national crisis management (national crisis centre / integrated multi-hazard alert efforts).⁴⁸

Community surveillance & food-security monitoring are undertaken by NGOs and UN agencies who run community monitoring (e.g., SAME surveillance) that feeds into anticipatory action and national planning. These systems flag market, nutrition and pastoral stress.

Regional/continental political early warning is effective through the AU/RECs' CEWS/ECOWARN architecture. As such, signals about governance deterioration or security threats are captured regionally and can be channeled to national authorities for action when appropriate.⁴⁹

Operational early warning is supported by security partners such as the EU, UNODC, and other bilateral intelligence cooperations, that provide threat assessments and operational alerts to Mauritanian forces. These intelligence flows function as practical early warning for imminent security incidents.

Mauritania's early-warning ecosystem appears **fragmented but is highly functional** – strong on environmental/food security EWS and on operational security intelligence, weaker on an institutionalized, inclusive national political EWS that connects socioeconomic indicators, local grievances and formal mediation channels.

UN support

For many years, UNDP has supported efforts to strengthen governance, resilience and conflict prevention across Mauritania. Their engagement has included support to early-warning and early-action systems related to climate, food security and livelihoods, efforts to build local institutional capacity in remote and marginalized areas, and programming aimed at reducing the drivers of conflict such as resource-based tensions, environmental shocks and social exclusion. By integrating humanitarian, development and peacebuilding tools, UNDP helps to fill governance and state-presence gaps (especially in remote desert regions), foster local mediation and community cohesion mechanisms, and promote more inclusive and resilient social systems. Its support to prevention has been specifically enhanced through the peacebuilding fund programming with prevention projects implemented in Bassikounou; in Hodh El Chargui where a borderland project reinforces women and youth engagement in prevention; in Trarza, Hodh El Gharbi, Hodh El Chargui and Guidimakha to fight against violent extremism etc.

⁴⁸ ReliefWeb, Mauritanie: *Système d'Alerte Précoce Lié aux Catastrophes – Moughataa de Bassikounou et d'Adel Bagrou. Tableau de bord #17* (Mars – Avril 2024), https://reliefweb.int/report/mauritania/mauritanie-systeme-dalerte-precoce-lie-aux-catastrophes-moughataa-de-bassikounou-et-dadel-bagrou-tableau-de-bord-17-mars-avril-2024?utm_

⁴⁹ African Union, *Alerte précoce et suivi de la gouvernance*, https://www.aupaps.org/fr/page/200-early-warning?utm_ October 2025.

Impact: Evidence of success

An “island of stability” in a volatile region: Mauritania has not suffered a large-scale jihadist attack on its soil since about 2011. This is evidence of success. While the absence of attacks does not necessarily equate to absence of jihadist activity, keeping jihadist violence off Mauritanian territory for more than a decade in the heart of a highly volatile Sahel region (where Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have faced recurrent, lethal insurgencies), shows effective prevention. It is the single most visible outcome measure of state success.

Effective remote-area presence – the Méhariste / Meharist camel patrol model: Mauritania maintains desert-adapted mobile units (Méharistes/Meharist units) – camel-mounted or highly mobile patrols – that regularly operate across remote border areas. These units are a deliberate tool to provide presence, gather intelligence, and engage communities in places where standard policing cannot reach. Providing persistent, culturally and geographically adapted presence reduces ungoverned spaces (where smugglers or militants hide), builds local trust through contact and service provision, and creates an early-detection capability. That combination of presence + intelligence has proven to be a classic prevention win in desert contexts.

Anticipatory humanitarian action and early-action protocols: The existing Early Action Protocols (EAPs) for drought led to effective action in advance of the 2020 locust threat with surveying, community sensitization and pre-positioned inputs. This Anticipatory action prevented livelihood collapse (crop failure, livestock loss) in that period. While coverage remains uneven, anticipatory actions and early action protocols such as the pastoral codes have regularly contributed to preventing or deescalating tensions in communities linked to natural disasters or competition for access to resources for herds of livestock.

Together, these items make a coherent case. Mauritania’s sustained absence of major jihadist attacks, tailored state presence in remote spaces, and anticipatory humanitarian/development programming, constitute concrete, demonstrable preventative outcomes. Importantly, each item pairs a capability or policy (e.g., Méharistes, EAPs) with an outcome or effect (reduced ungoverned spaces, blunted livelihood shocks etc.), which is the strongest form of evidence for prevention.

Key takeaways of the Mauritania prevention approach and perspectives

Mauritania’s prevention approach is pragmatic and multi-layered: boots on the ground and surveillance at the borders, community-level mediation and service-oriented patrols in the periphery, and donor-backed anticipatory development, humanitarian and migration management. That mix has so far produced relative stability in a volatile region. However, essential gaps exist in the approach as currently implemented. First, for more efficiency and sustainability, Mauritania’s pragmatic prevention approach requires an overall coordination framework with a clear vision articulated at the political level to enhance national ownership. The existing prevention practice also appears to rely heavily on security arrangements and partnerships that could overshadow necessary policy reforms. The slavery legacies and ethno-racial cleavages referred to above continue perpetuating exclusion that drives dissatisfaction among the population. Emphasis on external security assistance (border surveillance, military capacity) risks underserving governance and inclusion reforms that would deliver deeper, sustainable prevention. The deployment and use of the tra-

ditional Meharists in remote areas is undeniably a prevention best practice to extend state presence in remote areas in Sahel like contexts. However, there remains capacity asymmetries in the periphery. Where Meharist or local actors are absent, grievances can fester, and trafficking/arms flows find room to operate.

In 2025, the country has developed its national prevention strategy which builds on the existing prevention approach, turning prevention into policy while at the same time seeking to address gaps in its prevention practice.

The 2025 national strategy for peace consolidation and social cohesion



Political will and leadership

Mauritania's decision to develop a national prevention strategy in 2025 directly reflects its commitment to the *Pact for the Future* adopted at the September 2024 UN Summit, where member states pledged to establish or strengthen national prevention strategies as part of a renewed global prevention agenda. By translating this commitment into concrete national policy, Mauritania positions itself among the early implementers of the Pact's prevention pillar, demonstrating both political will and leadership in operationalizing the UN's call for nationally owned, forward-looking prevention frameworks.



Translating prevention practice into a comprehensive policy framework

Mauritania's new National Strategy for Peace Consolidation and Social Cohesion, articulates a genuinely holistic approach by structuring decades of practice-based prevention into five mutually reinforcing pillars that directly target the country's historical blind spots.

- **Pillar 1**, focused on territorial inclusion, cohesion, and social equity, tackles the long-standing structural drivers of grievance—ethno-racial disparities, uneven state presence, and peripheral marginalization—by bringing services, institutions, and recognition to underserved regions.
- **Pillar 2** complements this by promoting the **economic empowerment of youth and women**, two groups often sidelined from both economic opportunity and decision-making, thereby reducing recruitment vulnerability and strengthening social anchors of peace.
- **Pillar 3** introduces an environmental lens, addressing climate pressures, land degradation, and resource competition that have often been treated as humanitarian rather than conflict-risk issues, despite their role in local tensions.
- **Pillar 4** consolidates and formalizes **conflict-prevention and conflict-management mechanisms**, replacing ad hoc security responses with structured early warning, mediation, and community-level resolution tools—filling a critical gap that had previously depended heavily on informal customary systems.
- **Pillar 5** advances **inclusive and decentralized governance**, recognizing that unequal access to justice, participation, and local decision-making has long undermined trust in the state.

Together, the five pillars create a comprehensive prevention architecture by combining structural reforms, targeted support to vulnerable groups, environmental resilience, institutionalized conflict-management tools, and governance transformation—shifting Mauritania's prevention model from reactive and security-centric to more integrated and equity-driven.

In sum, the new strategy will serve as both a normative and operational reference document, guiding planning in the areas of prevention and peacebuilding. Its central vision is to make development a key driver of prevention, through the long-term structural prevention. In this perspective, all development planning and socioeconomic policymaking will be informed by the orientations set out in the Strategy. Furthermore, the Strategy is expected to be integrated into communal work plans, thereby strengthening the prevention dimension within local development plans.⁵⁰

The development of the Strategy now translates decades of prevention practice into a solid policy framework aligned with the country's national priorities. The government of Mauritania presented its National Strategy for Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion to the Peacebuilding Commission on January 22, 2026.



An inclusive process

The design and development process of the strategy followed an inclusive process supported by the UN in collaboration with the EU and IFIs (WB and AfDB), with the participation of thematic focus groups, sectoral ministries, civil society organizations including those operating at the local level, as well as local and community authorities in different regions of the country. Bilateral consultations were also held with think tanks, and a dedicated meeting on women's empowerment was organized with women's organizations.⁵¹ This inclusive approach enabled the development of a jointly agreed roadmap between the government, civil society, and territorial actors.⁵² The establishment of an institutional mechanism – the Expanded Coordination Group – played a crucial role in monitoring and coordinating the process. This structure facilitated government engagement and ensured strong national leadership.⁵³

Strengths of Mauritania's prevention strategy (what's promising)

- 1. Whole-of-state + territorial logic** – anchoring the strategy in the Ministry of Economic Affairs and development (for budgeting) and establishing a national coordination platform shows political intent to mainstream prevention into budgets and planning. This is an important structural strength for sustainability.
- 2. Development as a prevention leverage** – the National development plan has been the reference document, the milestone for prevention measures. For the government, development should be the leverage of prevention measures.
- 3. Integrated HDP, climate-peace framing** – the explicit integration of climate and resource governance into prevention is context-appropriate for Sahel settings and reduces siloing.
- 4. Community empowerment & inclusion** – formal recognition of local mediators, women, youth and displaced populations as active prevention actors is a positive design feature that supports local legitimacy and reach.
- 5. Clear territorial targeting** – prioritizing specific high-risk geographies allows piloting of integrated models and learning loops for scale.

⁵⁰ UN Peace and Development Advisor.

⁵¹ UN Peace and Development Advisor, August 2025.

⁵² The road was drafted by the government through the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Development. During the national consultation, the roadmap was discussed with civil society and local stakeholders, allowing it to be amended and reshaped.

⁵³ Ibid.

Challenges

1. **Funding uncertainty** – Mauritania continues to rely partly on donor funds for the implementation of its strategy. Some domestic funding should be allocated for its implementation. This could be scaled.
2. **Implementation capacity at sub-national level** – regional wilaya cells and community committees may need staff, training, retention plans, and logistical support.
3. **EWER → early action gap** – without robust, multi-channel reporting platforms and clear, resourced response protocols, early warning could generate unacted signals.
4. **Coordination burdens** – efforts to establish a coordination mechanism building from the existing model including the Government, the UN, EU, CSOs and IFIs, is a positive step. Lessons from other contexts such as Kenya suggest that coordination mechanisms are more efficient when mandates are clear, with streamlined commissions and a national peace fund to coordinate financing. Mauritania's strategy provides for a platform and interministerial committee, which is positive.

Transferable best practices

Mauritania's prevention approach and strategy is a contextually coherent blueprint that articulates prevention around a territorial, multisectoral and operational logic. Despite potential shortfalls (that could be mitigated), the strategy promises to continue delivering on stability in a fragile conflict-prone region. It could potentially lead the way to an African Sahel model for integrated prevention with several best practices.

- **Integrated Security–Community Engagement Model:** Mauritania combines hard security (professionalized units, mobile desert patrols, intelligence coordination) with structured community engagement and dialogue with religious, tribal, and local leaders including women religious leaders.
Why it works: This hybrid approach closes the gap between state security forces and peripheral populations, reducing ungoverned spaces while building trust and encouraging early reporting of risks.
Why it's transferable: Many fragile states struggle with a trust deficit between security forces and communities. Mauritania shows that tailored, culturally grounded engagement—especially through decentralized interlocutors—can significantly improve early warning and local legitimacy in contexts of vast, hard-to-reach territories.
- **Prevention through Territorial Inclusion and Service Expansion:** The strategy's Pillar 1 embeds prevention in improved territorial equity—strengthening state presence, civil registration, services, and social cohesion policies in marginalized regions.
Why it works: Historically excluded groups (Haratin, Afro-Mauritanian communities, remote nomadic populations) experience better access to identity documents, justice, and social programmes, reducing grievances that fuel long-term instability.
Why it's transferable: Many prevention blind spots stem from spatial inequality. Mauritania's focus on territorial inclusion shows that prevention is not just about security—it is about reducing the governance vacuum that allows grievances and extremist messaging to flourish. Countries with similar centre–periphery divides can directly adapt this approach.

- **Institutionalization of Early Action:** Linking Social Protection, Climate Resilience, and Peace: Mauritania integrates climate risk management, livelihoods support, and anticipatory humanitarian action (e.g., drought early action, pastoral conflict mitigation) into its national prevention policy.
Why it works: Environmental shocks have historically escalated into local conflict between herders, farmers, and vulnerable households. Anticipatory responses—before livelihoods collapse—break the cycle linking climate stress to recruitment, displacement, or local violence.
Why it's transferable: Many countries face climate-driven conflict risks but treat environmental issues as separate from peacebuilding. Mauritania's model shows how early warning on drought, desertification, or resource pressure can be integrated into national prevention architecture, making it highly relevant to climate-vulnerable regions.
- **Embedding Prevention in State Policy Through a Whole-of-Government Strategy:** The 2025 strategy consolidates diverse sectoral initiatives—youth empowerment, social protection, environment, security, governance—into one unified prevention framework aligned with UN global commitments.
Why it works: For decades, Mauritania's prevention success was practical but fragmented. A whole-of-government framework creates coherence, accountability, and strategic prioritization across ministries, allowing prevention to shift from ad hoc practice to policy-driven planning.
Why it's transferable: Many states have effective prevention elements but lack an integrated national strategy. Mauritania offers a replicable blueprint for transforming scattered initiatives into a coherent national prevention vision that meets global call like the Pact for the Future and the Twin Resolutions on the 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review.

4. Kenya case study

Evidence for prevention through a national architecture for peace

Introduction and context

Kenya's historic conflict profile is shaped by a mix of **political, ethnic, resource-based, and structural governance tensions** that have evolved over time. Conflict dynamics have moved from colonial land dispossession and secessionist rebellions, through political violence and election crises, to resource-driven conflicts and digital-era polarization.

The country's contemporary peace and conflict landscape has been deeply shaped by the 2007–08 post-election violence, which claimed more than 1,000 lives and displaced hundreds of thousands. That crisis catalyzed fundamental governance reforms, including a robust national peace architecture and a shift from reactive crisis management to proactive prevention. Today, Kenya contends with layered risks—recurring election tensions, localized inter-communal and resource conflicts (often exacerbated by climate stress), and online hate speech and dis/misinformation. At the same time, the country benefits from a devolved governance structure, strong civil society networks, and a sophisticated peace infrastructure.⁵⁴ Notably, international election observer missions—including the Commonwealth, the African Union/COMESA, and the European Union—reported that the 2022 general elections were conducted in a generally peaceful environment compared to previous electoral cycles, despite being politically contested, —an indication of preventive capacities taking root.

Compared with other countries in the Region or in Africa, Kenya is amongst a select few that can showcase a relatively structured peace architecture in design, implementation-and continuous reform drawn from lessons and good practices. The current case study focuses primarily on elements that make the Kenyan peace architecture unique and efficient. Whether it is its decentralized system, multilayered approach, a mature early warning system, or an innovative initiative to voluntarily review the architecture in 2023-2024, the Kenyan peace infrastructure offers a lot of learning opportunities worth exploring.

⁵⁴ The 2010 Constitution of Kenya introduced a major governance reform: devolution. It established 47 counties headed by an elected Governor as opposed to the previous 8 provinces headed by a Provincial Commissioner appointed by the President. The reform fundamentally restructured governance by transferring power, resources, and responsibility from the center to the 47 counties. This was designed to promote equity, inclusion, accountability, and stability, though implementation remains uneven.

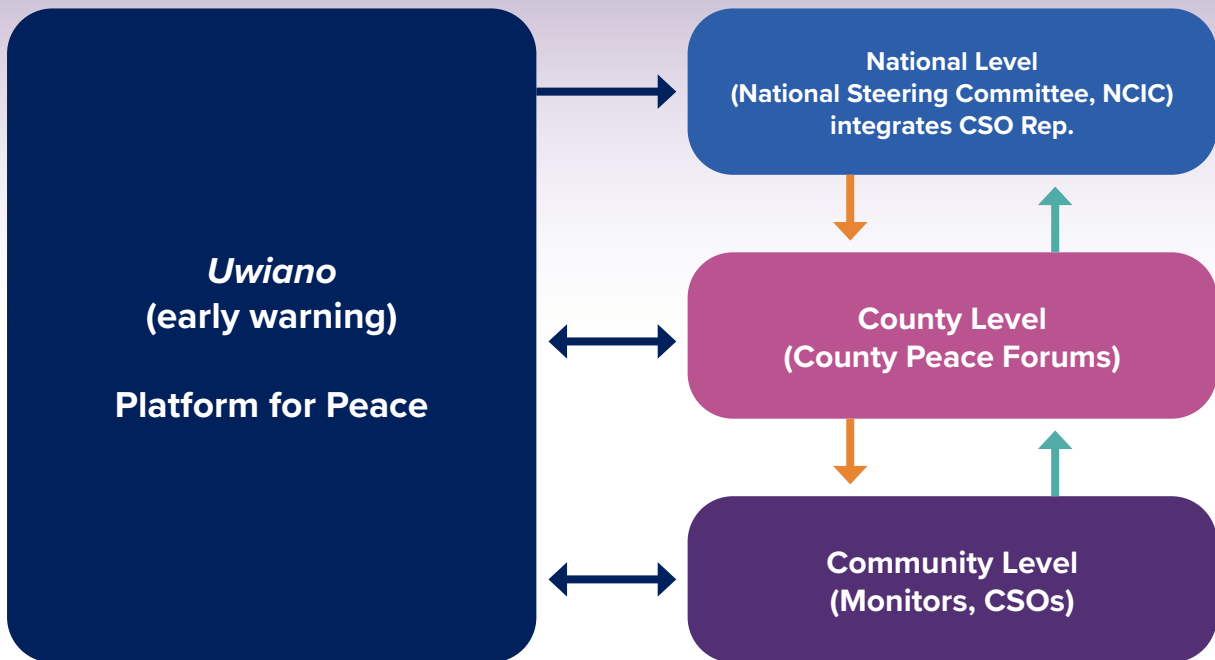
Kenya's architecture for peace

The Kenyan peace architecture is an interconnected system that links national, county, and community-level institutions with civil society and international partners.

The components and structure of the architecture offer an innovative design, where all conflict mechanisms whether at national or local level, formally integrate non-state actors into peacebuilding coordination (civil society, faith-based organizations, private sector, women and youth groups etc..) ensuring checks and balances on conflict management, decisions and initiatives.⁵⁵

At the highest level of the architecture is the National Steering Committee (NSC) on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management, which is positioned within the executive branch of government and serves as the central coordination hub overseeing the national early warning & response system, operationalized through the Uwiano platform, the public-facing rapid-response / incident-reporting mechanism..⁵⁶ It is a flagship state–civil society–UN joint mechanism. The county and community structures (county peace forums, local committees, faith groups, youth and women's groups) feed local data upward and receive policy frameworks and capacity-building support.⁵⁷

Architecture Overview



↑ Information flow upwards ↓ Policy guidance and training opportunities

⁵⁵ Interviews and inputs from Peace and Development team.

⁵⁶ Uwiano in Swahili stands for 'Equity'. The platform is accessible here https://nscpeace.go.ke/108/reports.php?utm_

⁵⁷ See Report on the National Review of Kenya's Peacebuilding Architecture, 2024, p.39.

Kenya's peace architecture is nationally led in design and implementation. Evidence of this lies in the central Government commitment to institutionalize conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms.⁵⁸ This contributes to long-term sustainability and continuity across successive administrations. *Individuals come and go but institutions stay.*

All policies and strategies in the peace sector in Kenya are developed through a bottom-up process that involves communities, CSOs, the media, the private sector, and academic institutions. There is a public participation law that ensures this happens. Prior to the legalization of public participation, inclusive approaches have been normalized practice. There are multi-sectoral forums through which consultations and formulation work is done before laws are taken up by the relevant government agency to lead the legislative process and dissemination.⁵⁹

The strategic takeaway from the Kenya architecture is the deliberate and active demonstration of political engagement at making all matters peace central to Governance. In line with the Secretary-General's New Agenda for peace, the architecture, broad in design ensures a participation and role for all societal components as well as international partners. The youth and women play a particularly central role at community level and in the early warning system.

■ UN support

The United Nations and UNDP contributions to the Kenya peace architecture have been catalytic. In terms of institutional support, UNDP facilitated the creation of the early warning system at the NSC, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) and the Uwiano Platform for Peace, embedding prevention mechanisms within state structures. The UN and UNDP in particular, also played a key role during election-period prevention, including through specific projects and engagement with civil society on hate speech monitoring, digital risk analysis, crisis mapping during electoral cycles and insider mediation particularly in 2010, 2013, 2017, and 2022.⁶⁰ UN's support was also pivotal in facilitating the 2024 peacebuilding architecture review.

■ Strengths of the Kenyan peace architecture

a. A comprehensive design

The Kenya peace architecture relies on a comprehensive array of policies, laws and mechanisms for addressing different types of conflicts ranging from violent extremism to land conflicts, electoral violence or hate speech.

The 2010 Constitution of Kenya is by itself a peacebuilding document. It was born out of the 2007–2008 post-election crisis which exposed deep ethnic, political, and socio-economic grievances linked to cen-

58 Interviews with UN Country Office staff and with Civil Society representatives, August and September 2025.

59 Interview and inputs from Peace and Development team.

60 Documentary research and interviews with national stakeholders, particularly CSO reveal an acknowledgement of the UN and UNDP support to the establishment of the Kenyan peace architecture. Often, UNDP is systematically referenced when talking about UN support. In some conversations, the 'UN support' is also limited to peacebuilding fund projects. Overall, the description of UN/UNDP support was rather broad.

tralized power, land injustice, corruption, and exclusion. Some of the reforms in the Constitution are an attempt to address root causes of conflict and establish a new social contract between the Government and citizens. Through the creation of the 47 counties, it established more decentralized structures for inclusion, accountability, and equitable resource-sharing, reducing zero-sum competition for central power. It provided mechanisms for preventing and managing conflict such as the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC). In sum, the Constitution symbolizes a new beginning after crisis, embedding peace, justice, and cohesion into the governance framework. By embedding prevention in constitutional values (equity, participation, cohesion), the country's leadership signaled that prevention is a core political priority, not a side agenda.

In addition to the Constitution, other policies include the National Peace Policy, the National Cohesion and integration Act of 2008 which outlaws hate speech, the National Strategy to counter Violent Extremism and the National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security.

National policies are complemented by several international and regional treaties. Kenya is signatory to multiple international treaties and regional agreements on peace and security, which have been implemented domestically through national policies, state institutions and coordination mechanisms. For instance, the Kenya National Focal Point on small arms and light weapons (KNFP) was established in 2002 to fulfil Kenya's obligations under the Nairobi Protocol, an agreement between 11 countries in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa region to prevent, control and reduce the threat of small arms and light weapons. In 2016, it established the National Committee on the Prevention of Genocide, War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity and All Forms of Discrimination following ratification of the ICGLR Pact on Peace, Security and Stability in the Great Lakes region.⁶¹

Developing multiple policy frameworks for different conflict types is itself strong evidence of a prevention approach. Policy frameworks formalize prevention efforts into law, institutions, and programs rather than ad-hoc measures. Prevention starts with diagnosing risks early. Kenya has acknowledged that conflict is multidimensional. Election violence, hate speech, land disputes, resource competition, and violent extremism have different causes and dynamics even if some causes can overlap. Developing **separate policy frameworks** for each, means the state is not treating conflict as a single, generic problem, but is **anticipating and targeting specific drivers** before they escalate. The various policies also allow for tailored interventions as different conflicts require different tools.

b. A highly decentralized system deeply rooted in the communities

The **47 counties** are the **main subnational units** headed by an elected County Governor. At the base of the decentralized system are the county peace forums, county peace monitors, Chiefs/elders, faith/youth/women networks, community policing, neighborhood watch, CSOs, etc. While the various policies and instruments of the peace architecture are developed through an inclusive and consultative approach by the Ministry of Interior in charge of Peace and Security, Counties which are at the core level of devolved governance hold a significant power and autonomy over conflict prevention and management.

County governments have used national peace policies to establish county peace directorates and formulate county peace policies.⁶² These county frameworks and NSC guidance set out the formal role of county

61 Inputs and interviews with the Peace and Development team, August, September 2025.

62 Interview with UN staff in Kenya and Civil Society Representatives.

peace forums and local committees to collect, validate and respond to incidents before escalation. County forums and trained local mediators are empowered to act immediately (first-responder mediation). This practice relies on protocols for local triage and response.⁶³

The effectiveness of the decentralized system relies on two key parameters:

1. The decentralized **structures exist at county and community levels (formal county forums, local committees, community monitors) and are institutionalized.**⁶⁴
2. Local peace monitors, **civil-society partners and local volunteers are fully integrated** into the national early warning system ensuring a direct link between local action and national policy discussions.⁶⁵

The Kenyan peace architecture started at the local level and grew incrementally into a national full-fledged system. The strong link between local action and national level policy ensures complementarities between Government perspective and community perspective. The decentralised design reduces single-point failure, despite gaps in remote or under-resourced areas. While politics and perceptions can sometimes hinder rapid response at local level, the decentralized approach is largely recognized and effective throughout the country.⁶⁶

At present, the sustainability and funding sources of the decentralized structures rely partly on national level allocations and on donor (mostly UN) support which has been significant in building county and community capacity. While some feel that long term domestic financing of County level systems should be increased, several stakeholders, particularly within the civil society argue that the level of commitment by local actors compensate for the financing gap.⁶⁷

This particular feature of the Kenya peace architecture, the decentralized approach ensuring linkages between local level action and national policies speak to a central element of the governance aspect of prevention. By rooting peacebuilding at county and community levels, the state shows that prevention is not an external imposition but part of **Kenya's governance fabric.**

c. A multilayered approach

Available documentation and evaluations show that Kenya deliberately designed a **multilayered peace architecture** that embeds **multiple safety nets:** legal/institutional anchors at the national level (NSC, NCIC), a resilient platform/operational layer that aggregates redundant reporting channels (the Uwiano early warning platform and NCEWERS), county-level forums and community monitors that act as first responders, and cross-cutting inclusion and partner support (UNDP/PBF) that add capacity and alternative channels. Those features explain why the Kenyan peace architecture can be described as layered, networked and resilient.

63 Early Warning and Early Response Framework for Countering Violent Extremism in Mombassa County, <https://collabowid.org>

64 <https://collabowid.org>

65 See Uwiano Early Warning Platform and National Steering Committee <https://nscpeace.go.ke>

66 Perceptions of bias in national institutions or security forces can limit community willingness to report or accept escalations. See end-term evaluation report of the Project on Enhancing Early Warning and Prevention to Counter Hate Speech and Incitement Ahead of the 2022 Elections in Kenya http://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org/peacebuilding/files/documents/pdf_irf_453_enhancing_early_warning_prevention_to.pdf?utm.

67 Interviews with Civil society, including Inter-religious Council of Kenya, Inter-Research Council, PeaceNET, September 2025.

The National / policy layer is the NSC, which provides strategic guidance and a top-level legal/coordination safety net characterized by a single national convenor that can marshal ministries, security services and partners when risks escalate.⁶⁸

The operational layer is the national early warning platform – Uwiano (redundant reporting and rapid response), designed as a state–civil society–UN joint mechanism that aggregates crowd-sourced incident reporting, social/media monitoring and inputs from community monitors and county forums. The social media monitors and community channels act in parallel so that reporting is not dependent on a single medium – a classic redundancy/safety net against single-point failures (e.g., power, network or censorship).⁶⁹

The sub-national layers are the county peace forums and local committees, that provide a first-responder safety net that can defuse tensions locally.

The Community layer composed of peace monitors, faith groups, youth & women networks can verify incidents and undertake mediation. They feed the county forums and national early warning system. Even if national systems are offline, local actors can act and document events. This creates distributed situational awareness and immediate mitigation capacity.⁷⁰

In addition, there are **cross-cutting safety nets** in terms of legal mandate, inclusion policies, and support provided by international partners. The National Cohesion & Integration Commission-NCIC has a legal mandate to investigate hate speech and incitement and works with Uwiano/NSC on rapid response to dangerous narratives. That legal/mandated function is a policy safety net against inflammatory messaging.⁷¹

Kenya's **second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2020–2024)**, embeds Women, Peace and Security objectives across the architecture – increasing the inclusion of women in monitoring, mediation and decision mechanisms. Gendered participation strengthens resilience because women's networks often provide separate reporting/mediation channels and different dispute-resolution capacities (i.e., additional safety nets).⁷²

International partners (UNDP, UNWOMEN, DPPA/PBF, donors) provide technical, financial and convening support (training monitors, funding SMS platforms, helping with data analysis,). Partner support functions as an external safety net (backup funding, technical capacity, independent verification).

Clearly, Kenya's peace architecture operates with safety nets at all levels. A conflict resolution trajectory usually starts at the local level. If the conflict cannot be resolved at that level, it is then escalated. As a particular issue goes up the ladder of the peace architecture, it forces stakeholders to consider the root causes of the problem and other components come in (security, economic dimension, religious approach etc.) to ensure that a sustainable resolution is found.

68 <https://nscpeace.go.ke>

69 See PBF project document on Enhancing Early Warning and Prevention to counter Hate Speech and Incitement Ahead of the 2022 Elections in Kenya, <https://mptf.undp.org/project/00130048>.

70 See Report on Engendering Conflict Early Warning and Early Response Mechanism in Kenya, <https://files.acquia.undp.org/public/migration/ke/Engendering-CEWERS-in-Kenya.pdf>

71 The NCIC mandate and public actions are documented on the Commission's site and parliamentary reports. https://cohesion.go.ke/index.php/media-center/press-releases-speeches/122-ncic-response-on-hate-speech-charges?utm_

72 See the National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security here: https://www.un.org/shestandsforpeace/sites/www.un.org/shestandsforpeace/files/kenya-2nd-1325-national-action-plan-knapii-2020-2024.pdf?utm_

Kenya's multilayered prevention system reflects **strong national ownership and a credible degree of political will**. While implementation is uneven, the existence and evolution of these multiple layers show that prevention is a **deliberate national choice**, not just donor driven.

d. Mature early warning/early response systems

The Secretary-General's *New Agenda for Peace* situates early warning and early action as central to conflict prevention. It states the need to move beyond reacting to crises toward anticipating threats and underscores that Member States should build national infrastructures for prevention, which include early warning systems, embedded at national level.⁷³ The Kenyan peace architecture illustrates this thinking.

The architecture operates a **mature early-warning / early-response (EWER) system** which rests on five key features.

The first is the institutionalization of the early warning, early response system. The **NSC** is the formal, national coordination hub for peacebuilding and early warning. This institutionalization, with a clear legal mandate reduces the "single-project" risk and enables sustained budgets, inter-ministerial buy-in, formal escalation channels and—critically—political ownership.

The second is an operational multi-channel reporting/triage platform (Uwiano + NCEWERS), which aggregates crowdsourced SMS reports, social/media monitoring and gender sensitive reporting from community peace monitors and county forums. In addition, the NCIC has recruited cohesion monitors across counties who feed the EWER system. The multiple, redundant reporting channels – in-person monitors, SMS, social media and formal county reports – are a hallmark of mature EWER because they prevent single-point failure and increase signal fidelity. Kenya's system explicitly designed these redundancies.

The third element is a continuous commitment to the training of community monitors, the inclusion of women monitors, and the development of gender-sensitive protocols. The training includes iterative learning and experiments with digital/AI augmentation. The gendered reporting channel and capacity building of those who are feeding the EWER system with data, demonstrate sophistication, as mature systems know where "blind spots" are and mitigate them through affirmative design.⁷⁴

The fourth element is donor accompaniment and independent evaluations of performance. The UN and particularly UNDP has been a constant and reliable support of the Kenyan EWER system designed as a joint Government/UN/Civil Society platform. The Donor engagement and formal evaluations create external accountability, resources for scale, and iterative improvements based on lessons learned.

Lastly, the fifth and perhaps the most important aspect of the system is that stakeholders in charge of feeding information on warnings and those in charge of the response, including mediation experts, police and security representatives are integrated in the same platform, thus facilitating early response.

There are empirical indicators of the performance of the Kenyan EWER system, notably during multiple national elections and referendums. The platform's situation-room reports and the PBF evaluation cite con-

⁷³ <https://dppa.dfs.un.org/en/a-new-agenda-for-peace?utm>.

⁷⁴ <https://files.acquia.undp.org/public/migration/ke/Engendering-CEWERS-in-Kenya.pdf>

crete instances where community alerts triggered mediation or county interventions.⁷⁵ During the lead-up to and conduct of Kenya's 2022 elections, community-based early warning mechanisms linked to the EWER system processed reports from 106 deployed election and cohesion monitors across sub-counties, which were channeled through three situation rooms to referral units for follow-up action. A total of 21 conflict incidents were "picked up" by these mechanisms, and 10 received direct rapid responses, ranging from local mediation to preventive measures.⁷⁶ Also, in the months leading up to the 2022 general elections, community monitors transmitted **over 668 alerts to the EWER system**. Those data were used to inform tailored peacebuilding and preventive actions such as youth engagement and sensitization in areas at risk of election-related violence.⁷⁷

While some noted that there was room for improvement as Kenya's early warning system tends to work majorly during electoral cycles, the structure, its functioning and results are quite encouraging.

e. Budgetary allocation

In many contexts, dedicated funding towards conflict prevention isn't always systematic. The United Nations also faces challenges in mobilizing funds for peacebuilding and prevention. In 2023, the UN **Peacebuilding Fund (PBF)** recorded a sharp decline in voluntary contributions. Contributions were about **USD 132 million**, far below the **USD 330 million** target for that year. The Fund approved some **USD 202 millions** of programmes in 2023 but reached its **lowest liquidity level since inception**.⁷⁸

The Secretary-General's report, **A New Agenda for Peace** also emphasized how limited funding, **constrains implementation at scale** and are a barrier to implementing prevention strategies.⁷⁹

It is then widely accepted that dedicated funding towards prevention contributes to success. The case of Kenya tells an interesting story. While funds are still dedicated in priority to security aspects of conflict management i.e. policing etc., the country is making a conscious effort to increase funding to support its peace architecture. The 2023-2024 Review of the Kenya Peace Architecture made a specific recommendation for more predictable funding.

Dedicated funding is often perceived as a sign of national ownership and sustainability. In the case of Kenya, many interlocutors argued that injecting a lot of money in the peace sector is not necessarily a sign of commitment. It was felt that Kenya chose the institutionalization route, hence the vast array of policies and institutions also seen as a sign of sustainability, more so than funding.

75 <http://nscpeace.go.ke>

76 INTERPEACE, Preventing electoral violence through early warning and rapid response in Kenya, October 2022, https://www.interpeace.org/2022/10/preventing-electoral-violence-through-early-warning-and-rapid-response-in-kenya/?utm_

77 REINVENT, Peacebuilding and Election Violence Reduction, https://reinvent-kenya.com/enhancing-election-security/?utm_

78 <https://dppa.medium.com/peacebuilding-fund-provides-crucial-support-but-needs-more-contributions-annual-report-finds-858ccfb-7ba71>

79 https://dppa.un.org/en/with-quarter-of-world-directly-affected-violent-conflict-surge-investment-prevention-and?utm_

f. Continuous review of the peace architecture

Of all features, the one that stands out is the strong political leadership and commitment by national stakeholders towards the peace architecture. In **2023**, Kenya began a formal review of its national peacebuilding architecture. This was spearheaded by the **National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management** and supported by an Independent Panel of Advisors (IPA), UNDP, civil society, youth, women, governors, private sector etc.⁸⁰

The review involved broad consultations: fieldwork in all counties, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, thematic roundtables, surveys, etc. It sought to re-examine the mandates and positioning of Kenya's formal and informal institutions, capacities and processes, and to assess the degree to which the architecture is still fit for purpose to holistically address recurrent and emerging challenges to peace, social cohesion, security, and to identify opportunities to promote greater national ownership. The Ministry of Interior and National Administration of Kenya presented the review and its key recommendations at a March 2024 Ambassadorial meeting of the peacebuilding Commission in New York.

The Initiative of the review is unique in the African / Global Peacebuilding Landscape. Few countries have conducted a so comprehensive peace architecture review that is both nationally owned and presented to the PBC. Kenya seems among the front-runners. The combination of institutional reform, anticipatory foresight, inclusion, and linking to local level peacebuilders gives a deeper level of maturity to the architecture. It models how to integrate peacebuilding into national governance systems, not just crisis response.

Impact: evidence of success

Empirical evidence indicates Kenya's peace architecture has delivered results.

- **Elections:** The 2022 general elections were markedly less violent than 2007 or 2013, with international observers crediting preventive systems like UWIANO, NCEWERS, and NCIC monitoring.⁸¹
- **Early Warning and Response system** has repeatedly been cited for mitigating tensions, including during the 2010 referendum and subsequent polls.
- **Digital prevention:** NCIC's monitoring of online hate speech, supported by UNDP, has resulted in rapid referrals and pre-emptive messaging campaigns.
- **Peace dividends:** except for episodes of electoral violence, Kenya has been a largely peaceful country despite being in a region where several countries are experiencing instabilities (Somalia...). Over the past decade, Kenya has **improved in three out of four** main categories of governance, namely *participation, rights & inclusion, foundations for economic opportunity and human development*.⁸²

While attribution is complex, the convergence of independent observer reports, government assessments, and stakeholder consultations demonstrates tangible prevention dividends.

⁸⁰ https://www.ipinst.org/2024/03/kenyas-national-peacebuilding-and-prevention-strategy?utm_

⁸¹ EU Electoral Observer mission reports, 2022.

⁸² Kenya ranked 13th in 2022 Ibrahim Index of African Governance, Daily Nation, https://nation.africa/kenya/news/kenya-ranked-13th-in-2022-ibrahim-index-of-african-governance-4099500?utm_

■ Challenges

Despite having many qualities and strengths, the Kenyan peace architecture presented some challenges. These were already identified by the 2023-2024 Independent Review which made several recommendations.⁸³

The multiplicity of policies and institutions, while positive in essence as it ensures that no conflict blind spot is left uncovered, has created a heavy structure which calls for more robust coordination. The Independent review recommended the establishment of a **National Peacebuilding Commission and Peacebuilding Fund** to streamline mandates and financing. While this recommendation was not taken forward as is, the notion of predictable funding would help establish a clear stream of work and division of labor between the various institutions.⁸⁴

Efforts to deepen investment in insider mediation, notably strengthening the **women's mediation networks and youth-led peace structures** was also flagged as a priority. While women and youth are fully integrated in the current architecture, ensuring that youth can have leadership roles in some of the peace structures at national level would further reinforce their involvement and sense of accountability.

Adapting to new technologies emerged as another key priority. Stakeholders noted that while there was still room for the traditional 'under the tree dialogue' for conflict prevention and resolution, several discussions and disputes related to peace and security are now taking place on digital platforms. Peace processes should also invest the virtual world. The traditional peace dialogues is nowadays less appealing to part of the youth.

Finally, developing **tools to understand and adequately address emerging conflicts** related to climate change is essential. At the community level where these conflicts emerge, elders and traditional chiefs who are often the first responders are not necessarily equipped to handle these as opposed to land conflict for instance for which many have decades of experience.

83 Report on the National Review of Kenya's Peacebuilding Architecture, 2024, pages 4-6 and 40 to 45.

84 UN and CSO stakeholders interviewed indicate that this recommendation is yet to be implemented.

■ Transferrable best practices

The Kenyan experience offers several best practices that can be documented and turned into learning opportunities or examples for other contexts. In fact, Countries like Cote d'Ivoire or South Sudan are being inspired by the Kenyan national peace architecture. There was a consensus amongst stakeholders on the transferable best practices below.

- **Early Warning/integrated platforms:** The Kenyan national early warning system has the capacity to look at all conflicts throughout the country. The UWIANO platform for peace demonstrates how state, UN, and civil society can jointly operate a nationally branded prevention system. It also illustrates how multi-channel early warning can link grassroots to national decision-makers.
Why it works: The system combines legitimacy (national branding and state ownership) with inclusivity (civil society and community monitors), enabling timely detection of tensions and coordinated early response. Its multi-channel design—formal reporting, crowdsourcing, and institutional analysis—creates redundancy and resilience, reducing the risk of blind spots.
Why it's transferable: Many countries possess fragmented early-warning mechanisms that operate in silos. Kenya demonstrates how integrated, nationally branded platforms can align state and non-state actors while maintaining trust and credibility. This model is particularly relevant for contexts seeking to institutionalize early warning without over-centralization.
- **Digital monitoring and response:** Institutionalized online hate-speech monitoring can be replicated in other contexts facing digital polarization.
Why it works: By treating digital spaces as legitimate conflict arenas, Kenya addresses polarization before it translates into physical violence. Early detection enables preventive engagement rather than reactive enforcement, preserving civic space while reducing escalation risks.
Why it's transferable: As digital polarization increasingly shapes conflict dynamics worldwide, Kenya offers a replicable model for institutionalizing online prevention within existing legal and governance frameworks—especially for countries facing election-related disinformation and identity-based mobilization.
- **Checks and Balances Through Structured Inclusion of Non-State Actors:** Kenya's peace architecture deliberately embeds civil society, faith-based organizations, and community representatives at all levels—from national steering committees to county peace forums. These actors are not merely consulted but actively participate in analysis, decision-making, and response planning.
Why it works: This inclusive design enhances legitimacy, transparency, and accountability while preventing the monopolization of prevention by state actors. It also improves the quality of analysis by integrating local knowledge and diverse perspectives.
Why it's transferable: In many contexts, prevention institutions suffer from trust deficits or politicization. Kenya illustrates how formalized inclusion of non-state actors can function as an internal accountability mechanism, strengthening credibility without undermining state leadership.

- Managing electoral violence through institutionalized prevention:** the Kenyan peace architecture has now been successfully tested since its inception and shown incremental success in the management of electoral violence. Elections have become increasingly better managed since the 2013 elections.

Why it works: Prevention is not treated as an ad hoc electoral add-on but as a standing institutional function. Continuous learning across election cycles has refined response mechanisms, improved coordination, and reduced violence intensity over time.

Why it's transferable: Many countries experience cyclical electoral violence without institutional memory or learning. Kenya shows how embedding election prevention into permanent peace structures can transform elections from high-risk events into managed political processes.
- Professionalization of the Peacebuilding Ecosystem:** CSOs representatives are highly educated and have the capacity to undertake solid analysis of conflict dynamics. They are regarded with respect which enhances their credibility with the Government.

Why it works: Technical competence enhances trust, improves the quality of prevention inputs, and allows civil society to engage the state as a partner rather than an adversary. This professional standing strengthens the overall effectiveness of the architecture.

Why it's transferable: Prevention systems are only as strong as the actors that sustain them. Kenya demonstrates the value of investing in skills, standards, and institutional relationships—lessons applicable to any context seeking to build durable peace infrastructures.
- Inclusion agendas mainstreamed in peacebuilding:** Integrating WPS and YPS frameworks ensure structural entry points for marginalized groups.

Why it works: Inclusive participation improves early warning accuracy, broadens mediation capacity, and addresses structural exclusion that often underpins conflict. It also enhances the legitimacy and sustainability of prevention outcomes.

Why it's transferable: Many prevention frameworks treat inclusion as symbolic rather than structural. Kenya demonstrates how formal entry points for women and youth can be embedded in institutional design, offering a model for translating global normative agendas into operational prevention practice.

5. Prevention results

The experiences of Norway, Kenya, and Mauritania illustrate how prevention architectures can produce demonstrable gains across very different conflict environments—from a highly stable democracy to countries facing cyclical or regionally driven instability. Despite the contrast in contexts, each case shows how tailored preventive systems—whether focused on violent extremism, electoral violence, or territorial security—can yield measurable outcomes when combined with strong institutional mandates and coordination mechanisms.



Norway operates in the context of a stability and strong state institutions with low levels of violent extremism. Prevention is forward-looking and oriented toward managing emerging risks—particularly radicalization—rather than responding to active conflict. Its prevention approach has produced tangible results. Its National Counterterrorism strategy has increased awareness across ministries, ensuring prevention receives attention even in a context where extremist activity is low. Dedicated resources for individual case management and deradicalization allows tailored interventions, long before individuals engage in criminal activity—offering a cost-effective, humane, and institutionally integrated preventive model. Ultimately, Norway exemplifies how strong democratic institutions can internalize prevention as part of routine governance, ensuring vigilance and long-term risk reduction.



Kenya has witnessed low to moderate levels of conflict with periodic spikes, especially during electoral cycles. Despite being situated in a volatile region, Kenya has built a relatively robust peace infrastructure to prevent and mitigate election-related, intercommunal, and online incitement-related violence. This is a particularly compelling example of prevention that is embedded at the highest levels of government, while remaining highly inclusive and grounded in community-level mechanisms, with clear and demonstrable results, including around electoral violence prevention. Evidence of the success of Kenya's peace architecture was collectively (by national and international observers) acknowledged during the 2022 electoral period when violence was significantly mitigated. The country's early warning system has also demonstrated tangible results, showing functional linkages between detection and rapid response for different types of conflicts including inter-communal, prevention of hate speech, elections related tensions etc. Digital prevention, especially the NCIC's online hate-speech monitoring, has allowed pre-emptive messaging and timely referrals that temper incitement. Governance indicators have improved over the past decade, suggesting that consistent prevention contributes to a wider environment of stability, even as the region experiences persistent insecurity. Overall, Kenya's architecture shows how multi-actor, multi-level prevention—linking civil society, government, and digital monitoring—can significantly reduce violence.



Mauritania sits in a highly unstable regional neighborhood (the Sahel) marked by violent extremism, trafficking networks, and resource-based tensions. Although the past decade has been marked by relative stability, the external threat environment is severe, requiring prevention systems that integrate security, territorial presence, and anticipatory governance. While its 2025 national prevention

strategy remains largely untested, its prevention practice has delivered some of the most visible outcomes among Sahelian states. No major jihadist attack since 2011—a remarkable achievement given the turmoil in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso—stands as the most concrete indicator of effective prevention. The Remote-area presence via Meharist (Méhariste) patrols reduces ungoverned spaces, builds trust with border populations, and provides real-time intelligence. This model is a culturally adapted form of prevention that combines deterrence, community engagement, and early warning in hard-to-reach areas. Anticipatory humanitarian action and Early Action Protocols have prevented livelihood shocks, as seen during the 2020 locust threat. Such measures reduce the risk of resource-related conflicts and strengthen community resilience. Mauritania’s approach shows how combining territorial governance, community-linked security measures, and anticipatory development action can yield strong preventive effects even in a high-threat region.

Despite their distinct environments, several common features underpin success across the three countries:

- 1. Clear institutional mandates:** Each country anchors prevention in defined structures Kenya’s peace architecture, Mauritania’s Meharist units and early action protocols, Norway’s CT strategy and inter-agency coordination.
- 2. Early warning linked to response:** Kenya operationalizes this through its NCEWERS; Mauritania achieves it through persistent border presence and intelligence; Norway uses individualized monitoring and case management.
- 3. Prevention tailored to context:** Norway’s efforts focus on radicalization and institutional coordination. Kenya’s mechanisms respond to electoral cycles, community tensions, and online incitement. Mauritania integrates security presence with livelihood-focused anticipatory action across vast desert terrain.

Taken together, these cases show that prevention—when institutionalized, well-coordinated, and context-specific—can produce tangible and measurable results across radically different environments. Whether in the form of reduced electoral violence, the absence of major extremist attacks, or a system for early intervention against radicalization, prevention architectures work best when grounded in sustained political commitment, adapted operational mechanisms, and strong cross-sector collaboration.

Conclusion

Measuring the impact of conflict prevention remains inherently difficult, even when prevention efforts are robust or widely acknowledged. At the core of the challenge is the **paradox of prevention**: when it succeeds, “nothing happens,” and the absence of violence is not easily attributable to any specific set of actions. Unlike post-conflict recovery—where changes can be observed, counted and linked to concrete actions—prevention operates in a world of *counterfactuals*: What would have happened without the intervention?

Despite this inherent difficulty, evidence shows that having a **structured preventive framework** such as a peace architecture, a prevention strategy, or early-warning mechanism makes it significantly easier to document results. These frameworks provide an institutional backbone that allows analysts to move from abstract claims about “stability” to concrete, observable indicators.

First, prevention frameworks **formalize roles, responsibilities, and procedures**, which in turn generate traceable actions: alerts issued, responses deployed, mediations conducted, risks mitigated, or campaigns launched. This creates a paper trail that makes it possible to assess whether preventive mechanisms were activated, how they operated, and what outcomes followed. Even if attribution remains difficult, contribution becomes visible.

Second, these architectures produce **regular data flows**—situation reports, monitoring dashboards, community feedback loops, or cross-agency coordination records—that allow practitioners to track trends over time. This transforms prevention from an ad-hoc, invisible process into one that produces measurable signals of whether risks are rising or declining, and how preventive actions may be influencing those dynamics.

Third, structured frameworks enable **comparability across episodes**, particularly in recurring stress points such as elections, drought cycles, or extremist recruitment spikes. When mechanisms are consistently deployed—early warning systems, inter-agency task forces, community dialogues—it becomes easier to compare outcomes across years and to identify patterns that suggest preventive impact.

Finally, prevention strategies and peace architectures facilitate **external validation**. Observers, researchers, and partner institutions can examine the system’s functioning, evaluate specific tools, and highlight areas of improvement. This opens the door to more credible assessments of what worked, what did not, and why.

In short, while the counterfactual nature of prevention will always pose methodological challenges, structured frameworks make the invisible more visible. They create the conditions for documenting success or failure, for learning, and ultimately for making prevention a tangible and accountable part of national and local governance.

What this study has also shown is that conflict prevention is a universal imperative and not a Global South Agenda. **No country is immune to destabilizing risks**. In developed countries, the drivers of unrest or violence may be less visible—such as radicalization, polarization, disinformation, or transnational threats—but they can still erode social cohesion, institutional trust, and public safety. The rise of violent extremism in many OECD states, periodic spikes in social unrest, and the political shockwaves produced by misinformation illustrate that even high-capacity countries benefit from early detection, targeted mitigation, and coordinated preventive action. **Prevention takes different forms depending on context**, but the underlying logic is universal. In countries with high institutional capacity, prevention tends to focus on risks that emerge “upstream”. In developing or unstable environments, prevention is more often oriented toward immediate triggers—including territorial insecurity, competition over resources, or electoral tensions. What varies is not the need for prevention, but the configuration of tools and institutions required.

Prevention is cost-effective regardless of a country’s wealth or stability. Developed countries invest in prevention (e.g., deradicalization programs, community policing, digital monitoring systems) because intervening early reduces long-term social, political, and financial costs. Similarly, for fragile states, preventing escalation—whether through local peace infrastructures, early warning systems, or anticipatory action—avoids the far greater cost of responding to full-blown crises. The return on investment is universal: it is always cheaper to prevent than to rebuild.

The drivers of conflict are increasingly transnational, making prevention a shared responsibility. Climate-related shocks, misinformation campaigns, violent extremism, and irregular migration flows affect states across development levels. No country can insulate itself from these pressures. Prevention therefore becomes a common global public good, requiring cooperation across borders rather than a one-sided agenda aimed at the Global South.

Finally, treating prevention as a Global South issue risks overlooking vulnerabilities in stable societies and perpetuating a false narrative that conflict or fragility is a characteristic of specific regions rather than a potential trajectory for any society. It also underestimates the innovations emerging from high-capacity countries—such as sophisticated deradicalization systems or cross-government preventive strategies—which provide valuable lessons in various contexts. Similarly, good practices originating from the global south have the potential to be equally instructive across countries. Innovations in prevention (e.g. architectures for peace, management of linguistic and ethnic diversity, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms) emerge regularly in developing countries and these present significant learning opportunities for countries in the global north. Conflict prevention is not a policy reserved for unstable or developing states. It is a universal governance function that helps all countries—whether developed countries or fragile contexts—anticipate risks, strengthen resilience, and reduce the likelihood of violence. When viewed through this lens, prevention emerges not as a Global South concern but as a core pillar of modern statecraft that every society must adapt to its own realities.

In short, in an era of multiplying risks and declining global consensus, prevention is both the most cost-effective and the most legitimate strategy for protecting peace, human dignity, and international stability. As the UN Secretary-General has underscored, “prevention is not merely a stage before crisis—it is the foundation of sustainable peace.

6. Annex

Annex 1 – List of interviewees and contributors

Name	Position	Organization
Lila Pieters Yahia	Resident Coordinator Mauritania	United Nations
Sadjo Amadou Barry	Peace and Development Advisor (PDA) Mauritania	Joint UNDP-DPPA Programme on Conflict Prevention
Benoit Romijn	Peacebuilding expert, former PDA Mauritania	Independent
Mohammed Ag Alhouseini	PDA Chad, former PDA Mauritania,	Joint UNDP-DPPA Programme on Conflict Prevention
Benjamin Olaboye	Strategic Advisor, Head of implementation hub in Mopti, former Technical Specialist Employment and Livelihood	UNDP Mauritania
Vanberg Øyvind Fossum	Policy Officer	Norway Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Elin Solberg	Policy Director	Norway Ministry of Justice and Public Security
Rana Taha	Resident Coordinator Tunisia, former Peace and Development Advisor Kenya	United Nations
Prisca Kamugi	Peace and Development Officer Kenya	Joint UNDP-DPPA Programme on Conflict Prevention
Rehana Mohammed	Knowledge Management Specialist	Joint UNDP-DPPA Programme on Conflict Prevention
Shamsa Abubakar	Deputy Chair of the Independent Review of Kenya's Peacebuilding architecture	CSO
Rolex Mwamba	Member/COG	Inter-Religious Council of Kenya
Thomson Muthama	Representative	PeaceNet Kenya (CSO)
Nirina Kiplagat	Governance and Peacebuilding Coordinator	UNDP Crisis Bureau and Regional Bureau for Africa
Fabio Oliva	Senior Advisor and Global Lead for Peacebuilding	UNDP Crisis Bureau
John Lewis	Policy Specialist	UNDP Crisis Bureau
Giulia Ghiggia	Policy Analyst	UNDP Crisis Bureau
Johan Fredborn Larsson	Policy Specialist	UNDP Crisis Bureau

Lorraine Reuter	Rule and Law and Justice Specialist	UNDP Crisis Bureau
Mohammed Al-Qusari	Regional PVE Programme Specialist	UNDP Regional Bureau for the Arab States
Martina Salini	Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Analyst	UNDP Regional Bureau for the Arab States
Raquel Leandro	Youth Empowerment Specialist for Africa	UNDP Bureau for Policy and Programme Support and Regional Bureau for Africa
Emmanuelle Bernard	Team Leader, Peacebuilding Impact Hub	DPPA/PBPSO

■ Annex 2 – Interview questions

1. Can you describe the infrastructure or national strategy currently in place for conflict prevention in [COUNTRY]?
2. Based on your professional assessment, would you consider the strategy inclusive in design and implementation? How have government, civil society, and local actors been engaged, and where do you see gaps?
3. What have been the main challenges in designing/implementing the strategy, and what factors have enabled progress despite these challenges?
4. What role have international partners, including UN/UNDP, played in supporting this strategy, and how effective has this support been?
5. Is the strategy sustainable, i.e. is there dedicated funding to support its implementation?
6. Has the strategy been impactful? i.e. What difference has the strategy made compared to if it hadn't existed? Who benefits most from this strategy (government, local communities, civil society)? How do they see its value? Peace dividends.
7. Is there documented evidence to support this?
8. How have prevention priorities been translated into concrete national policies or action plans? What is the evidence for this?
9. What are the practical lessons regarding the value of the national strategy?



EVIDENCE FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION

A compendium of case studies
and lessons from UNDP practice
on conflict prevention

March 2026

PART 2

1. Introduction

Rationale: Why prevention matters

Amid a sharp rise in the number, duration, and complexity of violent conflicts globally, the imperative for conflict prevention has never been clearer, yet it remains underutilized. Prevention not only saves lives, but it also protects development gains, safeguards institutions, and reduces the long-term costs of crisis response and recovery. Evidence shows that investing in conflict prevention yields significant returns, with up to \$103 gained per \$1 spent in fragile states.⁸⁵ However, funding for conflict prevention efforts is increasingly scarce.

The Secretary General’s New Agenda for Peace places strong emphasis on preventing conflict within its broader vision of positive peace. It recommends developing national prevention strategies “to address the different drivers and enablers of violence and conflict in societies and strengthen national infrastructures for peace. These strategies can help reinforce State institutions, promote the rule of law and strengthen civil society and social cohesion”.⁸⁶ Moreover, The Pact for the Future adopted by Member States in September 2024 reaffirms conflict prevention as a key component of sustainable peace. It emphasizes the interlinkages between conflict prevention and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and advocates for integrating prevention strategies into broader development frameworks that are locally led and owned. The Secretary-General’s latest report on military spending “The true cost of peace” further highlights the urgency of this agenda, warning that unprecedented global military expenditures risk diverting resources away from prevention, peacebuilding, and sustainable development. Across the UN system, efforts are underway to reposition prevention at the center of development programming, yet implementation remains uneven, and greater clarity on what works is urgently needed.

UNDP is a leading development organization in crisis prevention and peacebuilding. Its added value lies in its development-focused support to enhance national capacities for reducing the risks of violent conflict and broader crises, in close alignment with national policies and priorities. The organization promotes inclusive, locally owned and led prevention efforts – well before tensions escalate into violence or humanitarian emergencies, by drawing on a wide range of political, institutional, developmental, social, economic, and human rights approaches, mechanisms and tools. UNDP supports inclusive governance, access to justice, and the rule of law to build institutions that can manage tensions peacefully. It strengthens national and local peace infrastructures and promotes social cohesion to reduce divisions and foster trust. Prevention efforts also focus on advancing gender equality, youth engagement, and economic inclusion as key enablers of resilience in fragile settings. In contexts at heightened risk, UNDP works to reduce inequalities, prevent and respond to violent extremism, and facilitate inclusive dialogue as pathways to sustained peace. Building on its established presence in fragile and conflict-affected settings, UNDP leverages

⁸⁵ [The Urgency of Conflict Prevention – A Macroeconomic Perspective](#), International Monetary Fund, December 2024.

⁸⁶ UN Secretary-General’s A New Agenda for Peace, [2024 our-common-agenda-policy-brief-new-agenda-for-peace-en.pdf](#)

trusted relationships with public authorities, civil society, and youth-serving entities to foster strong partnerships and amplify marginalized voices. This convening role enables it to connect peacebuilding with broader priorities, such as economic development, governance, and climate action, and to drive systemic solutions that address the structural drivers of violence and instability. These efforts are grounded in strong collaboration with governments, civil society, donors, and international actors, including the World Bank and the UN Peacebuilding Fund.

This work is particularly relevant in the context of the ongoing UN Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR), which calls for more coherent, nationally owned, and sustained prevention strategies across the UN system.⁸⁷ With its strong field presence and expertise in conflict and crisis-affected settings, UNDP is uniquely positioned to help translate the PBAR's ambitions into practice.

However, to fully realize this potential and contribute to advancing the prevention agenda in the current global context, one critical challenge must be addressed: demonstrating results and impact. Assessing what did not happen is inherently difficult to measure. Strengthening the evidence base for conflict prevention, including producing new data as necessary, is therefore critical, both to improve effectiveness and to make the case for greater investment. This compendium of case studies contributes to that effort.

■ Objectives of the compendium

This compendium contributes to promoting a more evidence-informed approach to conflict prevention. By capturing concrete examples of 'what works and what does not' across diverse contexts, it seeks to support UN and other international practitioners and policymakers with practical insights to design and implement more strategic, coherent, and impactful prevention efforts. By distilling transferable lessons from diverse contexts, the study also seeks to inform global policy dialogues, foster innovation and support system-wide learning, ensuring that insights from practice translate into more effective prevention efforts at global, regional and country levels.

This compendium is also an attempt to demystify conflict prevention and make it accessible to those who still view it with skepticism. The case studies highlight that preventing conflict is neither a novel concept nor an unrealistic, far-fetched objective; rather, it is proven practice that can be successfully adapted to different contexts and challenges. It is true that many prevention initiatives produce intangible, long-term effects that do not fit neatly into conventional indicators. Sometimes, they evade the conventional observation timeframes used in international practice. Despite these difficulties, established patterns have emerged showing that well-designed, adaptive initiatives can effectively prevent violent outcomes in tense situations and help build homegrown systems that avert the recurrence of conflict. Recent research (Monnier, 2025) highlights how prevention can be measured by its capacity to reduce risk factors (e.g. lack of security, feeling of injustice) and increase protective factors (e.g. trust in institutions). However, interaction between these factors varies across contexts and require context-specific analysis to inform effective prevention strategies.

⁸⁷ The PBAR is a periodic review process mandated by the UN General Assembly and Security Council to assess progress and make recommendations for strengthening the UN's peacebuilding architecture, including the Peacebuilding Commission, Peacebuilding Fund, and related institutional arrangements.

The case studies developed will also contribute to strengthening the UNDP Prevention Campus curriculum. Launched in April 2022, the Prevention Campus, part of the UNDP Crisis Academy,⁸⁸ is a global learning platform designed to support a shift from reactive crisis response to proactive risk management and prevention. It equips practitioners with the tools and approaches needed to design and deliver interventions that address root causes of conflict and crises, anticipate emerging risks, reduce vulnerabilities, and build long-term resilience.

This compendium is intended for a broad audience, ranging from experienced practitioners to colleagues who are newer to the field of conflict prevention. The lessons and insights presented reflect this diversity, encompassing both well-established practices and emerging, innovative approaches. By addressing varying levels of experience and expertise, the compendium seeks to support both broad awareness-raising and more in-depth learning, recognizing that different users may draw on the findings in different ways depending on their roles, mandates, and levels of engagement with prevention efforts.

Methodology

For this first iteration of the compendium, case studies were selected to analyze UNDP’s approach to conflict prevention. These case studies were selected for their geographical and thematic diversity, as well as their potential to generate learning and support replication in other contexts. They reflect a wide range of approaches to conflict prevention (see table below). These include peacebuilding and peace-responsive programming, infrastructures for peace, insider mediation, early warning/early response, dialogue and mediation support, youth and women’s engagement, preventing violent extremism, data-driven tools for strengthening social cohesion and gender and conflict sensitivity. For a detailed description of these approaches, please refer to Annex 1.

Country/case	Thematic focus
Bolivia	Natural resource management, participatory governance, digital peacebuilding
The Caribbean	Data, social cohesion, conflict analysis, Women, Peace and Security (WPS)
Central Asia	Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE), youth and women’s engagement
The Gambia	Infrastructures for peace, transitional justice
Peru	Insider mediation, dialogue, youth engagement
Sudan (Darfur)	Insider mediation, youth engagement
Zambia	Electoral violence prevention, early warning systems, participatory analysis
Yemen	Local peacebuilding, insider mediation

The case studies were developed through a desk review and individual interviews with UN and UNDP colleagues in country and regional offices with knowledge of the specific interventions. The findings were presented to key stakeholders to integrate their feedback. A full list of colleagues who have contributed to the research is available in the Annex. Where relevant, the case studies draw from quantitative data available from ACLED to capture trends on political violence over the course of the period assessed.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ To learn more visit: <https://www.undp.org/crisis/academy>

⁸⁹ Data is used to complement qualitative assessment of interventions where the context allows: considering the specificity of the interventions assessed, some of them being regional interventions (Caribbean, Central Asia), others in ongoing conflict settings (Yemen, Sudan), the team decided to leverage the data where it was most relevant for the intervention type (The Gambia, Zambia)

2. Cross-cutting lessons

The case studies featured in this compendium highlight diverse approaches to conflict prevention across a range of contexts. Despite differences in geography, context, and entry points, they also reveal a set of transferable lessons that are essential for designing and implementing effective prevention efforts. These cross-cutting insights offer valuable guidance for practitioners and policymakers alike to inform effective approaches to prevent violent conflict in different settings. The following section distills the lessons drawn from practice.

Ground prevention efforts in robust, participatory conflict and context analysis

Before intervening in any conflict context, it is crucial to first understand the conflict dynamics and causes to design interventions that are conflict-sensitive and context-specific. Without a strong analytical foundation, prevention efforts risk being poorly targeted, insensitive to local dynamics, or even exacerbating tensions (Rhodes, G., & Akram, M., 2023). A thorough analysis of the context and underlying issues is essential to ground conflict prevention efforts in local realities and ensure they remain responsive to evolving dynamics. Participatory analysis, an approach that engages national and local stakeholders in identifying conflict drivers and priorities, adds particular value by strengthening the relevance, legitimacy, and ownership of the resulting findings.⁹⁰ Across these cases, shared and participatory analysis enhanced ownership, and created a common understanding of conflict risks and how to address them.

In **The Gambia**, a participatory Conflict and Development Analysis helped build national ownership and align UN engagement with local priorities.⁹¹ It informed a prevention strategy, supported resource mobilization, and reinforced political momentum around transitional justice and institutional reform. In **the Caribbean**,⁹² in response to a lack of overall data on prevention in the region, the Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) index generated previously unavailable evidence both at the national and regional levels underscoring the need for national prevention strategies across the region linked through a regional framework and helped shift the narrative from a securitized lens to a public health approach to addressing violence.

Moreover, joint analysis is also valuable for aligning prevention priorities across entities, supporting coordinated programming, and enabling consistent political messaging. In Zambia, joint tools such as the

⁹⁰ NYU Center on International Cooperation, *Towards effective prevention 2025*. The report refers to the diagnosis itself becoming a key preventive activity – where national and local stakeholders are encouraged to identify and collectively agree on the underlying causes of tensions and sources of resilience.

⁹¹ For more information, see: UN Development Group, *Conducting a Conflict and Development Analysis*, 2016.

⁹² Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, The Bahamas, Belize, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Dominica.

UN Prevention Platform Situation Reports and the Crisis Risk Dashboard (CRD)⁹³ helped the UNCT build a shared understanding of emerging risks ahead of the 2021 elections, supporting coordinated action. This case also shows the importance of embedding the analysis within planning, decision-making and political engagement – shaping how the UN and its partners design, prioritize and communicate prevention interventions. In **Zambia**, the joint tools were instrumental in informing the Resident Coordinator engagement with national counterparts and supporting high-level political engagement such as the SRSG/UNOAU Hanna Tetteh’s mission to promote dialogue with Zambian leadership, culminating in the signing of a peace pledge by political parties.

■ Tackle the root causes of conflict to enable sustainable prevention

While the need to address the root causes of conflict is a widely recognized principle in prevention practice, it is often not consistently applied. Short-term project cycles, institutional constraints, and pressure to deliver short-term results often lead to a focus on immediate risks – or the manifestations of the problem – rather than the deeper drivers of conflict. Yet the case studies reaffirm that without tackling underlying conflict causes prevention efforts risk being unsustainable.

In **Central Asia**, the establishment of Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) Advisory Groups offered a way to tackle social exclusion, marginalization, and lack of participation, key factors underlying vulnerability to extremist narratives. The initiative enabled dialogue between youth, women, and ethnic minorities and local authorities, helping to localize national strategies and strengthen social cohesion. In **Peru**, inclusive participation and dialogue platforms created space for historically excluded communities, particularly youth, women and rural populations, to participate in national reform discussions. By linking local concerns to national policymaking, the initiative addressed structural drivers of political polarization and public distrust. Similarly, in **Bolivia**, root causes of conflict were addressed by tackling exclusion from natural resource governance at national and community level, mistrust in institutions, and historical grievances on human rights. National Human Rights institutions supported consolidated systems to analysis risk and management of data to anticipate and prevent future conflicts.

These examples highlight that sustainable prevention depends on the ability to go beyond managing immediate triggers and instead focus on transforming grievances, systems, and structures that fuel conflict. Doing so requires engaging with politically sensitive issues and working through inclusive, participatory processes that build trust and accountability. Doing so not only enhances the legitimacy of prevention efforts but also contributes to more resilient institutions, stronger social contracts, and lasting peace.

93 For more information, see: [Crisis Risk Dashboard Product Page | Data Futures Exchange](#).

Strengthen inclusive institutions as a foundation for social cohesion & sustainable prevention

Across the case studies, a consistent lesson is that conflict prevention efforts are most effective when they support institutions to deliver services and resolve grievances in ways that are inclusive, transparent, and accountable. This institutional responsiveness is critical not only to rebuilding or reinforcing the social contract, but also to ensuring the long-term sustainability of prevention efforts. Above all, prevention strategies that strengthen or establish infrastructures for peace (I4P) – durable, nationally rooted institutions and mechanisms for dialogue, mediation, and conflict management— help ensure that the capacity to prevent and resolve conflict remains embedded within societies over time.

In **Zambia**, the support to the Electoral Commission, Human Rights Commission, Zambia Police Service, and the judiciary was instrumental to enhance institutional responsiveness, reduce tensions, and build public trust. In **The Gambia**, UN-backed support to transitional justice mechanisms and national human rights institutions helped lay the groundwork for more sustainable peace by embedding accountability and reconciliation processes within state structures. In **Bolivia**, institutionalizing participatory governance tools within national legal frameworks enabled sustained dialogue and policy engagement on sensitive natural resource issues and environmental justice, contributing to long-term conflict resilience.

Together, these cases show that building social cohesion is not only about fostering dialogue or coexistence, it also requires investment in the institutional foundations of inclusive governance. When people see their concerns addressed fairly and equitably through state structures, trust is built, and the risk of violent conflict diminishes. However, the case studies also underscore that institutional strengthening alone is not enough. Early engagement and sustained political will are essential to ensure impact and durability.

While influencing political commitment remains challenging, interventions rooted in national legal and policy frameworks are more likely to gain legitimacy and foster national ownership. In **Bolivia**, for example, prevention tools such as early warning systems and governance platforms were embedded within the country's environmental and indigenous rights frameworks, increasing their credibility and facilitating government uptake.

Prevention works even amid ongoing crisis and conflict, when designed for volatility

The case studies demonstrate that conflict prevention remains both possible and relevant even amid ongoing conflicts and instability, provided it is structured and grounded in whole-of-society approaches. While prevention is often viewed as something to pursue before violence erupts, these cases reveal that targeted, well-designed efforts can reduce conflict intensity, strengthen social cohesion, and preserve the conditions necessary for future peace. In many of these instances, peacebuilding tools were used for prevention objectives, showcasing how the lines between peacebuilding and conflict prevention often blur in practice.

In **Sudan's Darfur region**, youth peace ambassadors played a key role in preventing the escalation of violence by brokering localized ceasefires and mediating disputes, despite the ongoing conflict. Their interventions aimed to prevent further violence, not just mitigate its effects, clearly fulfilling a conflict prevention function even in a highly volatile environment. Similarly, in **Peru**, UNDP-supported civic forums were initiated in a period of high political volatility. These forums succeeded because they were grounded

in prior trust-building and preparatory work, enabling them to serve as spaces for inclusive dialogue and governance reform, thereby preventing political fragmentation and further violence.

In **Yemen**, amid one of the world’s worst protracted political, humanitarian and development crises, the UN Peace Support Facility’s Small Grants Mechanism (SGM) demonstrates how prevention can work even in extreme volatility. By supporting community-driven peace initiatives that directly reinforce broader national peace strategies, the SGM has contributed to measurable improvements in local stability, civic engagement, and institutional trust in multiple conflict-affected governorates. These achievements are rooted in empowering grassroots actors to lead initiatives that address immediate needs while reinforcing national peacebuilding priorities, showing how locally grounded, whole-of-society approaches can keep prevention relevant even amid protracted conflict.

These cases furthermore show that prevention in crisis settings is possible but only if programmes are explicitly designed for volatility, centered on conflict sensitive approaches and incorporate an incremental approach that builds on progress over time. Doing so requires:



Integrating conflict sensitivity and risk analysis into project design:

It is essential to account proactively for potential disruptions, political shifts, or conflict escalations, rather than assuming a stable operating environment. This requires adopting a conflict-sensitive approach, in which conflict analysis is systematically embedded into project design to understand conflict drivers, risks, and dynamics. Complementary tools such as horizon scanning and foresight can then be used to identify possible scenarios and ensure that interventions remain adaptive, inclusive, and grounded in a rights-based approach.



Local legitimacy:

Programmes should empower credible, trusted non-state actors who can function when formal systems are absent or mistrusted. This means identifying and engaging these actors before a crisis escalates, they can be mobilized quickly during volatile moments.



Adaptive management:

Prevention efforts must be flexible enough to respond to rapidly evolving risks and shifting political environments. It requires monitoring context shifts in real-time and adapting strategies accordingly, through incorporating a conflict sensitivity approach throughout the project cycle.



Clear coordination structures:

Effective conflict prevention depends not only on good tools and interventions but also on clarity about who is responsible for what, especially before tensions escalate. In volatile settings, when violence risks increase, delays, confusion, or overlapping mandates among actors can severely undermine response efforts.

The case studies underline the importance of embedding conflict-sensitive approaches in interventions. In **Yemen**, a politically charged context, the perception of bias—real or imagined—can undermine trust. The UN Peace Support Facility addressed this by adopting rigorous, transparent selection procedures for the projects to be funded. Projects were carefully chosen based on a set of criteria that considered not only thematic relevance to peacebuilding, but also geographic balance, inclusivity, and do-no-harm principles. Regular consultations with CSO networks helped build legitimacy and ensured that the mechanism remained responsive to evolving local priorities.

In **Darfur**, prevention was made possible by working through trusted youth peace ambassadors who operated independently of collapsed state structures. This approach illustrates how programming in volatile settings can be delivered through non-state, locally legitimate actors, rather than relying on fragile formal systems. In **Zambia**, prevention tools such as the Early Warning and Early Response System (EWERS) against electoral violence and hotspot monitoring were technically sound, but their late rollout and the shift in institutional responsibility during the electoral period weakened their impact. This underscores the need to clarify coordination mechanisms and institutional ownership well in advance, so that during moments of political tension, there is no ambiguity about who acts and how.

Moreover, the case studies demonstrate a shift in how we understand conflict prevention: it is not just about stopping violence before it starts but about building resilience during high-risk moments, even when formal state institutions are weakened. In volatile settings, peacebuilding and conflict prevention are often overlapping processes, working together to reduce violence, increase social trust, and open pathways for recovery.

■ Conflict prevention is most effective when grounded in locally led and inclusive efforts and institutions

The case studies show that local ownership and inclusive platforms, mechanisms and institutions are not just ideal – they are essential for sustainable prevention outcomes. When national and local actors lead, shape, and sustain conflict prevention initiatives, efforts are more likely to reflect local realities, respond to underlying grievances, and withstand political or funding disruptions (Saaida, M., 2023). This reflects the wider concept of Infrastructures for Peace (I4P), understood as interconnected mechanisms, institutions, and processes at national and local levels that give societies sustained capacity to manage tensions and resolve disputes peacefully. The case studies demonstrate how strengthening or creating such arrangements can embed prevention capacities at local, national and regional levels, making them more durable and adaptive.

In **Central Asia**, PVE Advisory Groups embedded in local institutions enabled responsive, community-informed action on extremism. In **Zambia**, the institutionalization of Conflict Management Committees and Early Warning Systems at the district level allowed for proactive responses during the electoral period. Following elections efforts to formalize these mechanisms in law enhanced long-term sustainability. The **Gambia's** peace infrastructure roadmap, led by national actors with UN support, demonstrates how transitional justice goals can be translated into locally owned policy and planning frameworks.

The case studies also underline the importance of whole-of-society approaches. In **Yemen**, recognizing that sustainable peace requires engagement across all levels of society, the UNDP Small-Grants Mecha-

nism targeted grassroots actors, particularly women-led and youth-focused CSOs, with the dual purpose of delivering tangible peace dividends and enhancing local capacities for future peace agreement implementation. The most impactful projects combined quick improvements in daily life—such as infrastructure repairs or community campaigns—with inclusive, dialogue-based processes.

Yet, the cases also reveal challenges to achieving meaningful local ownership. In **Zambia**, delayed engagement with key institutions and fragmented roles between national bodies reduced the effectiveness of otherwise promising tools like EWERS. In **Darfur**, unclear institutional mandates at the state level complicated coordination and limited the ability of government partners to engage meaningfully in prevention. In **Yemen**, complex application forms and English-only templates initially created barriers for some civil society organizations. Adapting tools to local language and context, and providing training on UN financial procedures significantly improved participation and implementation.

These findings reinforce recent research (Cournoyer et al., 2025), which highlights that while multi-stakeholder processes are among the most effective forms of prevention, their impact depends on early engagement, institutional clarity, and efforts to decentralize ownership beyond elite actors. Taken together, the cases underscore a central lesson: prevention is most sustainable when driven by those closest to the context. Achieving genuine local ownership, however, does not happen automatically. It requires deliberate investment in institutional capacity, clear and coordinated mandates, and inclusive participation from the outset to avoid over-reliance on a small group of individuals.

■ Ensure meaningful and sustained engagement of youth & women moving from participation to influence

The case studies reaffirm the transformative potential of youth and women’s leadership in conflict prevention, when their engagement is structured, supported, and embedded in decision-making processes. In **Darfur**, Youth Peace Ambassadors facilitated community dialogues, countered hate speech, and helped broker local ceasefires. Recognizing youth as key actors in peacebuilding, the PVE Advisory Groups established in **Central Asia** have promoted their inclusion in local and national decision-making. By amplifying youth voices and supporting youth-led initiatives, the Groups have helped shape more responsive PVE strategies and advance counter-narratives that foster tolerance, cohesion, and civic engagement.

In **Yemen**, the Small Grants Mechanism channels flexible funding to civil society organizations, with half of all grants allocated to women-led groups and a strong emphasis on youth inclusion. By supporting initiatives such as combating online harassment and creating Women’s Police Units, the mechanism has not only delivered tangible safety improvements but also helped shift perceptions of women and youth from passive beneficiaries to active peacebuilders.

The **Peru** case shows how structured engagement, through civic forums and preparatory workshops, enabled youth to contribute to national-level dialogue on governance and inclusion. This deliberate linkage between participation and influence helped move youth engagement beyond visibility. However, in **Zambia**, youth engagement focused on civic education and outreach, boosting participation but offering limited influence over policy or institutional reform. While visible during project cycles, their impact remains limited without mechanisms for sustained, meaningful inclusion in governance.

This highlights a common challenge in youth and women-led prevention work: these constituencies may be highly visible in outreach and public engagement but remain excluded from meaningful influence unless their roles are explicitly defined, embedded within institutional frameworks, and connected to broader governance or policy processes. Recent research supports these findings. For example, Cournoyer, Badri, and Messmer (2025) note that multi-stakeholder processes that include youth in agenda-setting, not just participation, are among the most sustainable and adaptive forms of conflict prevention.

■ Strategic use of data enables early and sustained conflict prevention

The strategic use of data and evidence is increasingly central to effective conflict prevention. It supports early action, targeted interventions, and informed political engagement, especially in settings where risks evolve quickly and institutional trust is fragile or contested. In such environments, governments and partners often hesitate to act on early warnings without credible justification, while institutional roles may be unclear and coordination mechanisms weak. When used effectively, data can depoliticize preventive action, build consensus, and help focus limited resources where they are most needed.

In **The Gambia**, a nationally led Conflict and Development Analysis (CDA) shaped the country's Peacebuilding Fund strategy and mobilized USD\$40 million for transitional justice, reconciliation and creation of peace infrastructures. The CDA's influence stemmed not only from its analytical quality but from being co-developed with national stakeholders and linked to formal policy and financing processes, demonstrating how evidence can guide both planning and resource alignment. In **the Caribbean**, SCORE data was used to predict and rank the main factors that shape attitudes toward violence. This analysis provided key evidence on the relationship between family vulnerability, economic anxiety, mental health, gender norms, civic trust, jobs, and attitudes toward violence. In doing so, the data supported the regional public health approach to crime and violence adopted by national governments and laid the empirical groundwork for expanding prevention efforts beyond a focus on the security sector to address other social-economic sectors in the region.

However, the case studies also showcase key challenges. In **Zambia**, for instance, while data tools helped generate alerts, action was sometimes constrained by legal ambiguities, fragmented mandates, or lack of institutional preparedness.

Another risk is data politicization or selective use. In polarized settings, actors may manipulate data to advance their own narratives, or discredit early warning platforms they perceive as biased or externally imposed. This risk is amplified when data systems are not transparent, or when they lack broad-based stakeholder participation in both design and validation. This points to the finding that, ultimately, data alone is not inherently transformative, but when used strategically and as part of an inclusive engagement and decision-making process, it becomes a foundation for timely, accountable, and inclusive prevention. The challenge is not generating information, but building inclusive systems, with the trust, and political incentives to act on it.

3. Case studies

3.1 Bolivia: Conflict prevention in natural resource governance



Introduction

In response to growing socio-environmental tensions surrounding natural resource governance, UNDP Bolivia has piloted an initiative to transform the way resource-related conflicts are managed through strengthening anticipatory and preventive governance in the context of the country's energy transition. Focused on the lithium and gold mining sectors – key drivers of Bolivia's economic development, the project aimed to prevent conflict by supporting inclusive decision-making processes with affected communities, promoting environmental justice through the protection of indigenous rights and ecosystems, and strengthening governance using data-driven tools to anticipate risks and inform policy responses.

Bolivia's experience illustrates how conflict prevention can be effectively operationalized in resource-rich contexts through anticipatory and inclusive governance. The approach helped address structural drivers of conflict by enabling affected communities to voice grievances before they escalated, build trust, and co-develop policies, such as the lithium law proposal, grounded in evidence and local participation. As such, it contributes to critical lessons on how natural resource governance, often a source of tension, can become a foundation for resilience, justice, and peace when rooted in local ownership and informed decision-making.



Context

Bolivia is undergoing a delicate political and economic transition, grappling with the decline of its gas-based economy, deepening social and territorial fragmentation, and the intensifying global demand for strategic minerals such as lithium and gold. As one of the countries in Latin America's "lithium triangle," Bolivia holds enormous potential to contribute to the global energy transition. However, this opportunity is coupled with heightened risks of socio-environmental conflict, particularly in indigenous territories where resource extraction often collides with traditional land rights, environmental protection, and historical grievances.

Environmental governance in Bolivia is further complicated by institutional fragility and low public trust. Despite the presence of progressive environmental and indigenous rights frameworks, the enforcement of these norms remains weak. Political volatility, exacerbated by polarization and exclusion, continues to undermine the country's capacity to implement sustainable, long-term development policies. This was dramatically illustrated by the failed military coup attempt in 2024, which reaffirmed the urgency of addressing underlying tensions and anticipating conflict risks before they escalate.



Intervention design & approach

The project, led by UNDP Bolivia with support from the Crisis Bureau and the Regional Hub, aimed to prevent socio-environmental conflict and promote environmental justice in the context of Bolivia's expanding lithium and gold extraction sector. In light of the country's strategic role in the global energy transition, coupled with institutional fragility and rising tensions over resource governance, the project focused on establishing an inclusive, preventive governance model for the sustainable management of natural resources.

The project's conflict prevention value lies in its emphasis on anticipating and addressing socio-environmental risks before they escalate. This was operationalized through two core innovations:

- *SIMAT* (Sistema Inteligente de Monitoreo, Análisis y Alerta Temprana): an early warning system tailored to the extractives sector, designed to monitor risk factors and generate real-time alerts.
- *Sistema Paisaje Litio*: a data-driven platform that uses environmental indicators, geospatial data, and machine learning to anticipate socio-environmental risks and support inclusive, conflict-sensitive decision-making around lithium extraction.

Both tools were developed in alignment with Bolivia's legal and constitutional frameworks on indigenous and environmental rights, which enhanced their legitimacy and enabled formal uptake into policy dialogue and planning processes.

Equally important was the emphasis on inclusive governance. The project engaged local communities, indigenous organizations, and public institutions in the co-creation of governance frameworks and policy proposals, most notably the draft lithium law, which incorporated environmental safeguards and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms, thereby proactively addressing long-standing grievances.

In a politically sensitive and polarized context, this preventive governance model proved essential. It enabled the early identification of shared priorities, reduced information asymmetries, and fostered joint solutions, laying the foundation for more peaceful, just, and sustainable natural resource governance.



Results & impact

The project demonstrates the potential of preventive governance to reduce socio-environmental conflict and promote more inclusive, sustainable resource management. The project contributed to the development of inclusive and data-informed governance models that helped mitigate tensions and reduce conflict risks in the extractives sector. The SIMAT early warning system and the Sistema Paisaje Litio platform enabled real-time risk monitoring and scenario planning, equipping institutions and communities with tools to anticipate and respond to emerging tensions. Participatory processes involving indigenous organizations led to the co-creation of a draft lithium law, which incorporated key provisions on environmental justice and benefit-sharing, laying the groundwork for more sustainable and conflict-sensitive resource governance.

These outcomes demonstrated that preventive governance approaches, when grounded in legal frameworks, informed by data, and developed inclusively, can reduce tensions, strengthen trust among stakeholders, and institutionalize mechanisms that support long-term peace and sustainability.

Implementation challenges and opportunities



Balancing long-term prevention with short-term extractive pressures

A key challenge faced by the project was the tension between long-term conflict prevention goals and immediate pressures to expand extractive activities. As Bolivia faces declining revenues from gas and increasing international demand for lithium, political and economic incentives have favored rapid resource exploitation. However, these short-term imperatives often conflict with the time-intensive processes required for inclusive governance, environmental justice, and consensus-building. The project had to navigate this tension by demonstrating that preventive approaches, grounded in participation, legal safeguards, and data-informed decision-making, can enhance both social stability and the long-term sustainability of extractive investments.



Navigating political sensitivities

Implementing a preventive governance approach in Bolivia's extractive sector required navigating a complex political landscape shaped by strong notions of resource sovereignty, historical territorial disputes, and deep-seated distrust in institutions. The state's emphasis on national control over natural resources limited openness to private sector involvement and heightened sensitivities around external influence. Conflicts between local communities, indigenous groups, and extractive companies were often rooted in historical grievances and divergent development visions. Moreover, environmental justice itself had become a politicized issue, further complicating efforts to build consensus.

To manage these dynamics, the project prioritized inclusive, multi-stakeholder dialogue, facilitated through consultations such as focus groups, and grounded its approach in Bolivia's legal framework, ensuring respect for indigenous and environmental rights. A data-driven methodology, including the use of AI-enabled tools like Sistema Paisaje Litio, helped depoliticize discussions by anchoring recommendations in objective evidence. Strategic alliances with trusted institutions, such as the Defensoría del Pueblo and key ministries, further enhanced the initiative's legitimacy and reach.



Challenges to inclusive participation

Inclusive participation was essential to the project's conflict prevention goals, yet significant barriers emerged. Bolivia's linguistic and cultural diversity, with over 35 indigenous languages, created communication challenges. Distrust toward state institutions and entrenched power asymmetries, for example, between rural and urban actors, local governments and national ministries, and communities and companies, limited the meaningful engagement of historically marginalized groups.

The project addressed these challenges through a culturally adaptive approach. Local facilitators and indigenous language speakers were integrated into the team to adjust working methods to the cultural particularities of each community. Capacity-building efforts, including support to navigate key policy documents and understand the use of AI tools, helped strengthen indigenous actors' ability to engage meaningfully in governance processes. Intercultural mediation and dialogue between different groups and the use of 'governance platforms' enabled consensus building on solutions that were agreeable to all. Research partnerships with academic institutions supported a deeper understanding of local perspectives and strengthened evidence-based engagement.



The use of digital technologies

The use of digital technologies created important opportunities for the project. Tools like Sistema Paisaje Litio and SIMAT enabled real-time monitoring and early warning, enhancing the capacity of institutions and communities to anticipate and respond to socio-environmental risks. These platforms helped ground dialogue in objective data, reducing polarization and building trust across stakeholders. Moreover, digital innovations supported more transparent, accountable, and participatory decision-making processes. At the same time, the use of these technologies also presented risks. Unequal access to technology could reinforce exclusion, particularly among rural and indigenous communities. There were also concerns about the potential misuse of digital platforms for misinformation or political manipulation, as well as risks to data privacy and personal security.

To mitigate these risks, UNDP implemented digital literacy initiatives, such as the ‘Code Your Future’ program, to help communities engage critically with digital tools. Fact-checking efforts and support for investigative journalism helped counter misinformation, while robust data security and privacy protocols were established to protect sensitive information. Collaboration with academic institutions ensured that technological innovations were context-sensitive and grounded in ethical standards.

Key lessons learned for conflict prevention practice

- 1. Governance tools can serve as entry points for conflict prevention in politically sensitive contexts.** The Bolivia case study illustrates how the use of governance tools and approaches can create space for conflict prevention even in highly polarized environments, especially when they are firmly embedded or reinforce national legal and institutional frameworks. Tools like Sistema Paisaje Litio and SIMAT provided early warning and scenario modeling capabilities, but their preventive value came from more than just data; they were developed and applied in ways that respected Bolivia’s environmental and indigenous rights laws and institutional mandates. This legal alignment enhanced the tools’ legitimacy, increased the willingness of government actors to engage, and ensured that outputs could inform formal decision-making processes, such as the participatory development of a draft lithium law. This demonstrates that when properly designed and localized, governance tools are not just technical instruments, they are entry points for prevention, capable of shifting how actors interact, making decisions, and resolving tensions over time.
- 2. Digital technologies offer both opportunities and risks for prevention.** While digital platforms enhanced early warning, accountability, and participation, they also introduced new risks of exclusion, misinformation, and privacy breaches. Bolivia’s experience shows that successful digital innovation in conflict prevention depends on parallel investments in digital literacy, ethical safeguards, and inclusive access, especially for rural and indigenous populations.

3. **Inclusion must be actively enabled through culturally adapted strategies.** In culturally diverse, multi-lingual settings like Bolivia, inclusion cannot be assumed. It must be built through intentional adaptation of tools, processes, and engagement strategies. The project's use of local facilitators, indigenous languages, intercultural mediation, and targeted capacity-building allowed historically marginalized actors to engage meaningfully in governance and decision-making processes. This contributed not only to conflict prevention but also to the legitimacy and ownership of proposed solutions.
4. **Participatory policy development can transform conflict risks into opportunities for structural change.** A standout achievement of the Bolivia project was its support for the co-development of a draft lithium law through inclusive governance platforms involving indigenous organizations. This process helped embed environmental safeguards, benefit-sharing mechanisms, and indigenous rights into national policy frameworks. The participatory approach addressed historical grievances around exclusion and inequality by ensuring that affected communities helped shape the rules governing resource use. This demonstrates that when communities are not just consulted but actively co-create policy, legal reform becomes a vehicle for peacebuilding, anchoring conflict prevention in long-term institutional transformation.

3.2 Caribbean: Using social cohesion data for prevention



Context: Bridging the evidence gap for the prevention of all forms of violence

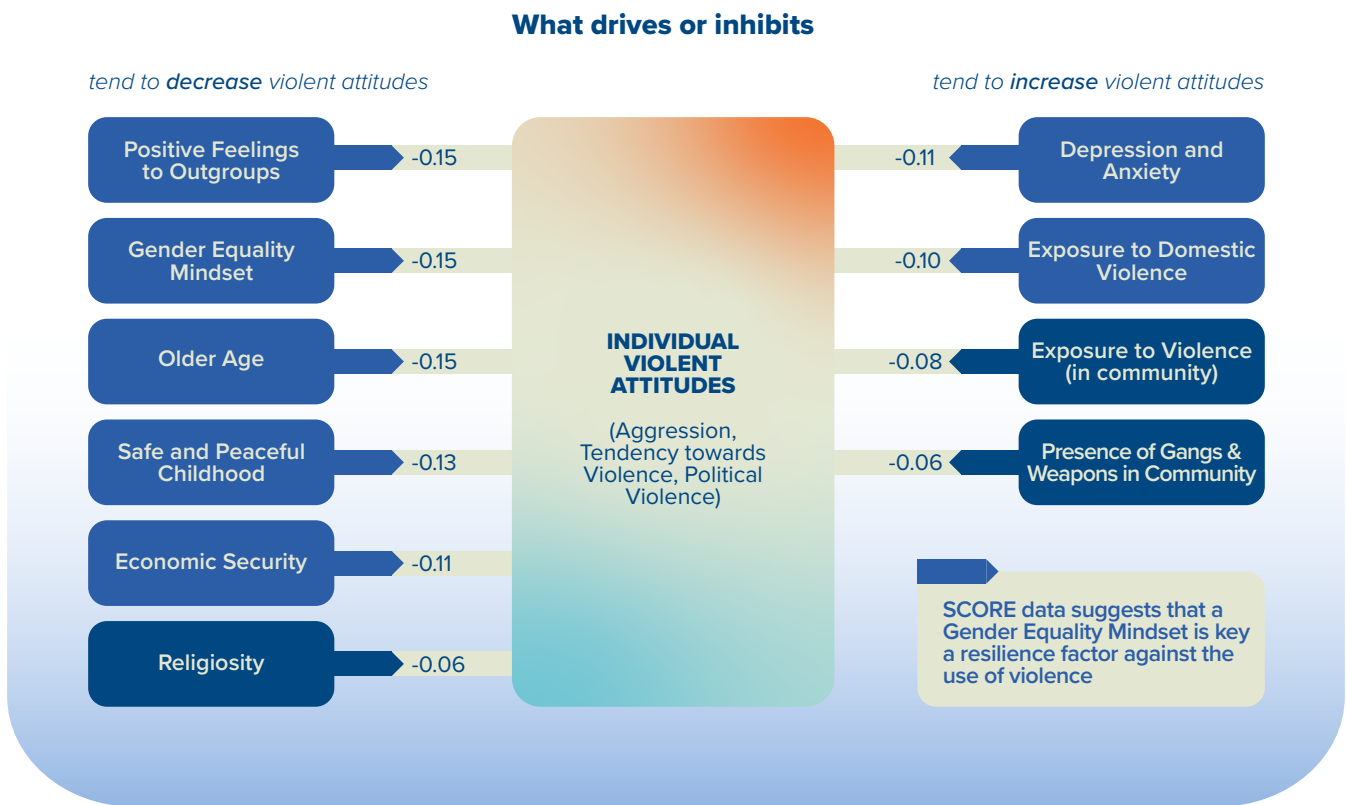
Since the early 2000s,⁹⁴ Trinidad and Tobago's national security landscape has long been shaped by high rates of violent crime, including gang activity, gender-based violence, arms proliferation and one of the top 5 highest per capita homicide rates in the world.⁹⁵ Although the country is not in formal state of national-level-conflict, the daily realities of armed violence, what some officials have referred to as a state of "non-peace" or negative peace, create profound insecurity, particularly for women, youth, and marginalised communities.

Historically, and for a variety of reasons, responses to these multiple challenges have been security-focused, reactive, and poorly informed by disaggregated data. As in much of the Caribbean, limited access to prevention-oriented, gender-sensitive data and evidence has constrained national policymaking. Recognising this gap, the Joint UNDP-DPPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention, in the form of the Peace and Development Advisor and the Peace and Development Officer, in collaboration with SeeD, UNDPTMCO, and multiple UN and government partners in the Caribbean, supported the development of the Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index for the English-speaking Caribbean.

94 Hunte, M. and Waldropt Bonair, L.A., 2010. Crime in Trinidad and Tobago: Trends and Implications. World Sustainable Development Outlook, p.16.

95 Baird, A., Bishop, M.L. and Kerrigan, D., 2023. Differentiating the local impact of global drugs and weapons trafficking: How do gangs mediate 'residual violence' to sustain Trinidad's homicide boom?. Political geography, 106, p.102966.

Figure 1: what drives violent attitudes?⁹⁶



Individual violent attitudes?

The SCORE Index aimed to support shifting the policy conversation from securitisation to prevention, and in particular provide evidence on what are the granular building blocks of social cohesion in the context of peacebuilding; away from treating violence solely as a policing issue, and toward a deeper understanding of the make-up of the social fabric. The SCORE data provided for predictive analyses which identified the drivers of violent attitudes and was able to rank them statistically. It also allowed for better understanding the relationship between phenomenon, such as providing evidence to link family vulnerability, economic anxiety, mental health, gender norms, civic trust, jobs and attitudes toward violence. In doing so, it laid the empirical groundwork for a new generation of prevention strategies.



The SCORE index: laying the analytical foundation

Between 2022 and 2024, the SCORE data – both qualitative and quantitative – was collected across seven Caribbean countries,⁹⁷ generating a robust dataset of over 3,000 surveys. The data was both aggregated at the regional level but also disaggregated at the national level. In the second half of 2024, as part of its broader conversations on democracy and development, the UNDP multi-country officer in Trinidad

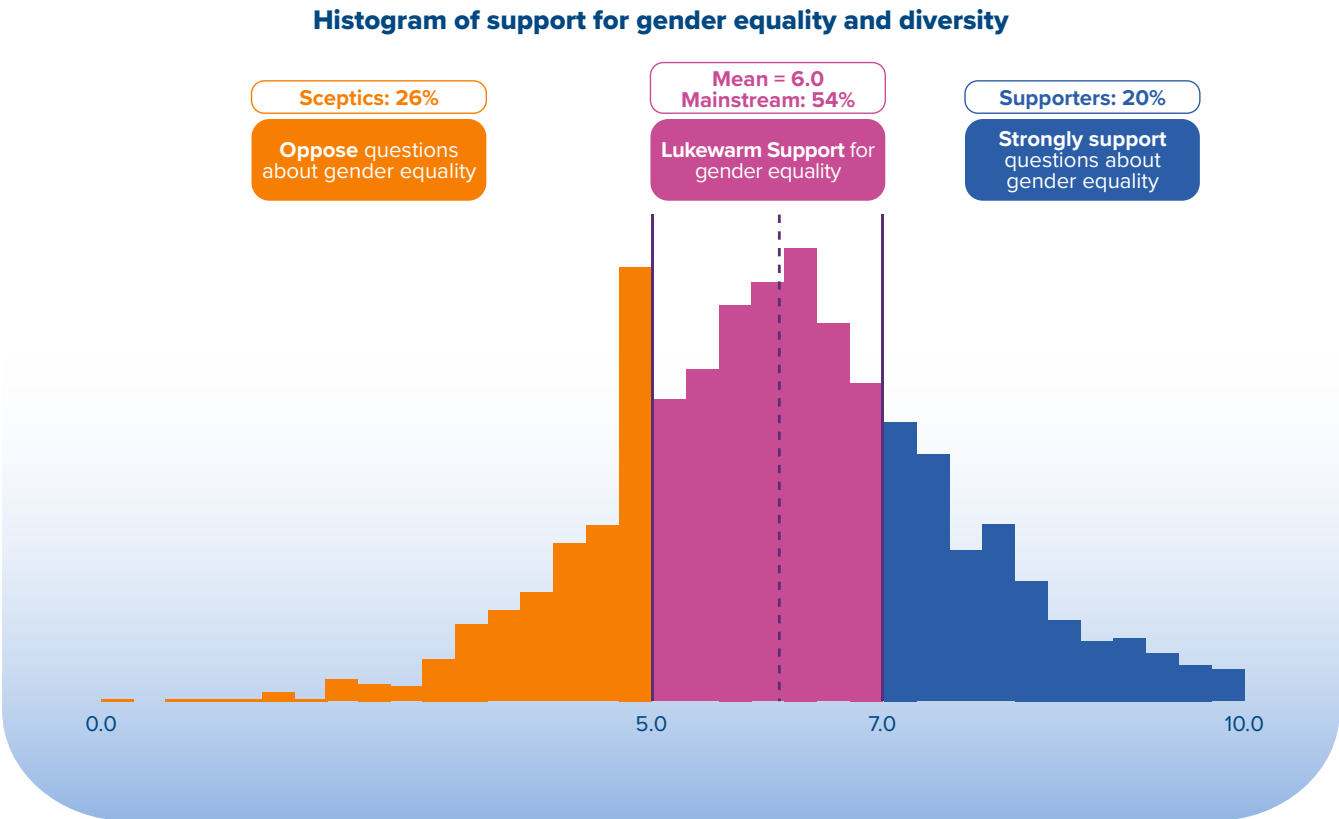
⁹⁶ Figure 1: How to reduce violent attitudes. Linear regression showing the predictors of individual violent attitudes. Resilience factors predicting lower violent attitudes shown on left, in red, while risk factors increasing violent attitudes are shown on the right, in blue. Factors ranked from top to bottom by strength of the predictive pathway (standardised beta coefficient). Weaker factors ($\beta < 0.08$) shown in a lighter shade, while stronger factors ($\beta > 0.1$) are bolded. Model controlled for gender, country, age. Outcome was square-rooted to ensure normality. Standardised $R^2 = 0.301$.

⁹⁷ The 7 countries were Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Jamaica St Lucia, St Vincent, and Trinidad and Tobago.

and Tobago took the SCORE on the road as part of its 'We Ting' Community Caravan. The caravan was an opportunity to ask communities across the twin-island nation state about the data and for the UNDP to support the verification of the data. The SCORE data was also verified via regional universities and with four different United Nations country teams. Across the region, and also in Trinidad and Tobago, the data and evidence painted a detailed picture of gendered insecurities and the root causes of violence:

- Young men showed elevated support for gender stereotypes and violent attitudes, with strong correlations to depression, unsafe childhoods, and economic stress.
- Women reported significantly higher exposure to domestic violence, lower trust in state institutions, and greater fear of public spaces.
- Support for gender equality policies was high overall, but generational divides were stark: young women were growing more progressive while young men were becoming more sceptical
- Attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people remained overwhelmingly negative, particularly among men, revealing additional layers of gendered exclusion and marginalisation.

Figure 2: histogram of support for gender equality and diversity⁹⁸



⁹⁸ The SCORE modelling covered many thematic areas include support for gender equality and diversity, which was identified as a resilience factor against attitudes towards the use of violence

These SCORE insights also connected well to the regional CARICOM agenda, launched in 2023, to treat the prevention of crime and violence in the sub-region as a public health issue. The SCORE is helping policymakers, government and civil society actors at both national and regional levels to reframe violence not as isolated incidents, but as symptoms of deeper social fractures, rooted in inequality, exclusion, and harmful social and gender norms. The SCORE Index thus became a platform for cross-sectoral dialogue and, critically, a foundational input into the design of the Trinidad and Tobago's first National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS NAP).



Designing the WPS NAP: from evidence to strategy

Beginning in mid-2023, UNWomen and the Peace and Development Unit, supported the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in designing a WPS NAP that would embed prevention, inclusion, and gender-sensitivity into its national security and peacebuilding agenda.

Through the WPS Multi-Stakeholder Advisory Group – composed of government, security actors, civil society, and development partners – the SCORE data alongside other UNWomen data indicators and inputs from the final report of the UNDP 'We Ting' community caravan – was used to guide key discussions. In particular, SCORE data shaped the articulation of five core outcomes of the NAP:

- Government decisions on gun and gang violence are better informed through gender-disaggregated evidence;
- Communities experience improved social cohesion through peacebuilding and empowerment initiatives;
- Gender-based violence linked to gun and gang violence is reduced through integrated programming;
- State institutions adopt multi-stakeholder, WPS-integrated approaches to crime prevention and violence reduction;
- The impacts of the climate crisis on peace and security are mitigated through inclusive, resilient community strategies.

Each of the first four outcomes draws on SCORE insights. For instance, the correlation between violent attitudes and mental health supported the NAP's pre-determined emphasis on public health approaches. The gendered data on domestic violence and masculinity, alongside other UNWomen indicators, informed the NAP design and potential male engagement strategies. And the attitudinal divides on LGBTQ+ rights and women in leadership helped tailor messaging and targeting for social-norms-shifting interventions.



Monitoring and evaluation: Using SCORE to track progress

Beyond strategy design, the SCORE also provides a basis for the NAP's monitoring and evaluation framework. In early 2025, the UN presented a tailored M&E approach to the government of Trinidad and Tobago, mapping specific SCORE indicators to four of the five outcomes:

- For Outcome 1 (data-informed decisions): Baselines were established using SCORE's indicators on violent attitudes, gang presence, and domestic/community violence.
- For Outcome 2 (social cohesion): Civic engagement, intergroup trust, and community cooperation indicators enable longitudinal tracking of peacebuilding initiatives.
- For Outcome 3 (gender norms and GBV): Profiles of gender equality sceptics, support for gender equality policies, and attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people offer disaggregated insight into shifting mindsets.
- For Outcome 4 (institutional integration): Trust in institutions and perceptions of progress on violence provide a governance-sensitive lens.

- For Outcome 5 (climate and security): While less developed, SCORE’s data on social marginalisation and service access may provide future entry points.

As a result, the WPS NAP is not only the first in the Caribbean – it is also among the few globally to provide a ready-made, participatory, gender-disaggregated M&E framework and baseline from the outset.



Government ownership and regional significance

The integration of SCORE into the NAP was widely recognised by national and international actors. At the launch event in March 2025, Trinidad and Tobago became the first Caribbean country to officially adopt a WPS National Action Plan, setting a regional precedent.

“ The WPS NAP is a game-changing opportunity, putting women at the centre of the security strategy ”

said Joanna Kazana,
UN Resident Coordinator

“ Your leadership is showing in this process... it is going to be really important not just for the region, but for many other countries in the world ”

noted Sahana Dharmapuri
of Our Secure Future

From the Office of the Prime Minister, Permanent Secretary Kurt Meyer echoed the strategic significance:
“ Our country is not in an active conflict zone, but we continue to see high rates of armed violence. This situation of non-peace affects women and girls disproportionately... The National Action Plan is a vital tool ”



Lessons for prevention in the Caribbean

The development of the SCORE Index and its integration into Trinidad and Tobago’s WPS NAP illustrates a powerful shift in peacebuilding strategy. Instead of waiting for crises, the government, with support from the UNDP-DPPA Joint Programme, UNWomen, UNDPPTT and partners, can now add a data-driven, gender-transformative, public health-informed model of prevention to its broader plans for supporting citizen security. One that could be mirrored for other countries in the Caribbean to develop their own national prevention strategies, but also potentially at the sub-regional CARICOM level, to develop a regional prevention strategy to coordinate the national strategies.

Key lessons include:

- The focus on prevention is essential to addressing the underlying causes driving violence in negative peace contexts;
- Prevention strategies gain traction when built on rigorous, disaggregated, nationally validated data;
- Gender equality cannot be treated as a standalone issue – it must be woven into violence prevention, civic trust, and institutional legitimacy;
- Monitoring frameworks benefit from using existing tools like SCORE, rather than designing parallel systems from scratch;
- In contexts of “negative peace,” countries do not need formal violent conflict to benefit from WPS frameworks.

Trinidad and Tobago now provides a roadmap for other Caribbean nations: one that moves from negative peace to positive peace by centring women, evidence, and prevention.

3.3 Central Asia: Preventing violent extremism through community engagement



Background

Violent extremism is a global phenomenon and there is no universally agreed definition¹. It is neither new nor exclusive, but all countries are affected in different ways. The prevention of violent extremism (PVE) promotes a development approach to an issue traditionally viewed as a security problem. It emphasizes prevention interventions designed to mitigate the key drivers of violent extremism, a combination of socio-political grievances, economic deprivation, systemic marginalization, and limited access to opportunities for education, and employment. Disenfranchisement, lack of political representation, and perceptions of injustice can further contribute to an environment where extremist narratives gain traction.

A fundamental aspect of PVE is its strong connection to broader peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts. Both approaches share the objective of addressing structural and cultural factors that contribute to violence while fostering social cohesion, tolerance, and long-term stability.

UNDP adopts a whole-of-society, whole-of-government approach by supporting Member States in the development and implementation of National Strategies on Preventing Violent Extremism and related Action Plans. These efforts focus on addressing the drivers of violent extremism through inclusive, rights-based measures, while complementing broader national strategies on development, prevention and security

PVE initiatives involve community engagement, educational programs, interfaith and intercultural dialogues, as well as the promotion of democratic values and human rights. Additionally, early warning mechanisms and grassroots interventions play a crucial role in identifying potential risks and preventing the escalation of extremist tendencies before they manifest into violence.



Preventing violent extremism in Central Asia – a regional approach

The 2025 Global Counter Terrorism Index indicates that the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISK), originally formed to counter the Taliban, has become one of the most active jihadist groups globally, raising concerns in the Central Asia region. Over the past decade, an additional challenge has been the regrouping of fighters of Central Asian origin returning from previous Daesh-controlled territories to Afghanistan, including areas near the borders with Central Asian states.

As of 2024, all five states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – have in place their national counter terrorism and P/CVE strategies or national action plans, based on UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy, Central Asia Joint Plan of Action document, General Assembly resolutions and international best practices. Under the Strengthening Resilience Against Violent Extremism in Asia Project (STRIVE Asia, 2019-2024)—a collaborative initiative between the European Union and the UN/UNDP provided support to the five states to strengthen local resilience of at-risk communities through supporting community-led PCVE initiatives.

A key achievement of the initiative was the establishment and operationalization of 35 PVE Advisory Groups across five Central Asian countries: five in Kazakhstan, nine in Kyrgyzstan, eight in Tajikistan, six in Turkmenistan, and seven in Uzbekistan. These Advisory Groups served as critical, community-based

platforms for dialogue, consultation, and deliberation, linking government institutions, traditional entities, and marginalized groups, including women, youth, and ethnic minorities. They also functioned as a bridge between established religious and community institutions, formal governance systems, and evolving approaches to inclusive, people-centered peacebuilding, grounded in democratic principles and international human rights commitments.

By addressing social cohesion challenges at their roots, the Advisory Groups tackled underlying drivers of violent extremism, such as socioeconomic injustice and inequality. They also ensured local government engagement and policy awareness-raising, strengthening community participation in decision-making. This foundation contributed to more inclusive policymaking and programming, making PVE efforts more sustainable. Additionally, strong partnerships at both local and national levels—involving local authorities, municipalities, ministries, and community leaders—were instrumental in building trust between the public and the state.

While the Advisory Groups shared common foundational principles, their structure and implementation were adapted to fit the unique sociopolitical contexts of each country. For example, in Tajikistan, the Advisory Groups—also known as “consultative groups”—were piloted in eight cities and districts, where they were chaired by Deputy Chairs of local authorities. These groups brought together a diverse range of stakeholders, including religious leaders, media professionals, educators, and civil society organizations (CSOs), ensuring that PVE initiatives were informed by a broad spectrum of community voices.

Following the conclusion of the STRIVE Asia project, each country has taken different approaches to sustain the PVE Advisory Groups, largely depending on budget availability and national government interest in continuing the initiative. In Uzbekistan, for instance, the recent Mahalla policy reform led to the restructuring of the PVE Advisory Groups, with their roles and responsibilities now integrated into the Mahalla system under the framework of Mahalla Seven.

Despite variations in implementation, the PVE Advisory Groups in Central Asia represent a distinctive and impactful model of preventive action. Their locally driven, multi-stakeholder approach, emphasis on root causes, and commitment to inclusivity make them a valuable case study in the broader field of PVE. By fostering strong community ownership and institutional linkages, they offer important lessons for future prevention efforts, both within and beyond the region.



Results and impact

The establishment of PVE Advisory Groups in Central Asia has yielded significant and multifaceted impacts, contributing to the development of more inclusive, locally-driven, and sustainable peacebuilding strategies. By fostering collaboration between local governments, policymakers, and communities, these groups have enhanced awareness of the complex drivers of violent extremism while reinforcing trust between the state and the public. This approach has not only strengthened governance structures but also laid the groundwork for long-term policy coherence and effective PVE programming.

A key achievement has been the championing of bottom-up approaches in PVE efforts, particularly through the localization of National Action Plans (NAPs). Traditionally, PVE policies have often been designed at the national level without adequate consideration of local dynamics. However, through direct engagement with municipal authorities, civil society organizations, and grassroots actors, the PVE Advisory Groups have facilitated the adaptation of NAPs to the

specific needs and challenges faced by communities across the region. This localization has led to greater policy relevance, ensuring that interventions are more responsive to the lived realities of those most vulnerable to radicalization.

Moreover, the PVE Advisory Groups have served as an important platform connecting government institutions with community members. By creating platforms for dialogue and civic participation, these initiatives have empowered young people to actively contribute to peacebuilding efforts, shifting them from being passive recipients of policy to engaged stakeholders in decision-making processes. This engagement has been instrumental in reshaping narratives around governance, fostering a sense of ownership among youth, and reducing susceptibility to extremist ideologies that exploit feelings of alienation and disempowerment.

Recognizing the vital role of youth in peacebuilding and violence prevention, the Advisory Groups have advocated for greater youth inclusion in decision-making processes at both local and national levels. By amplifying youth voices in policy discussions, the initiative has ensured that PVE strategies are more reflective of their perspectives, concerns, and aspirations. Furthermore, youth-led initiatives supported by the Advisory Groups have helped disseminate counter-narratives to extremism, promoting tolerance, social cohesion, and alternative pathways for civic engagement.

Another critical area of impact has been the capacity-building of religious leaders, acknowledging their influence in shaping community norms and values. Through targeted training and engagement, religious figures have been equipped with the tools to counter extremist rhetoric, promote interfaith dialogue, and foster messages of peace and coexistence. This approach has strengthened community resilience by enhancing the role of religious institutions as pillars of stability and sources of credible guidance for vulnerable populations.


Additionally, the partnerships forged between local authorities, ministries, municipalities, and community leaders through the PVE Advisory Groups have contributed to strengthening trust between the public and the state. This trust-building has been a crucial step in mitigating grievances that extremist groups often exploit. By fostering inclusive governance mechanisms and demonstrating responsiveness to community concerns, these initiatives have contributed to a more stable and cohesive societal fabric.

By reinforcing the links between government institutions and society, championing youth engagement, empowering religious and community leaders, and institutionalizing inclusive policymaking processes, these efforts have strengthened the foundations for sustainable peace and security in the region. The lessons drawn from this initiative highlight the importance of long-term, trust-based engagement as a cornerstone of effective PVE programming.



Best practices to ensure sustainability

The experiences of the PVE Advisory Groups across five Central Asian countries offer valuable insights into best practices for ensuring the long-term sustainability of PVE initiatives. Given the evolving nature of security threats and socio-political landscapes in the region, the ability to adapt to changing national contexts has been a defining characteristic of the Advisory Groups. UNDP has played a pivotal role in providing strategic guidance, facilitating stakeholder coordination, and helping navigate challenges related to governance, policy implementation, and community engagement.



A core best practice has been the promotion of national and local ownership by aligning the work of the PVE Advisory Groups with national PVE strategies and Action Plans (NAPs). Integrating these groups into broader government-led PVE frameworks has enhanced their legitimacy, increased policy coherence, and ensured that their initiatives contribute to long-term institutional goals. Furthermore, linking PVE efforts to community-based programs has reinforced grassroots engagement, fostering local leadership in PVE.

One of the most critical factors in securing the longevity of PVE Advisory Groups has been the establishment of formal agreements with local governments to guarantee financial sustainability. By integrating PVE-related activities into national and municipal budgets, these agreements have helped institutionalize PVE efforts, ensuring they do not remain dependent solely on external funding. This approach has enhanced the continuity of interventions and reinforced the commitment of local authorities to sustain prevention efforts over time.

Moreover, ongoing awareness-raising and sensitization among policymakers, law enforcement, civil society actors, and community representatives have been instrumental in building long-term stakeholder commitment. Standardized and streamlined messaging has ensured consistency in communication about the objectives and functions of PVE Advisory Groups, reducing misinformation and increasing public trust in these mechanisms.

Recognizing the transnational nature of violent extremism, a key best practice has been the facilitation of regional cooperation through knowledge exchange. By creating platforms for dialogue and experience-sharing among countries in Central Asia, the PVE Advisory Groups have helped disseminate effective strategies, lessons learned, and innovative approaches to tackling extremism. These regional collaborations have contributed to the development of more context-specific, evidence-based, and culturally sensitive interventions, ultimately strengthening the collective resilience.

To ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of PVE initiatives, the Advisory Groups have also prioritized the establishment of robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms. These systems enable the continuous assessment of the impact of PVE interventions, ensuring that strategies are data-driven and responsive to emerging challenges. By systematically tracking progress, identifying gaps, and refining interventions, the M&E mechanisms have contributed to evidence-based policy development and strategic decision-making at both local and national levels.

Sustaining PVE efforts requires continuous investment in capacity-building and technical assistance for PVE Advisory Groups, with a particular emphasis on prevention strategies. Strengthening the technical expertise of Advisory Group members has enhanced their ability to design, implement, and evaluate prevention programs effectively. This includes training on early warning systems, conflict-sensitive approaches, interfaith dialogue, and youth engagement strategies, ensuring that interventions remain proactive rather than reactive.

The lessons learned from the implementation of PVE Advisory Groups in Central Asia demonstrate that sustainability in PVE programming hinges on institutional integration, financial security, multi-stakeholder engagement, regional cooperation, and continuous learning mechanisms. By embedding PVE efforts with-

in national frameworks, securing government commitments, and fostering community ownership, the Advisory Groups have established a solid foundation for long-term impact. Moving forward, sustaining these efforts will require continued investment in capacity-building, cross-border collaboration, and adaptive policy responses to address the evolving dynamics of violent extremism in the region.



Lessons learned

The project has underscored the critical importance of contextual sensitivity and local ownership in ensuring the sustainability and long-term impact of PVE initiatives. Tailoring interventions to address the specific needs of beneficiaries while remaining adaptable to shifting socio-political dynamics is essential for achieving strategic and enduring change.

While top-down, centralized approaches may appear efficient, they often fail to foster genuine, community-driven engagement, ultimately undermining both the process and the intended outcomes. In the complex socio-political landscape of Central Asia, proactive engagement with local authorities and government representatives has proven indispensable for unlocking deeper and more meaningful impact. By maintaining and expanding civic space, the project has facilitated a bottom-up, whole-society, civilian-based approach to PVE, fostering community-driven solutions and enhancing local resilience. This approach has created a more inclusive and participatory environment, empowering community members to contribute to the prevention of violent extremism.

Additionally, the establishment of clear support mechanisms and incentive structures has played a pivotal role in maintaining momentum and scaling results over time. Some of the Advisory Groups formed during the project are still operating, whereas others have closed, highlighting the challenge of sustainability and the need for a comprehensive plan to address this issue as part of the program design. Strengthening local capacities, fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration, and institutionalizing best practices will be key to sustaining progress and mitigating future risks associated with violent extremism in the region.

A key takeaway from the project is the ongoing need to nurture local leadership capabilities, as strong local leadership is fundamental to the successful implementation, institutionalization, and sustainability of PVE efforts. For example, in Kyrgyzstan's Jalal-Abad and Batken regions, PVE activities continue to flourish under the leadership of the Chairperson, Elders' Council, and local law enforcement officials, with active support from local government through funding and the provision of physical facilities. This case underscores the effectiveness of empowering local leaders and strengthening existing governance structures, ensuring that initiatives are embedded within the community fabric and responsive to local needs and realities.

By adopting this locally driven, participatory approach, the project has maximized its immediate impact and laid the foundation for long-term resilience and sustainability. Strengthening local capacities, fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration, and institutionalizing best practices will be key to sustaining progress and mitigating future risks associated with violent extremism in the region.

3.4 The Gambia: Supporting a peaceful political transition



Background

The Gambia underwent a historic political transition in 2017 following the unexpected results of the December 2016 presidential elections, which ended 22 years of authoritarian rule. Opposition candidate Adama Barrow's victory marked a turning point, ushering a new era of democratic governance and created momentum for institutional reforms, transitional justice, and rebuilding public trust.

However, the transition has faced significant challenges. Deep political divisions, economic hardships and increased distrust in state institutions have constrained progress. Efforts such as The Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparations Commission (TRRC), launched in 2018 to investigate past human rights violations, became a cornerstone of justice and reconciliation efforts, but its implementation has been slow, partly for political reasons. Additionally, tensions surrounding constitutional reform, governance transparency, and Security Sector Reform (SSR) have further underscored the complexities and fragility of The Gambia's democratic consolidation.

As one of the most closely observed democratic processes in West Africa, The Gambia's transition reflects both the opportunities and risks of post-authoritarian political transformation. Gambians' demand for a new beginning based on justice, reparations, accountability, and the restoration of democratic norms created both high expectations and significant challenges, as the country embarked on the difficult task of dismantling entrenched structures of repression while building inclusive and resilient institutions.



Supporting national commitments to the political transition and “Never Again”

The promise of a “New Gambia” quickly became synonymous with the commitment to “Never Again”—a collective determination to prevent the recurrence of abuses and to address the legacies of impunity. The reform agenda has been ambitious, encompassing transitional justice, constitutional review, SSR, and local governance renewal.

In this context, the Gambian government, supported by the UN and partners, began laying the foundations of a national “Infrastructure for Peace” (I4P) framework. More than a slogan, “Never Again” became a guiding principle for institutional reform and reconciliation, embodied in the work of the TRRC, the National Human Rights Commission, a National Peace and Reconciliation Strategy and the creation of inclusive dialogue platforms. The UN provided critical support to these nationally-led reconciliation and resilience efforts, particularly through the deployment of a Peace and Development Advisors (PDA),⁹⁹ UNDP technical and programming support, and financing from the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).

A Conflict and Development Analysis (CDA) based on multi-stakeholder consultations, was conducted to create a shared understanding of the drivers of conflict and fragility, and of the pathways to peace. The

⁹⁹ The Joint UNDP-DPPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention is a flagship UN initiative. Since 2004, it has been at the forefront of the UN's support to nationally-led conflict prevention, through the deployment of Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs). Present in over 50 countries around the world, it delivers tailored assistance to national stakeholders and UN Country Teams to help tackle underlying conflict drivers, anticipate and mitigate risks, and strengthen infrastructures for peace. <https://dppa.un.org/en/peace-and-development-advisors-joint-undp-dppa-programme-building-national-capacities-conflict>

CDA provided an essential common foundation for developing a comprehensive package of support to core national priorities. Collaboration with the World Bank, for example, ensured that institutional analysis informed both the CDA and the World Bank’s Turn Around Allocation¹⁰⁰—a special financing mechanism that provides support to countries emerging from conflict or crisis. This partnership ensured that investment decisions were aligned with peacebuilding priorities and reforms were grounded in credible analysis.

Building on the CDA’s findings, the PDA team together with UNDP and other UN entities worked on strengthening capacities for conflict prevention, facilitating insider mediation, and fostering linkages and cooperation between government and civil society. A consortium of three UN agencies – UNDP, International Trade Centre (ITC) and UNESCO – supported the Gambian-led processes through a PBF project entitled “Strengthening the National Infrastructure for Peace to Promote Social Cohesion in The Gambia” (2023-25), which has leveraged additional financing from the European Union to support insider mediation across all regions within of the country. These efforts culminated in a Gambian-led roadmap for infrastructure for peace that tied national reforms to prevention outcomes, focusing on accountability, reconciliation, and institutional resilience, including the development and launch of the National Action Plan for Youth Peace and Security.

The TRRC’s mandate to document abuses and propose reforms was central to the “Never Again” vision. In just under three years, the Commission produced a landmark report with 265 recommendations, of which 263 were accepted by the government. UNDP has been instrumental in translating these into practice, supporting efforts to establish the Special Prosecutor’s Office, expanding a High Court complex in Banjul, and accompanying the government’s White Paper implementation plan. These interventions are not only about accountability but also about reinforcing public trust in the rule of law.

The Reparations Commission, set to become operational in 2025, represents another step toward victim-centered justice. With UNDP support, the Commission is building a database of victims and exploring options for financing reparations, including assets recovered from illicit enrichment. Progress remains uneven, but the institutional groundwork for justice and reparations has been laid.

Under authoritarian rule, security institutions were used to suppress dissent. Reforming them has been critical to restoring trust between citizens and the state. With Peacebuilding Fund support, UNDP has led joint programming with OHCHR and UNODC to strengthen civilian oversight in these institutions, introduce human rights training, and integrate gender-sensitive policies. This work, coordinated through the Office of the National Security Advisor, has begun to shift the culture of security institutions from control to service, albeit at an incremental pace.

UNDP has also worked to embed gender equality and youth empowerment into the transition. Women’s leadership has been promoted not only through state institutions but also through civil society initiatives, such as so-called Women’s Listening Circles. These safe spaces allowed survivors of gender-based violence to participate in transitional justice processes without stigma, ensuring that “Never Again” includes women’s voices and perspectives. Youth, who make up a majority of the population, have been engaged in peacebuilding training sessions and local governance reforms, building a new generation of leaders invested in democratic consolidation.

100 <https://ida.worldbank.org/en/financing/resource-management/fcv-envelope>

Rebuilding governance from the ground up has been a priority. Through decentralization initiatives, UNDP has supported reforms that bring government services closer to citizens, enhance accountability, and address grievances that fueled past authoritarian excesses. By strengthening local councils and improving service delivery, these reforms connect national-level accountability processes to daily community needs, reinforcing trust in state institutions.

The strategic deployment of PDAs has complemented UN's and UNDP's role in navigating sensitive reform processes. Since 2017, successive PDA teams have worked with the UN system on the ground, providing essential inputs to the strategies and actions of national and international partners. They strengthened UN advocacy efforts, kept partners and donors informed, and secured political coverage during a complex and sensitive process. Drawing on the CDA, which was updated in 2025, they supported the UN Country Team and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa to align engagement with national priorities.

Civil society has been indispensable in ensuring that transitional justice processes reach the grassroots in The Gambia. CSOs documented violations, raised awareness, and engaged communities through memorialization, radio programs, and community dialogues. Women's Listening Circles created inclusive spaces for survivors, while youth organizations promoted civic participation and peace education. Despite resource challenges, CSOs remain at the forefront of bridging the gap between state-led reforms and citizen experiences, a role they played effectively because of UN and UNDP support.

National ownership remains central, but also contentious. The constitutional reform process exemplifies both the progress and fragility of the transition. Twice, efforts to replace the 1997 Constitution failed—first in 2020 and again in July 2025—due to disputes over presidential term limits and political mistrust. The failure to secure a new social contract has cast doubt on the credibility of the transition and reinforced concerns about executive dominance.

Nevertheless, the process revealed the importance of sustained support and engagement. Going forward, the constitutional question will remain central to democratic consolidation and to fulfilling the promises of the “New Gambia”. The Gambia's political transition has been shaped by competing narratives: the promise of justice and democracy, and the resilience of old structures and interests. Through the “Never Again” agenda, Gambians have committed to a process of reckoning with the past while striving to build institutions capable of safeguarding peace.

UNDP's role—together with the broader UN system, CSOs, and national actors—has been to ensure that this transition is not merely symbolic but transformative. From supporting transitional justice and reparations to advancing SSR, local governance reform, human rights promotion and protection, and the WPS and YPS agendas, these efforts collectively strengthen the infrastructure for peace. Although the constitutional reform did not succeed, the overall process reflects a commitment to resilience and ongoing perseverance in pursuing reform initiatives.



Results and impact

The Gambia's transition has yielded a number of tangible results that underscore both the progress achieved and the fragility of ongoing reforms. Since 2017, nationally driven processes, supported by the UN and other partners, have made notable advances in democratization, transitional justice, and institutional strengthening. These developments have not only reshaped the political landscape but also created open-

ings for greater civic participation, accountability, and social resilience. A cornerstone of the transition has been the TRRC, which provided a platform for victims to recount their experiences and demand accountability. The government's acceptance of 98 percent of TRRC recommendations and the adoption of a reparations law, with a seven-member commission now operational, signal strong political will to confront past abuses. Victims have received some reparations, though funding shortfalls have slowed disbursement. Plans to finance part of the reparations package through seized assets demonstrate a pragmatic approach to sustaining the process. Importantly, the TRRC helped break the silence around decades of violations, giving victims recognition and creating a societal consensus around the "Never Again" commitment.

Electoral processes have been central to consolidating the transition. The 2016 presidential election, followed by subsequent parliamentary (2017, 2022) and local elections (2018, 2023), marked a departure from the contested practices of the past. The re-election of President Barrow in 2021, with a turnout exceeding 89 percent of registered voters, was widely regarded as credible and peaceful. Observers highlighted increased transparency in vote counting and improved safeguards against intimidation. While campaign finance and incumbency advantages remain areas of concern, the overall conduct of elections has enhanced trust in political processes and underscored citizens' determination to engage in shaping their governance.

The independent National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has taken on a visible role in investigating violations, monitoring abuses, and advising on legislative reform. Its presence has strengthened accountability and provided citizens with an avenue for redress. The adoption of the Access to Information Act (2021) and an anticorruption bill (2023) further illustrate progress in legal frameworks.

At the same time, the constitutional review process has been uneven: despite extensive consultations and broad consensus in many quarters, the draft constitution stalled in parliament in 2020 as well as 2025. This setback was a disappointment for many citizens hoping for deeper systemic change, yet it underscored both the complexity of reform and the importance of continued political dialogue. By encouraging broad and inclusive discussions about the constitution's text, tensions were eased ahead of the 2025 parliamentary reading, since diverse participation supported by UNDP working in close collaboration with national institutions and civil society promoted understanding of both the process and the potential results.

One of the most striking impacts of the transition has been the reduction in political violence. Since 2017, elections and political contests have largely unfolded without widespread intimidation or clashes. Instances of communal violence and rising urban crime do pose challenges, but there has been no relapse into state-sanctioned violence. SSR has moved slowly, reflecting entrenched structures and limited resources, yet efforts are ongoing to professionalize the armed forces and law enforcement agencies. The broader outcome has been a reduction in political violence¹⁰¹ a society that is less fearful of political persecution and has greater freedom to express political views, even on sensitive topics.¹⁰² Some risks remain however, and the public perceptions of insecurity and crime has meanwhile actually risen.¹⁰³

Civil and political rights have expanded substantially compared to the pre-2017 period. Freedom of the press has improved: new media outlets have flourished, investigative journalism has grown, and public de-

101 Armed Conflict Location and Event Data ACLED

102 See for example Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2023 report (<https://freedomhouse.org/country/gambia/freedom-world/2023>)

103 Afrobarometer (2023) "Amid increased insecurity, Gambians cite corruption and lack of professionalism among police shortcomings". Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 66. (<https://www.afrobarometer.org/publication/ad665-amid-increased-insecurity-gambians-cite-corruption-and-lack-of-professionalism-among-police-shortcomings>)

bate has become more open. Civil society organizations are more active in monitoring government performance, advocating for reforms, and mobilizing communities. Women’s and minority rights remain unevenly protected, but key advances—such as upholding the ban on female genital mutilation and legal protections against discrimination—signal gradual progress. However, outdated laws on sedition and defamation have not been amended, creating lingering risks for journalists, human rights defenders and activists.

The political transition has also shaped economic and social dynamics. GDP growth is beyond five percent,¹⁰⁴ and international confidence has increased, reflected in donor commitments and development investment. Yet the benefits of growth are uneven: rural poverty remains high, youth unemployment is widespread, and inequality persists.¹⁰⁵ Many Gambians report frustration at the slow pace of reform and the rising cost of living.¹⁰⁶ While the democratic opening has created space for debate and accountability, it has also strengthened public expectations, making delivery on socio-economic fronts critical for sustaining legitimacy.

Ultimately, The Gambia’s transition underscores that peacebuilding is not a linear path. It requires sustained commitment, inclusive participation, and credible institutions. The “Never Again” vision remains alive—not as a guarantee, but as a guiding principle for the nation’s unfinished democratic journey.

Today, The Gambia stands at a crossroads. The foundations of democratic governance are firmer than at any point in the country’s recent history, with stronger institutions, greater openness, and more empowered citizens. At the same time, the fragility of reforms, particularly around corruption and constitutional renewal, makes the future of the transition vulnerable. The UN’s support, alongside the activism of civil society, has been instrumental in helping Gambian-led processes. The challenge now is to translate political will into sustained structural change, ensuring that the momentum of the past seven years leads to durable peace, justice, and inclusive development.



Best practices

The Gambian transition demonstrates that political will is indispensable for sustaining peace and accountability. Even with resource constraints slowing implementation, innovative approaches—such as channeling assets seized from the former regime into reparations—show how persistence and adaptation can keep reforms moving forward. The attempt to introduce a new constitution, though unsuccessful, highlights that reform is a long process that can include setbacks, and consensus-building around foundational issues is particularly complex in fragile settings.

National ownership has been central to The Gambia’s transition, with reform processes led by Gambian institutions and shaped by broad consultations across society. At the same time, regional and international support has played a vital complementary role. ECOWAS has provided critical mediation and security guarantees during sensitive phases of the transition, while also endorsing new accountability mechanisms when domestic capacity alone was insufficient. The decision by ECOWAS leaders in December 2024 to establish a Special Tribunal for The Gambia illustrates this balance: while rooted in Gambian ownership, the hybrid nature of the court—able to sit within or outside the country—ensures both credibility and the technical capacity to prosecute complex crimes.

¹⁰⁴ 5.7% in 2024 (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gambia/overview>)

¹⁰⁵ Worldbank 2022 “Gambia Poverty and Gender Assessment 2022 : Securing a Robust and Inclusive Recovery” (<https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099530111032210190>)

¹⁰⁶ Afrobarometer 2024 (<https://www.afrobarometer.org/articles/gambians-bemoan-economic-conditions-express-dissatisfaction-with-government-performance-afrobarometer-survey-reveals/>)

Another best practice has been the highly consultative and participatory nature of the Gambian process. Nationwide dialogues, conflict analysis, and victim hearings served not only as mechanisms for decision-making but also as instruments of reconciliation. By bringing diverse voices into the process, consultations themselves became confidence-building measures, helping to bridge divides and legitimize reform efforts. This inclusive approach has reinforced national ownership and given Gambians a sense of collective stake in the transition.

The nationally led CDA, supported by UNDP and other international partners, provided a shared understanding of risks and opportunities. This analysis became a foundation for mobilizing resources, including through the Peacebuilding Fund, and was further strengthened by collaboration with the World Bank. The ability to connect evidence-based analysis with funding and programming helped sustain momentum and ensured that interventions were coherent across sectors. This has been a successful project for the Peacebuilding Fund.

Finally, The Gambia's trajectory offers lessons for other countries navigating fragile transitions. The combination of transitional justice, reparations, human rights, governance reform, and security sector transformation shows how peacebuilding gains can be mutually reinforced when sequenced strategically. Delegations from the governments of Central African Republic and South Sudan have been visiting The Gambia to learn from this transition.



Challenges and lessons learned

The Gambian transition has delivered important milestones, but several challenges continue to test the sustainability of reforms. Funding remains a major constraint, particularly for the Reparations Commission and the broader transitional justice agenda. While innovative financing options are being explored, such as channeling assets seized from the former regime, there is still a heavy reliance on donor support.

Coordination has at times been another persistent challenge, especially related to SSR. Multiple international actors, including UN agencies, the EU, and bilateral donors, have engaged government counterparts separately, often leading to duplication and inefficiencies. Evaluations of past SSR initiatives point to weak joint planning and insufficient coherence across partners. However, learning from previous mistakes, this is no longer a challenge. By contrast, post-TRRC coordination between UNDP and OHCHR has been more effective. This contrast illustrates the value of streamlined partnerships and joint platforms to reduce fragmentation. In some cases, projects have been working as catalysts for new funding and projects in a sustainable and successful way. PBF projects paving the way for an EU-funded UNDP project is such an example.

The slow pace of reforms also reflects deeper structural realities. While the government has accepted nearly all TRRC recommendations and enacted key laws, constitutional reform efforts have repeatedly stalled. This outcome demonstrates the difficulty of building consensus on foundational governance issues in fragile political environments. It also highlights the need for patient, long-term engagement, where progress is measured not only in landmark achievements but also in incremental changes that build resilience.

Political will is essential to a successful and inclusive political transition, but insufficient on its own; it must be matched by consistent follow-through, institutional capacity, and accountability mechanisms to ensure credibility. Effective alignment between government, civil society, and international partners is critical, particularly in cross-cutting areas such as SSR and anti-corruption. Civil society organizations remain indis-

pensable watchdogs and advocates, but their role depends on adequate protection, resources, and an enabling legal environment. Finally, ensuring that marginalized groups, including women, rural populations, and minorities, are meaningfully included in reform processes is central to building legitimacy and sustaining peace.

These lessons highlight both the fragility and the promise of The Gambia's transition. They reinforce the importance of coherence, inclusivity, and long-term commitment—not only from government but also from international partners and civil society—to ensure that the vision of “Never Again” becomes a lasting reality.

■ 3.5 Peru: Insider mediation and civic dialogue



Background

Insider mediation has emerged as a pivotal tool for establishing and maintaining peace in conflict-affected areas, as well as for preventing conflicts. Although insider mediation is not a new concept, its significance has gained increased recognition. Unlike conventional mediation, which often relies on external actors to mediate differences among conflict parties through confidence-building and political dialogue, insider mediation encompasses a broader range of activities—such as fostering social trust, early warning, outreach, and advocacy—that occur at local, sub-national, and national levels. Insider mediation depends on credible figures who leverage their deep connections within their communities to navigate the complexities of conflict. Due to their contextual knowledge, they are often more effective in devising approaches that both anticipate immediate conflict triggers and address the underlying causes of conflicts, which are specific to the local context and may be overlooked by external actors.

The success of insider mediators stems from their ability to foster a sense of local agency, empowering communities to play a central role in maintaining peace and resolving disputes. By reducing violence and encouraging cooperative and trustful relations, these mediators contribute to broader national peace efforts both directly and indirectly. They facilitate popular engagement within consultations that underpin formal peace talks, lay the groundwork for the acceptance of negotiated terms, and reduce the likelihood that local tensions will trigger outbreaks of violence that could hamper peace negotiations. Thus, investing in community-level insider mediation not only builds local resilience but also strengthens the overall framework of peace within a nation, complementing and enhancing formal peace agreements established at higher levels.

Given the central role that insider mediators play in preventing conflict and easing social tension, determining who assumes this role has significant implications for which issues are addressed and what solutions are deployed. Traditional, patriarchal social norms and practices often grant older men more authority and visibility in mediating conflicts within their communities and beyond. This visibility, however, obscures the critical mediation work of others who bring different perspectives shaped by their unique experiences and positions in society. This diversity of viewpoints provides non-traditional leaders with access to various resources—from connections with different actors and institutions to an understanding of how cultural, political, and economic dynamics affect groups differently—sensitizing them to a broader set of problems, constraints, and solutions. The different networks, capacities, and knowledge that these actors bring may not even be visible to those outside the group. Expanding the recognition and support for a broader range of mediators is therefore critical to ensure a more holistic approach to addressing grievances, meeting community needs, and promoting capacities for peace.

Insider mediators come from diverse backgrounds, including men, women, young people, religious leaders, and minority groups. They may operate within organized networks or work informally. Regardless of their structure, they possess a range of skills and deep-rooted community relationships that grant them the credibility needed to reduce friction and foster harmony. Their close ties to community members provide them with socio-cultural insights and strong bonds of trust, enabling them to detect brewing tensions, broker agreements, and encourage attitude changes that prevent conflicts and sustain peace—capabilities often inaccessible to outsiders. The term “local level” in the context of insider mediators refers to the community where they generate credibility, legitimacy, and trust. This community can be geographic, sub-national, identity-driven, or even virtual. Each type of community requires different mediation approaches and considerations for effective engagement.

Insider mediators often play multiple roles within their communities, such as family members, neighbors, business owners, or local council members. The relevance of these roles depends on the context, and some roles may create conflicts of interest, making it challenging to maintain trust and legitimacy. An insider in one situation may be an outsider in another, depending on the dynamics of the interaction. Ultimately, it is the parties involved who determine the mediator’s insider status and confer trust and credibility.



Challenges in Peru

For decades, Peru has faced persistent challenges related to social conflict and protests, inequality and exclusion, and public dissatisfaction with governance, which have fueled cycles of political instability and civil unrest. These long-standing grievances, coupled with allegations of corruption, growing citizen insecurity and the influence of criminal interest in politics, have eroded public trust in institutions and deepened societal divisions. These dynamics reached a critical juncture in 2022 when then-President Pedro Castillo was removed from office by Congress after attempting to dissolve the legislative body. His ousting triggered widespread protests and counter-protests, exacerbated by a forceful security response that resulted in over 50 fatalities. The situation underscored the deep polarization within Peruvian society, as dialogue between opposing factions became increasingly strained and civic space for constructive engagement narrowed.

Peru is facing growing tensions around governance and sustainable development. Current trends indicate a profound crisis of confidence in public institutions, with fewer than 20% of the population expressing trust in government bodies, political organizations, and the media (INEI, 2024). Furthermore, perceptions of centralism remain deeply entrenched, with 59% of the population believing that the country is governed predominantly from the capital, Lima, without adequate consideration of regional concerns (IEP & OXFAM, 2024). In addition, 80% of citizens feel that national media outlets overly prioritize issues related to Lima, neglecting the interests of regional populations. The growing polarization within society is also a significant issue, with 45% of Peruvians identifying political and ideological divisions as the primary source of social discord (IEP, 2023).



Building relationships through inclusive civic forums in Peru

In response to these pressing challenges, UNDP has tried in different ways to strengthen dialogue at the local level. Among these, UNDP Peru launched a strategic initiative named *Tejiendo Ciudadanía: Encuentros por el Perú* (Weaving Citizenship: Encounters for Peru) aimed at fostering dialogue and mediation through an inclusive, community-driven approach. Recognizing the critical role of local peacebuilders and insider mediators—individuals with the trust and legitimacy to engage conflicting parties—UNDP initiated a year-

long inception phase to identify and empower mediators from diverse backgrounds. This process focuses on establishing relationships with local actors, ensuring that traditionally marginalized groups, including youth, indigenous communities, women, and LGBTQI+ individuals, are represented.

At the core of this initiative is a series of four civic forums held in different regions of Peru, designed to create a platform for open dialogue, consensus-building, and civic engagement. These forums, implemented in collaboration with academic institutions, media and civil society organizations, serve multiple objectives:

- Raising awareness of critical socio-political and economic development challenges at the local and regional level.
- Facilitating discussions that promote mutual understanding across diverse sectors of society, integrating voices often excluded from dialogue.
- Identifying potential insider mediators capable of bridging divides and fostering peaceful discourse.

The four forums were held in the South, North, Amazon and Center regions, bringing together representatives of 310 organizations, including civil society groups, the public and private sectors, academia, and both national and local media. These forums served as a critical platform for engaging in discussions on urgent governance and sustainable development issues, playing a pivotal role in uniting diverse stakeholders in an increasingly polarized society. Particularly noteworthy is the opportunity these dialogues provided for marginalized groups to directly voice their concerns and priorities regarding conflict prevention and development, addressing both local and national authorities.

A strong focus was placed on youth participation. In collaboration with the UNDP project Redpública, 13 preparatory workshops – under the initiative “Jóvenes Tejiendo Ciudadanía” (Youth Weaving Citizenship) – were organized to equip 606 young participants with essential skills for effective engagement. Selected youth delegates were given the opportunity to represent their perspectives in the discussions, amplifying their voices and positioning dialogue as a powerful driver for change.

Moreover, an important outcome of these forums was the identification of insider mediators among the panelists and participants. These individuals will undergo a comprehensive training program focused on conflict resolution, further reinforcing their role in peacebuilding efforts and contributing to the establishment of a robust network of insider mediators.

Through these forums, UNDP is contributing to the creation of sustained relationships among individuals and groups who were once divided by historical and socio-political divides. The long-term goal is to build resilient networks of dialogue and collaboration — including both institutional actors and civil society, particularly at the local level — that not only address immediate issues but also establish a foundation for ongoing peaceful exchanges that can withstand future challenges. In this way, the forums represent a key step in redefining how Peru’s diverse population can engage in constructive conversations and ultimately contribute to the creation of a more peaceful and equitable society. The process of identifying and strengthening insider mediators to foster and facilitate inclusive dialogue at the local, regional, and national levels in Peru represents a long-term, strategic undertaking that requires sustained engagement, capacity-building, and trust-building efforts across diverse stakeholder groups.



Impact

The civic forums organized in Peru served to foster dialogue as an essential way to enhance or restore trust between citizens, prevent violence and include excluded voices in the public debate. In a country deeply divided by political, social, and economic challenges, the forums provided a rare and crucial opportunity for individuals from divergent sectors—such as indigenous leaders, representatives of extractive industries, national government officials, local authorities, academia, and civil society organizations (CSOs)—to come together and engage in constructive discussions. In many of these regions, far from the capital, there had been a lack of platforms for open dialogue, and longstanding grievances had often escalated into tensions and violent conflicts. The forums not only created a space for these actors to address the most pressing local issues but also allowed them to identify solutions to challenges that were often overlooked or ignored in national discourse. These solutions will contribute to a national citizens' agenda, which will be informed by the systematised results of each forum.

One of the most notable impacts of these forums is the influence they have had on national media. Participants in these regional dialogues, who had historically been marginalized, have been identified by some of Peru's largest national newspapers to contribute commentaries, thus expanding their influence and ensuring that voices from the peripheries of the country are heard. By amplifying these perspectives, the forums have provided an important platform for marginalized groups to shape the national discourse on key issues such as social inequality, illegal economies and organized crime, corruption, land rights, and the distribution of natural resources.

In addition, *Tejiendo Ciudadanía* has helped to strengthen the ecosystem of democratic dialogue in Peru. This initiative has facilitated closer ties with other high-level platforms of political dialogue, such as the National Agreement, the National Assembly of Regional Governments, and the Secretariat of Social Management and Dialogue of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, all of which are primarily led by the Government at national and regional level. Under *Tejiendo Ciudadanía*, UNDP has provided technical support to these three institutions to enhance their work to promote dialogue, amplify their networks and strengthen their capacities for conflict prevention, management and resolution with a solid decentralized approach.

Looking ahead, UNDP's efforts to sustain and expand this initiative will continue to focus on empowering participants through further training in mediation techniques, non-violent communication, and strategies for countering divisive narratives in the media. By empowering inclusive dialogue processes and strengthening the role of insider mediators, the initiative seeks to generate a sustainable and long-lasting impact on the use of dialogue as a strategic tool for influencing public policy and fostering social cohesion in Peru. These efforts are particularly significant as 2026 approaches, with the country entering a highly anticipated election year that is expected to be fraught with political tensions. By strengthening the capacity of these regional actors, UNDP aims to leverage these networks to promote peaceful dialogue, prevent conflict, and foster a more inclusive and peaceful political climate.

This shows how structured engagement, through civic forums and preparatory workshops, enabled youth to contribute to national-level dialogue on governance and inclusion. This deliberate linkage between participation and influence helped move youth engagement beyond visibility toward meaningful policy impact.



Lessons learned

The forums also highlighted several important lessons about barriers marginalized groups face, informing future engagement to ensure greater participation from a wider range of actors. These lessons include:

- **Inclusive design through local partnerships:** A key feature that made these forums more inclusive than previous efforts was their co-creation with local actors from the start. UNDP partnered with universities in regions, involving them in shaping the process and ensuring that local knowledge and priorities were embedded in the forums' design, while also avoiding the replication of stereotypical narratives and prejudices surrounding regions outside the capital. These partnerships enabled a more accurate mapping of relevant stakeholders and strengthened the legitimacy and inclusiveness of the dialogues. Consultations with youth from the macro-regions where forums were held also enhanced visibility of local voices, complementing a parallel effort under the “*Jóvenes Tejiendo Ciudadanía*” initiative. Holding the forums outside of Lima brought national institutional actors into direct contact with local realities and communities. Open microphone spaces were particularly meaningful, as they enabled local citizens to express their concerns and propose solutions directly to institutional representatives. Local media played a critical role in broadening and sustaining the dialogue, as well as socializing outcomes beyond the forums themselves.
- **Incentives and added value for local participation:** A key incentive for local participation was the presence of national institutional actors—something uncommon in local spaces often limited to civil society and marked by polarization and dialogue fatigue. This multistakeholder approach offered a distinct value by fostering direct interaction between local communities and institutional representatives. The forums were also seen as part of a broader, ongoing process (*Tejiendo Ciudadanía*), with a clear methodology aimed at co-creating a citizen agenda and returning with results. This sense of continuity, supported by national actors, UNDP and the media, helped build trust and engagement. Also, existing relationships from other UNDP initiatives—such as participatory environmental monitoring and business and human rights projects—were leveraged to mobilize trusted local actors and strengthen participation.
- **Financial support:** Many potential insider mediators from marginalized communities faced significant financial constraints that hindered their participation in the two-day forums. Recognizing that participation in the insider mediator network will require an even greater commitment, UNDP learned that addressing participants' financial needs is essential to encourage their inclusion.
- **Simplified language:** A core principle for all forum participants was that language must be respectful, which is challenging given Peru's political polarization. It quickly became apparent that language must also be simple and understandable, given participants' diverse backgrounds and educational levels. Technical jargon often used by experts and government officials can be a barrier to participation. The role of the dialogue facilitator is crucial in ensuring that the dialogue is fluid, respectful, and accessible to everyone.
- **Language diversity:** Despite the widespread use of Spanish, forum organizers observed that participants from indigenous communities sometimes struggled to fully participate in Spanish-only sessions. Since outreach to indigenous communities is vital for inclusive insider mediation in Peru, UNDP learned that training materials, group work facilitation, and other communications need to be offered in Quechua and other native languages to support the meaningful participation of indigenous insider mediators.
- **Physical accessibility:** The civic forums were held in face-to-face settings that were not always accessible to people with disabilities. The accessibility of proposed venues for in-person group work needs to be assessed beforehand.
- **Gender-based family responsibilities:** Reflecting on lessons learned after the forums, UNDP observed that most last-minute cancellations were from women who cited pressing family obligations. This constraint affected women across socio-economic classes. Moving forward, UNDP will need to work with potential female insider mediators to understand what kind of support can offset this barrier.

Working with insider mediators, a practical approach

Below a few practical tips on how UNDP country offices can work with insider mediators:



How to ensure inclusive insider mediation

- Analyzing the context through inclusive partnership.
- Assess existing analysis, research and data on the context for inclusivity and highlight gaps.
- Conduct broadly inclusive stakeholder consultations to gather additional information and understand how conflict and peace dynamics affect groups differently.
- Developing a risk management strategy.
- Identifying diverse insider mediators

How to identify diverse groups of insider mediators

- Conduct a mapping and analysis of potential insider mediators in a specific space.
- Identify potential mediators through training programs that afford project managers an opportunity to become familiar with the skills, strengths and backgrounds of a broader range of actors
- Carry out an open, participatory consultative process with actors who are directly affected by a diverse range of local conflicts and dynamics that lead to tensions
- Weigh the pros and cons of conditioning support on achieving benchmarks within the stakeholder group.

How to support insider mediators

- Identify the objectives of insider mediators and the realities that inform, shape and constrain their ability to reach these objectives.
- Map the capacities and resources that insider mediators have to achieve these objectives and identify gaps.

For more information on UNDP's work on insider mediation, and more examples, see the forthcoming UNDP "Guidance Note on Amplifying Inclusivity within Insider Mediation" (2025).

3.6 Sudan (Darfur): Youth-led peacebuilding



Introduction

The *Darfuri Youth Empowerment* project, jointly implemented by UNDP and UNHCR under the PBF's Youth Promotion Initiative, was launched in the aftermath of Sudan's Juba Peace Agreement in 2022, to address deep-rooted intercommunal violence and the continued marginalization of youth in West and Central Darfur. Designed to shift perceptions of youth from potential drivers of conflict to legitimate peace actors, the project focused on expanding civic space, promoting inclusive decision-making, and strengthening the role of young people in local conflict resolution. Through a conflict-sensitive, youth-led, and contextually grounded approach, the initiative offers concrete insights for practitioners working in fragile settings. It demonstrates that, even in volatile and conflict-affected environments, youth-inclusive prevention is not only possible, but also essential.



Context

Sudan's fragile political transition, launched after the 2019 revolution and the ousting of President Omar al-Bashir, held the promise of democratic reform, inclusive governance, and peace. Yet, despite early progress, including the signing of the Juba Peace Agreement in 2020 and a transitional power-sharing arrangement, the transition faltered amid persistent political instability, weak institutions, and unresolved grievances from decades of authoritarian rule and civil conflict. Tensions between civilian and military actors culminated in repeated breakdowns in governance, ultimately paving the way for the violent power struggle that erupted in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

The war has since triggered one of the world's largest internal displacement crises, deepened humanitarian needs, and fragmented an already volatile security landscape. In Darfur, long marked by intercommunal violence, ethnic marginalization, and displacement, the conflict has reignited tensions between communities such as the Masalit and Arab groups, particularly in West Darfur's El Geneina and Kreinik localities. Access to land, political representation, and unresolved grievances remain central drivers of conflict. Amid this backdrop, young people have assumed a dual role—emerging as key agents of change, while also, in some instances, being vulnerable to recruitment into cycles of violence and instability. Despite their critical role in the 2019 revolution, youth, especially those from IDP, nomadic, and marginalized communities, remain largely excluded from formal decision-making. The shrinking civic space, increased online hate speech, and breakdown of customary governance mechanisms have further exacerbated risks of violence and radicalization.



Intervention design & approach

In response to entrenched intercommunal tensions and youth marginalization in Darfur, UNDP and UNHCR aimed to prevent conflict by empowering youth as peacebuilders. The project focused on expanding their civic space, strengthening their role in local conflict resolution, and promoting inclusive decision-making to address underlying drivers of instability. Central to the project was the creation of a diverse network of Youth Peace Ambassadors, trained in conflict transformation, non-violent communication, and digital storytelling. With support from UNDP and CSO implementing partners on the ground, these ambassadors facilitated community dialogues, implemented microprojects, countered hate-speech in their communities and promoted peaceful coexistence across divided groups.

UNDP and UNHCR embedded a conflict-sensitive approach throughout both design and implementation. Initial conflict and stakeholder analysis informed locality-specific interventions, while continuous contextual monitoring enabled the team to anticipate and mitigate risks. For instance, the youth peace ambassadors were chosen through open calls and validated by trusted community networks and CSOs to ensure ensuring diversity, legitimacy, and representation across ethnic, gender, and geographic lines. Moreover, facilitators, drawn from both UNDP and local CSOs, were trained to manage sensitive intergroup dynamics and dialogue formats were carefully designed to avoid triggering old grievances and instead reframe conversations around shared issues. The approach also made room for adaptive risk management, a feature that proved critical when conflict escalated in April 2023. At that point, the project pivoted from civic engagement activities to emergency support for youth farmers, and UNDP maintained communication with displaced youth leaders who continued to engage in peacebuilding—even brokering a ceasefire in one case.

UNDP and UNHCR maintained a facilitative role throughout, providing strategic oversight and helping to coordinate a network of local implementing partners. CSOs played an essential role in mentoring youth, anchoring the project locally, and maintaining delivery amidst insecurity. This multi-level approach—combining youth leadership, community-based support, and UNDP’s strategic oversight—allowed the project to remain responsive, credible, and operational even amid deteriorating security conditions and political sensitivities. Moreover, UNDP’s convening role assisted in creating the political space for youth engagement with government representatives and institutions. This helped pave the way for the inclusion of Youth Peace Ambassadors in formal coordination platforms, such as state-level steering committees. Similarly, the dialogues and microprojects carried out by youth forced local officials to take notice and develop their own strategies, coordination mechanisms, and response, lending further legitimacy to youth. Taken together, the project’s design and approach reflected a deliberate effort to localize peacebuilding, center youth agency, and remain responsive to rapidly changing conditions. These elements proved essential for delivering impact in a fragile and conflict-affected setting.



Results & impact

The project demonstrates how localized, youth-led initiatives can make meaningful contributions to conflict prevention, even in volatile and rapidly shifting environments. By investing in young people as peacebuilders, the project helped reframe youth not as passive victims or potential spoilers, but as legitimate actors in peace processes. It created new civic spaces for young people to engage meaningfully in their communities through structured training, dialogues, and microprojects that directly addressed conflict drivers such as displacement, marginalization, and intercommunal mistrust. These initiatives visibly increased youth participation in local peacebuilding and enhanced perceptions of youth as constructive actors, fostering improved relationships with both community leaders and state authorities. Indeed, prior to the conflict, several state-level authorities committed to youth inclusion in coordination platforms and began developing strategies inspired by the project’s model.

While the outbreak of national conflict in April 2023 disrupted formal programming, the foundations laid by the project enabled a degree of continuity. Youth Peace Ambassadors in Central Darfur played a central role in brokering two local ceasefires—demonstrating the value of investing in community-based prevention capacities. These efforts helped de-escalate violence, protect civilians, and maintain communication between armed actors and local communities at a time when formal channels had collapsed. Although the broader conflict limited the project’s ability to fully realize its planned outcomes, the results underscore the potential of youth-led, conflict-sensitive approaches to prevent violence and sustain peace at the local level.



Implementation challenges and opportunities

The 2023 conflict rendered many civic spaces inaccessible, displaced large numbers of youth peace ambassadors, and forced the suspension of planned activities. As described by the project team, the situation was “chaotic,” with shifting frontlines and deteriorating communication infrastructure. Many youth ambassadors relocated to IDP camps in Chad, and in some areas accessing participants became impossible. This demanded a high degree of flexibility and adaptability. The project had integrated mechanisms for adaptive management and conflict sensitivity from the outset, including flexible implementation tools and continuous conflict analysis. These proved essential when UNDP and UNHCR had to re-programme project funds, with clearance from the PBF Secretariat, to support emergency agricultural activities for youth farmers in North Darfur. While formal programming could not continue as originally envisioned, this flexibility allowed the project to retain its core peacebuilding focus, support community resilience, and respond meaningfully to a rapidly deteriorating environment.

Coordination across multiple levels posed a consistent challenge during implementation. While efforts were made to link youth ambassadors with community leaders, CSOs, and government actors, project staff noted that coordination with state institutions was often fragmented and inconsistent. Engagement with government actors shifted between the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Humanitarian Aid Commission, and the Supreme Council for Peace, creating confusion and delays. Despite these challenges, the project was able—prior to the outbreak of conflict—to secure commitments for youth representation in state-level coordination platforms.

Technology and infrastructure limitations further constrained implementation. Internet blackouts and poor connectivity hampered communication and information-sharing. Many youth ambassadors lacked access to smartphones or computers, and connectivity worsened significantly after the conflict escalated. UNDP attempted to mitigate this by distributing devices and maintaining engagement through CSO networks and social media platforms, but information flows remained inconsistent, affecting monitoring and follow-up. Despite these constraints, the project created important opportunities for youth-led conflict prevention. Youth Peace Ambassadors, selected through open calls and community validation, were seen as legitimate actors within their communities. Their training in peacebuilding and dialogue facilitation enabled them to lead local initiatives and, in at least one case, play a central role in brokering localized ceasefire agreements. In Zalingei, Central Darfur, youth ambassadors worked alongside community leaders to facilitate negotiations between armed actors and contributed to two separate agreements focused on civilian protection and de-escalation.

Key lessons learned for conflict prevention practice

The project provides important insights into how conflict prevention can be meaningfully pursued, even in the midst of active conflict and institutional breakdown. Rather than viewing prevention as relevant only in post-conflict or stable environments, this case demonstrates that local prevention efforts can endure and adapt under extreme pressure, if designed and implemented in a conflict sensitive and risk-responsive and flexible manner.



- 1. Youth-led approaches can be effective and sustainable in fragile settings.** Placing youth at the center of the project strengthened local ownership, enhanced trust, and generated legitimacy. Youth Peace Ambassadors were perceived as credible actors within their communities and played a visible role in conflict prevention through dialogue, advocacy, and local peacebuilding efforts, where institutional actors could not. Designing conflict prevention initiatives that place youth in active leadership roles and invest in their long-term capacity demonstrates the lasting value of early investment in youth leadership.



- 2. Conflict-sensitive and context-specific design is essential.** The project demonstrated the importance of grounding interventions in local realities through conflict and stakeholder analysis. The project's conflict-sensitive design helped avoid reinforcing divisions and enabled programming that responded to real needs. Community-based selection processes and culturally informed facilitation were crucial in navigating intergroup tensions. Continuous monitoring allowed the team to manage risks and adjust approaches as the situation evolved.



- 3. Adaptive management is critical in volatile contexts.** The integration of adaptive management tools into the project design allowed for rapid shifts in programming in response to the 2023 conflict. When civic space collapsed, UNDP and UNHCR reallocated funds to meet urgent needs—supporting youth farmers and maintaining links with displaced participants. This flexibility preserved the project's relevance and ensured continued support to peacebuilding actors.



- 4. Multi-level coordination creates opportunities but requires sustained effort.** Efforts to engage with local and state authorities highlighted both opportunities and limitations. Fragmentation within government structures and frequent shifts in institutional counterparts created delays and confusion. However, where coordination mechanisms were in place, they provided valuable entry points for youth engagement and policy influence, demonstrating the need to invest early in relationship-building with institutions, if possible—even in active conflict.

3.7 Zambia: Preventing electoral violence



Introduction

The case of Zambia 2021 elections was selected as an illustrative example of UNDP's engagement to prevent electoral violence, working closely with UNCT and other UN entities to support the country towards peaceful elections. Beyond a project-approach, the study considers how UNDP contributed to prevention through joint-understanding of priorities, strategic engagement with national authorities, early warning and institutional strengthening initiatives.



Context

In August 2021, Zambia held successful general elections, resulting in the fourth peaceful transfer of power since independence in 1964. The outgoing President's decision to accept the election, despite calls from his party to halt the announcement of results, played a pivotal role in ensuring a relatively smooth transition. Voter turnout reached a record 70.6%, with strong participation of women and youth.

However, the pre-election period was generally marked by political tensions and a significant risk of possible violence. Tensions between the two main political parties which had persisted since the closely contested 2016 elections, contributing to growing incidences of political violence, intimidation, and harassment of political opponents mostly by party-affiliated youths (cadres). Public dissatisfaction was compounded by shrinking democratic space, perceptions of politicization of the police and judiciary services, and deteriorating socio-economic conditions. These were exacerbated by debt challenges and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. There were also concerns regarding the selective application of the Public Order Act¹⁰⁷ and perceived targeting and intimidation of Government opponents. Meanwhile, the media's coverage of electoral and political events was largely viewed as biased and potentially divisive.

Several processes helped inform the UN's preventative engagement strategy in the country. Following the 2016 elections, the 2018 Electoral Needs Assessment identified several challenges relating to the electoral environment, including:

- Selective application of Public Order Act in favor of the ruling party
- Shortcomings in the existing judicial electoral dispute resolution mechanisms
- Need for more effective and timely voter education
- Polarized media and a perception of bias in favor of the ruling party by state media
- Rise of political violence, particularly building up from 2016 elections

In addition, in September 2020, the Zambia UN Regional Monthly Review (RMR) identified both risks and opportunities for the UN preventive engagement ahead of the elections. Following the RMR outcome, the UN supported the establishment of a Prevention Platform that also ensured a nationally supported political dialogue processes.

¹⁰⁷ The Public Order Act regulates assemblies and processions in public places, which many argue includes colonial provisions which limit freedoms



UNDP contribution to UN-wide efforts: Analysis and high-level engagements

Following the RMR recommendations, the UN Prevention Platform was established with Situation reports generated contributing an early warning system for the UN system, covering the period May to August 2021. A key contribution from the RMR process was the Crisis Risk Dashboard (CRD), launched by UNDP in collaboration with other UN entities, notably the OHCHR. The CRD supported the UNCT in addressing emerging issues by triangulating media reports and updates from across the UN system. These were visualized on the dashboard, offering a quick snapshot of incidents of violence, types of violations and perpetrators, fatalities from political violence, and disaggregated data such as violence targeting women and geographic spread. UNDP and the RCO jointly developed the situation reports, which covered incidents related to violence, human rights, gender, security, and operational issues.

The Resident Coordinator and the UN System used this data to engage government counterparts and highlight areas of concern. Collectively, the UN Prevention Platform and the CRD provided timely information to the UN Country Team, fostered systematic analysis sharing and informed dialogue and discussions with high-level visitors to Zambia. They were instrumental in supporting visits such as the SRSG/UNOAU Hanna Tetteh's mission from 31 May to 4 June, to understand the political situation and promote constructive dialogue between Zambian leadership, opposition parties, and other stakeholders.

Following the SRSG's visit, and diplomatic engagement with the Commonwealth, a Coalition for Peaceful Elections was established, co-convened by the Zambian Church Mother Bodies and the Zambia Centre for Interparty Dialogue, with civil society and UN support, culminating in the signing of a peace pledge by political party presidents on 14 July 2021.

The prompt deployment of an interim-Peace and Development Advisor (PDA) to further support the analytical capabilities of the RCO and UNCT was crucial. Managed by the UNDP-DPPA Joint Programme for Conflict Prevention, the PDA allowed for consistent use of the CDA and the identification of entry points for UN engagement on prevention. The PDA's timely information sharing with all relevant UN entities was instrumental in aligning national prevention initiatives. Following the RMR and After Action Review Recommendations post 2021, the presence of a substantive PDA has strengthened collaborative ongoing analytical capabilities of the UNCT and entities information sharing/dialogue at UN HQ levels; Cooperating Partners & Government to anticipate collective appropriate early prevention efforts including good offices and development of a comprehensive National Infrastructure for Peace building onto UNDP ongoing support to elections in the country.



UNDP initiatives to prevent electoral violence

Based on the recommendations of the 2018 Electoral Needs Assessment, the Democracy Strengthening for Zambia (DSZ) project was established to provide technical support to the electoral process, support electoral related conflict prevention and the peaceful conduct of elections. In a context of perceived mistrust of electoral institutions, mounting political tensions and exclusion of women and youth, UNDP recognized the need for broader engagement beyond the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) for effective collective prevention efforts. This was reflected in the structure of the DSZ Project three-chair Steering Committee, which included the ECZ, Ministry of Justice (MoJ), and UNDP. This structure was replaced at the technical level with the three entities co-chairing the Technical Committee. The MoJ's involvement was crucial, given its role in addressing governance and conflict prevention issues closely connected to the electoral process and for national ownership of the processes. Government implementing partners included the ECZ, Zambia Police Service (ZPS), Human Rights Commission (HRC), National Assembly, Judiciary and MoJ.

1.

Conflict mitigation mechanisms

Although Zambia had previously experienced three peaceful transitions, there had been a rise of political violence, particularly since the 2016 elections. As part of its Programming for Peace, the DSZ aimed to reinforce conflict prevention mechanisms to support peaceful elections.

Police training on rights and electoral security was a key component of the DSZ Programming for Peace. The 2018 electoral Needs Assessment identified the need for enhanced training of ZPS on election-related security. In response, UNDP, in collaboration with OHCHR, organized capacity-building activities focused on crowd management and the prevention of human rights violations. UNDP trainings of the police, which benefitted over 13,000 officers were critical given the past instances of alleged police violence that had contributed to increased polarization. However, it was observed that funds permitting such engagement would have been more effective had the intervention commenced earlier. This underscored the importance of early proactive engagement “before things get too hot”.

Another key element of UNDP’s engagement with the police was the introduction of a Campaign Venue Management System, renamed Public Events Management System – an online system through which notifications for public gatherings, meetings and processions would be lodged with the police. As tensions frequently erupted when political parties sought access to campaign venues, the system promoted transparency and accountability in the management of public gatherings and electoral events. The Police keenness to take the system on board is testament to the commitment to address perennial concerns about uneven application of the Public Order Act.

The ECZ was a key partner for UNDP engagement. ECZ has established Conflict Management Committees (CMCs) in all the 116 districts as alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. UNDP worked to strengthen the capacity of the Committees to review cases and to handle disputes.

The UNDP also developed and institutionalized an Early Warning and Early Response System (EWERS) at the national, provincial, and local levels. The EWERS was initially intended to support the CMCs managed by the ECZ. These were primarily reactive in nature, strictly responding to incidences of violence reported. The EWERS was meant to enhance their ability to act proactively. However, at the time of the System’s launch, the Electoral Commission expressed concerns that due to time and legal constraints it would not be able to co-implement the system. UNDP had to implement the initiative with the Human Rights Commission instead. Through the EWERS, UNDP supported institutions with real-time data on the risks of electoral violence and informed appropriate responses to mitigate the violence by both state and non-state actors.

Key success factors included the system’s multi-channel approach—a web-based application, toll-free hotline, and SMS gateway—to counter Internet access challenges and expand public access to the system. In Lusaka, the HRC established a Situation Room to receive, monitor and respond to incidences of violence by directing them to relevant authorities such as the ECZ and the Police for corrective action. Ongoing technical support from the Joint Task Force on Electoral Assistance and flexible funding enabled the rapid development, and deployment of the EWERS. Crucially, the active engagement of response partners, including the Zambia Police Service and CMCs at the sub-national level ensured that early warning translated into timely preventive actions.

2.

Addressing legal bottlenecks and strengthening institutions

With multiple institutional counterparts, UNDP facilitated inclusive consultations on contentious constitutional and legislative issues, including the Public Order Act that the Electoral Needs Assessment identified as a driver of conflict. Through UNDP's support, stakeholders partnered on the development of a Public Gathering Bill, which was intended to repeal and replace the Public Order Act. Building on the ECZ's post-election review, UNDP supported long term legislative reforms efforts, including through the multi-stakeholder Electoral Reforms Technical Committee (ERTC) whose report was subsequently submitted to the MoJ for consideration. UNDP continues to engage partners to identify opportunities to strengthen Zambia's democratic institutions.

While some institutional strengthening actions did not explicitly seek to target tensions and political violence, they had an important underlying preventive component. As part of its support to the MoJ, UNDP strengthened Electoral Dispute Resolutions processes by training judges and judicial personnel to adjudicate cases in a timely and consistent manner, and to establish standard procedures for managing electoral disputes. Supporting institutional mechanisms for addressing grievances helped to build public trust in the electoral justice system, enhancing the electoral process credibility.

3.

Support to women and youth participation in elections

UNDP worked with Civil Society organizations (CSOs) to increase the participation of women, youth, Persons with Disabilities' (PWD) and Persons in Lawful custody. 18 CSO grants were awarded for voter and civic education to support participation of targeted groups. Different outreach efforts contributed to increasing the participation of citizens, as evidenced in the high voter turnout (70.6 %) in the elections. Voter turnout was even higher among those in correctional facilities.

Recognizing the challenges women face in participating in politics—particularly due to abuse and intimidation—UNDP organized capacity-building activities with the Women's Parliamentary Caucus, to strengthen MPs engagement with the public and their constituencies. UNDP also addressed the rise of online bullying ahead of elections by conducting analysis and advocacy. In partnership with the Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority (ZICTA), UNDP supported the development of the Strategy for combating Online Gender Based Violence aimed at contributing towards exposing online abuse and raising awareness for women participating in elections.

Despite increased turnout by women voters, the number of women elected to the National Assembly declined, now below 15 percent. This underscores the possible impact of gender-based violence (GBV) and related structural challenges including exclusion in limiting women's full participation in politics. To address this, the upcoming electoral assistance project will include a dedicated violence against women in elections component.

4.

Addressing misinformation and dis-information

In June 2021, UNDP in partnership with the EC-UNDP Joint Task Force on Electoral Assistance (JTF) launched the iVerify Zambia Mechanism to address misinformation, disinformation and hate speech, to enhance electoral integrity and mitigate electoral violence. This contributed towards addressing several instances of misinformation around elections and debunk them.

Ahead of the next elections cycle, Zambia is part of the UNDP Action Coalition on Information Integrity in Elections,¹⁰⁸ to address the issue of misinformation and elections preparation in a holistic, proactive approach. Initiatives include information-sharing and peer-learning with other Coalition member states, working with tech companies and the expansion of capacity-building efforts on information verification, targeting not only established media houses but also independent and freelance journalists.

UNDP is also expanding its engagement with marginalized constituencies. One of the key priorities moving forward is to increase investment in youth-focused initiatives, in response to growing expressions of dissatisfaction and underlying grievances voiced by young people.

More broadly, UNDP is working with the Government to strengthen the country's efforts to embed both the Early Warning System and iVerify Zambia within host institutions, thereby enhancing the long-term sustainability of these mechanisms and reinforcing national ownership. Strengthening EDR capacity at all levels of the judiciary – Constitutional Court, High Court and Local Government Election Tribunals – is also specific area of focus, as is the human rights and election security capacity and orientation of the Zambia Police Service. UNDP continues its strategic engagement with the relevant Ministries to advance legislative reforms aimed at further strengthening democratic processes, institutions, and procedures.

To ensure conflict prevention capacity both within and outside the election season, from 2023, UNDP with collaborative technical advisory expertise and support of the RCO and a substantive Peace and Development Advisor commissioned a Stakeholders Mapping for the Development of a Multi-Layered Comprehensive National Infrastructure for Peace in Zambia. This should inform future broad context-based and nationally owned conflict prevention efforts for the country and continue to enhance the existing strong collaborative engagements and relationships of the key entities – RCO/RR/PDA/UNDP/DPP/OHCHR crucial for establishing a well capacitated timely prevention and early warning mechanism supported by UNDP.

¹⁰⁸ See: <https://www.undp.org/policy-centre/governance/projects/action-coalition-information-integrity-elections>



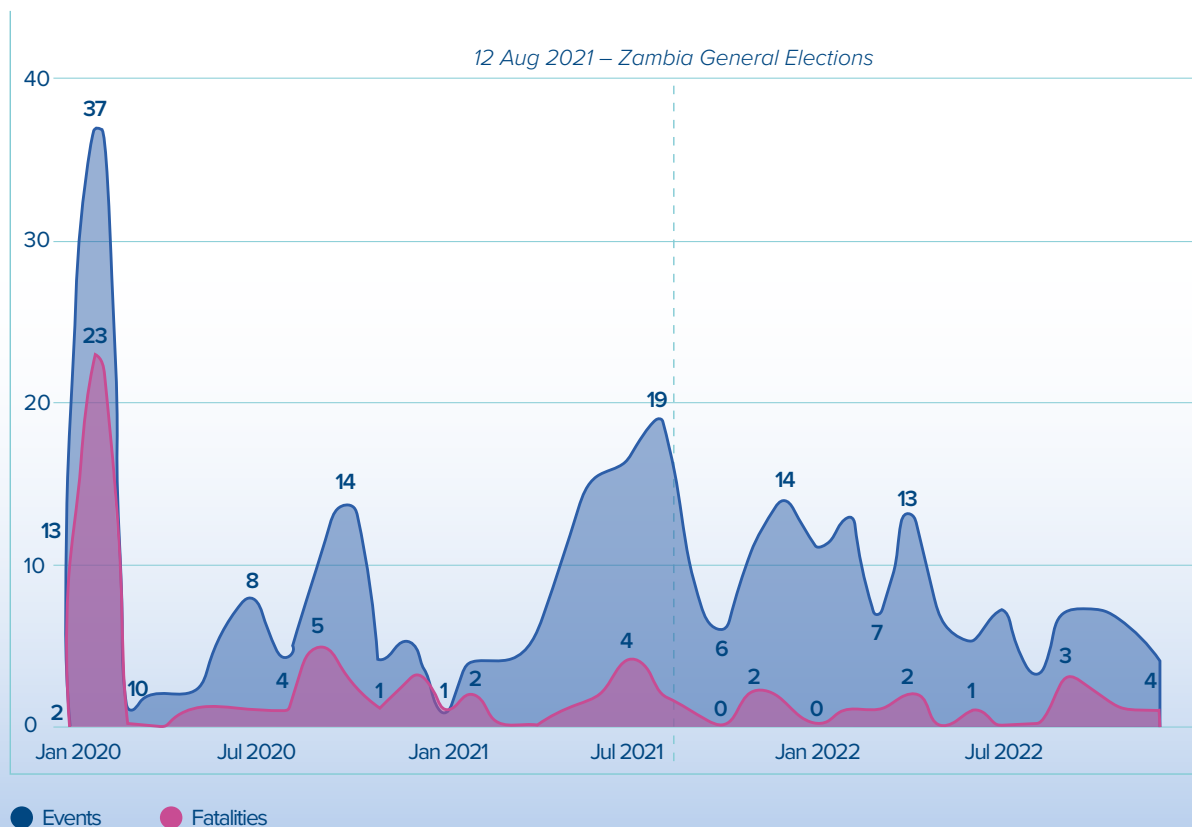
Key results

UNDP’s contribution to UN-wide efforts on prevention enabled early analysis, and joint identification of priorities with UN entities, informed high-level engagements to defuse tensions and informed UNDP electoral assistance in country (based on the 2018 Electoral Needs Assessment). The rapid deployment of an interim PDA on accelerated basis in November 2020 was crucial to enhance the analytical capabilities of the UN in country and support joint preventive actions. Situation reports and the CRD were crucial to support a coherent and shared understanding of the context and avenues for leveraging the respective roles and networks to amplify messages.

UNDP strategic engagement with national stakeholders around the 2021 election brought together a wide range of stakeholders (Zambia Police Service, Human Rights Commission, Electoral Commission of Zambia, and non-state actors), critical to ensure prevention from a variety of perspectives. Early engagement with relevant national entities supported the political space and enabled timely and effective UN electoral support. Beyond formal structures, regular informal engagement convened by UNDP between government institutions, the Resident Representative, Resident Coordinator, and bilateral partners was key in fostering trust and enabling honest exchanges on needs and challenges.

UNDP programming to prevent electoral violence made meaningful contributions towards strengthening the capacity of national partners to prevent and respond to violence and enhance their responsiveness. UNDP leveraged innovation and technology for preventive action, developing several innovative tools—such as the Early Warning System and the iVerify Zambia mechanism—that enhanced the capacity of national partners to identify, address, and mitigate risks of violence and conflict. This work has served as a catalyst for convening diverse actors and fostering long-term dialogue on how technology can be strategically leveraged to sustain peace.

Timeline



Source: ACLED

ACLED data from 2020–2022 indicate a significant decline in reported political violence events following the elections. While this trend reflects a range of broader dynamics beyond UNDP’s engagement, it underscores how Zambia successfully navigated a potentially volatile electoral period, with support from the UN system, including UNDP.¹⁰⁹

UNDP’s engagement around elections contributed to a holistic review of legal bottlenecks in the current constitution and institutional processes. This is contributing to long-term reforms that are supporting the responsiveness of institutions. For example, the introduction of the Early Warning and Early Response System, while limited to the electoral period, prompted a deeper reflection within the Electoral Commission on the need for legislative reform to establish a permanent Early Warning mechanism. Similarly, initiatives like the Public Events Management System helped enhance the transparency and accountability of how public gatherings and political campaigns are managed.



Implementation challenges

Some interventions, such as the Police training on Electoral Security and Human Rights would have benefited from earlier implementation, in particular as some of the activities were scheduled at the time the police were already deployed ahead of elections, resulting in a 60.8% reach of the intended target group.

In deploying the EWERS, a key challenge was the delayed system setup and limited earlier assessment and investments in partners’ capacity to de-escalate emerging risks and incidents of violence. However, an unintended but positive consequence of the EWER system was that, despite its limited use during the elections, it catalyzed internal discussions within the ECZ on the need for legislative reform to establish a permanent early warning mechanism within the country’s institutional framework.

For the i-Verify Zambia Mechanism, a key challenge encountered was limited access to timely information from some response partners. In many institutions, information could only be obtained through designated spokespersons, which often delayed the fact-checking process. Hierarchical decision-making structures posed further obstacles to the rapid verification of incidents, affecting the overall responsiveness of the system.

Challenges to roll-out the EWER and i-Verify system point to the need to enhance the systems’ sustainability, strengthening national ownership and expanding the system to remote areas through press clubs and community radio stations. Translation of fact-checked stories from English to the seven major local languages will expand access in underserved communities. UNDP efforts to embed these systems in the country’s national institutions are crucial to foster institutional buy-in and long-term sustainability.

¹⁰⁹ Source: ACLED (ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data), visuals prepared by UNDP CB

Key lessons learned



- **Recognize and respond to context-specific dynamics:** Understanding the unique challenges to peace in Zambia was essential to justify and sustain continued engagement on conflict prevention. Demonstrating the existence and drivers of localized violence—through data and early warning systems—helped make the case for targeted preventive efforts. Moreover, leveraging national processes, such as the 2019 report of the Commission of Inquiry on Voting Patterns and Electoral Violence, proved crucial to maintain momentum for sustained dialogue and action.



- **Early and continuous partner engagement:** In countries requesting electoral engagement, the timing of interventions is key. The efficacy of early action as a preventative mechanism lies in understanding the context and acting before the occurrence of political violence. Early partner engagement before the situation becomes too sensitive is essential. Maintaining engagement with partners in between elections is important to nurture trust and openness.



- **Early assessment and investment in institutional capacity strengthening:** While resource mobilization efforts at times hamper earlier interventions, starting the analysis and early warning mechanisms in advance helps to inform key decisions and track trends.



- **Sustainability and systemic impact.** Embedding early warning systems in existing national and local institutions, with firm commitment and leadership from the Government and State agencies to provide resources and mobilize partners especially in the out-of-elections period is essential for their sustainability.



- **Strategic communication during electoral periods:** It is essential to approach communication around project results with caution during electoral periods. In the lead-up to elections, a low-profile communication strategy is advisable to avoid any perception of political bias and ensure that messaging does not inadvertently appear to endorse any candidate or political party. Maintaining the impartiality and credibility of UNDP is critical to preserving trust and safeguarding the integrity of its work.



- **Strategic use of resources:** In a resource constrained environment, it is essential to strategically prioritize and maximize the use of available resources. UN additional capacity, can be crucial to provide timely technical expertise.



- **Thought leadership:** To support UNDP thought leadership in electoral contexts, in contexts at risk of electoral violence, UNDP can explore convening UN partners to workshops to share lessons and promote joint reflections on preventive action.

3.8 Yemen: Embedding local peacebuilding in the national process



Introduction

Yemen's decade-long conflict has produced one of the world's most severe and complex crises, marked by deep political fragmentation, widespread humanitarian needs, and weakened governance. In such a volatile environment, sustaining peace requires approaches that not only advance national-level peace processes but also strengthen the foundations for local resilience and trust. The United Nations Peace Support Facility (UN PSF) for Yemen is a strong example of UNDP's support to national and subnational peace initiatives. This case study demonstrates how small, targeted, locally owned peacebuilding initiatives build trust and momentum that sustain and complement high-level political processes. The Facility's flexibility, fast response, and alignment to the mandate of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSESGY) make it a unique instrument for reinforcing the UN-led peace process. By coordinating across national, governorate, and community levels, the Facility ensures that peacebuilding outcomes remain inclusive and grounded in Yemen's realities.

Within the wide programmatic portfolio of the Facility, the Small Grants Mechanism (SGM) offers a compelling case of support to community driven peacebuilding. By channeling rapid, small-scale funding to Yemeni Civil Society, the SGM supports urgent peacebuilding needs while providing capacity. It exemplifies how local empowerment and trust-building at the grassroots level are critical foundations for sustaining the momentum for broader political processes, especially in complex and fragmented conflict settings like Yemen.

The case is particularly noteworthy as it illustrates how UNDP effectively leverages strategic political alignment and adaptive local approaches to navigate Yemen's complex and fragmented conflict landscape. The UN PSF's innovative use of rapid-response small grants provides a replicable blueprint for other UNDP offices, demonstrating how community-driven peace initiatives can directly reinforce broader national peace strategies.



Context

Since the eruption of conflict nearly a decade ago, Yemen has experienced one of the world's most protracted political, humanitarian and development crises. The conflict has caused massive displacement, entrenched poverty, and fractured governance at both national and subnational levels. Politically, tensions between the Internationally Recognized Government (IRG) and de facto authorities have deepened, with competing claims over governance issues and control of economic activity. Public services have collapsed, and more than 80% of Yemen's population—around 24 million people—are in need of humanitarian assistance. Women, children, and youth are disproportionately affected. Over 70% of displaced persons are women and children, often facing heightened protection risks. Also, gender inequality has deepened, with women largely excluded from national political processes despite their previous engagement in Yemen's National Dialogue.

In this volatile environment, the UN Special Envoy for Yemen leads the peace process. The peace negotiation effort engages both national-level parties (through Track I negotiations) and various societal groups (through Track II negotiations) to support de-escalation and achieve just and lasting peace working across three tracks – political, economic and security. In 2018 the Stockholm Agreement represented a first break-

through, generating momentum. To operationalize the outcomes of the political negotiations, build trust between the parties and incentivize further engagement by conflict parties, the UN collectively established the UN PSF. As part of UN PSF's second phase, the Small Grants Mechanism (SGM) was launched in 2023 to channel rapid and conflict-sensitive funding into local peacebuilding efforts. The conflict-sensitive approach was operationalized through a transparent and multi-layered project selection process, which ensured that projects were not only thematically relevant but also geographically balanced, inclusive, and consistent with 'do-no-harm' principles. Due to the ongoing difficulties faced by civil society in Ansar Allah (AA) or de facto authority-controlled areas, the mechanism targeted governorates in IRG controlled areas. Priority was given to initiatives with strong potential for impact, such as resolving disputes over water, security, safety, promoting civic engagement, and advancing women's participation in conflict resolution. An early lesson learnt is the crucial role of women for a sustainable resolution of conflict.

Throughout the process, open communication of eligibility and selection criteria, combined with regular dialogue with CSOs, helped to ensure that projects were context-appropriate and responsive to evolving local dynamics while minimizing risks of exacerbating existing tensions. By engaging grassroots actors, particularly women-led and youth-focused organizations, it delivered tangible peace dividends while building the capacities of local partners to contribute to future peace agreement implementation.



Intervention design & approach

The PSF prioritizes interventions at national and subnational levels that a) incentivize, b) are relevant to, and c) lay the foundations for the national-level political process. Initiatives include: subnational level conflict resolution initiatives; supporting the accountability of local level security actors; local-level, small wins, that contribute to the momentum and demand for peace; support to local-level social networks and movements aimed at advancing women's rights and gender inclusivity; support to youth participation to decrease the likelihood of their recruitment, among others. The SGM was designed as a catalyst to connect formal peace efforts with grassroots realities. It provides flexible, rapid funding to Yemeni CSOs to implement community-level peacebuilding initiatives in conflict-affected areas. With inclusion at its core, half of all grants are allocated to women-led organizations, while youth and marginalized groups are actively prioritized in outreach and project evaluation.

SGM projects are implemented through UNDP's Direct Implementation Modality (DIM), which ensures fiduciary oversight while promoting local ownership and participation. A defining feature of the mechanism is the embedded technical support from project design to financial reporting, combined with a strong emphasis on gender-sensitive programming. Each round of calls for proposals begins with a start-up workshop, followed by targeted training on peacebuilding skills, gender inclusivity, proposal writing, risk management, and monitoring and evaluation.

The first round of the SGM (2023–2024) supported six CSOs in Marib, Taiz, and Aden. The second round, initiated in 2024, expanded its reach to include Hadramout and Al Mahrah, and introduced innovative themes such as private sector engagement in peacebuilding. Each grant is capped at US\$ 80,000, with a maximum implementation period of eight months. To reinforce linkages between the national-level political process, and community initiatives and ongoing peacebuilding projects, the evaluation committee of the SGM consists of two donor representatives, the UN RCO, OSESGY, and UNDP.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Effectively, the selection committee constitutes the UN PSF Technical Committee

To date, 12 local projects have been supported in IRG-controlled areas. Demand, however, has been overwhelming, with more than 75 applications received across the first two rounds. In response, the UN PSF is identifying the most impactful interventions for potential scale-up, while continuing to maintain support for smaller grassroots initiatives.

By embedding local initiatives within a broader political and institutional peace architecture, the SGM has emerged as a critical instrument to operationalize inclusive peacebuilding. It demonstrates that a credible national peace process must be rooted in locally owned efforts that deliver tangible results for communities.



Results & impact

Since its inception, the SGM has contributed to tangible peace dividends in conflict-affected governorates by reducing local tensions, strengthening civic participation, and restoring confidence in institutions. These achievements stem from aligning small-scale interventions with pressing local needs while empowering grassroots actors to lead the response. In doing so, the SGM has helped build the trust within and among communities and inclusion that are essential foundations for sustaining Yemen's broader peace process. In Taiz, the Sheba Youth Foundation (SYF)'s "Sanad" project series successfully facilitated mediation on water-related disputes between communities divided by frontlines. This process resulted in a jointly drafted water management roadmap that not only addressed immediate service gaps but provided an avenue for reconciliation between communities split by the conflict. Dialogue sessions between local communities and water-user associations resulted in identification of collective community priorities and joint, practical solutions. Together, these efforts successfully alleviated water-related tensions and restored water access for over 350 households.

Like SYF, Abductees Mothers Association (AMA) is a women-led CSO in Taiz. AMA's efforts to combat online harassment were multifaceted, with a strong focus on capacity building initiatives and equipping relevant entities with practical tools such as laptops, software, and skills. The primary trainees were individuals working within security and women's protection-related entities. In terms of digital safety, AMA strengthened the capabilities of the Cybercrime Division, providing digital safety tools to improve monitoring and case archiving for online and offline harassment.

The project also supported the development of clear procedures for reporting and responding to digital abuse. Additionally, AMA's ongoing awareness-raising work includes the publication of a report and detailed map that documents cases of violence against women, featuring personal stories from affected women, from four districts of Taiz. Both products will be shared via social media and other channels in September 2025. While these measures have greatly enhanced institutional capacity and raised awareness, they primarily strengthen existing reporting pathways rather than creating new dedicated ones.

In parallel, other organizations supported by the SGM have established dedicated Women's Police Units and spaces within the police stations for women. Training of police and dedicated spaces improved community perception of local security and the targeted communities' overall sense of safety, especially among women.

In Marib, the SGM supported projects focused on the role of small business in peacebuilding, women-led initiatives that promoted civic education and digital literacy, and establishing a peacebuilding cluster. The inclusion of private sector actors in peacebuilding efforts led to increased cooperation between local businesses, displaced people, and host communities, which enhanced community cohesion and mutual trust. In Hadhramaut and Al-Mahrah, an SGM-supported project empowered more than 200 leadership figures

from law enforcement and community committees, supporting the establishment of a “Community Security Management Unit” within governorate-level security administrations. The units contribute to local dispute resolutions and mediation. At the community-level, the project empowered the participants to function as effective mediators and increased participation in peace and coexistence efforts. The immediate impact of the project was reduced tensions between security forces and communities.

Collectively, the SGM projects aim to support and empower Yemeni civil society involved in peacebuilding, gender, and security. While the initial ambition was to support 12 projects, the positive impact cascaded further as the CSOs collaborated with over 30 smaller youth, women, and local initiatives, significantly broadening the project’s reach and enhancing their capacity and empowerment. The assessment of the longer-term impact of the project is ongoing, but the interim findings and anecdotal evidence highlight improvements in perceptions of safety, inter and intra community dialogue and cooperation. Women and youth—who have traditionally been sidelined from peace processes—are increasingly participating in processes as peacebuilders, and consequently the perception of their role in communities are slowly changing. Several initiatives have begun documenting and systematizing women-led mediation efforts to feed into the broader UN research and policy ecosystem.

These early results demonstrate how relatively small grants, when properly targeted and supported, can trigger significant shifts in attitudes, behaviors, and both intra and inter-community relations. By rehabilitating critical infrastructure and increasing local capacities, these initiatives have reinforced momentum and demand for peace at subnational and local level, reduced the level of tensions and strengthened the capacities of local organizations to contribute to a more sustainable peace process. By fostering trust and gradually rebuilding the Yemeni civil society as a critical vehicle to channel demands for peace, they create momentum for peace that is deeply embedded in local realities.

Another key result lies in the surge of interest from civil society. The SGM has not only funded projects but also cultivated a network of credible peacebuilding actors now equipped with operational experience and a record of impact. With continued investment, these actors could serve as key partners in future national or subnational peace agreements.

Finally, while the PSF was initially created as a tool to narrowly support outcomes of the peace process led by the UN Special Envoy, it evolved as a key platform that brings together the UN and international partners to discuss, design and implement a harmonized and coordinated response supporting the broader peace process.



Implementation challenges & opportunities

The implementation of the SGM has encountered a range of structural and contextual challenges that reflect the broader operating environment in Yemen. Among the most prominent were delays in project clearances, fund transfers, and logistical bottlenecks, often linked to the fragility of Yemen’s banking system and bureaucratic processes. Several implementing partners had to change banks mid-cycle and withdraw funds in cash, disrupting project timelines.

Additionally, the relatively low institutional capacity of many Yemeni CSOs—particularly those newly engaging with UN systems—required significant time and resource investment in technical mentoring. Some organizations struggled with English language reporting, prompting discussions within UNDP about more accessible documentation formats. Though UNDP is bound by internal language policies, steps have been taken to accommodate Arabic submissions when feasible.

Maintaining neutrality was another critical challenge. In a politically charged context, the perception of bias—real or imagined—can undermine trust. The UN PSF addressed this by adopting rigorous, transparent selection procedures and ensuring geographic and thematic balance. Regular consultations with CSO networks helped build legitimacy and ensured that the mechanism remained responsive to evolving local priorities.

Despite these challenges, the SGM also revealed unique opportunities. Its flexibility enabled course correction and expansion in response to unexpected openings—such as the cross-line mediation breakthrough in Taiz. The hands-on involvement of the UN PSF team, including gender and risk experts, ensured technical integrity without sacrificing local relevance.

Key lessons & recommendations



- **Ensure vertical linkages between local peace dividends and national processes:** Local initiatives that build trust, inclusion, and visible results are essential foundations for sustaining political negotiations and peace processes. Mechanisms like the SGM can help operationalize this link.



- **Recognize and adapt to access constraints:** The concentration of SGM-funded projects in IRG-controlled areas reflects both security limitations and political realities. Recognizing these constraints early allowed for operational feasibility, but also underscored the need for careful geographic balancing and transparent eligibility criteria to maintain legitimacy among local actors.



- **Engage local partners early and build capacity continuously:** Many CSOs were engaging with the UN system for the first time. Early outreach, joint planning workshops, and continued mentoring throughout the grant cycle proved critical to building trust, improving compliance, and strengthening project quality.



- **Simplify tools and processes to match partner capacity:** Complex application forms and English-only templates initially created barriers for some CSOs. Adapting tools to local language and context, and providing training on UN financial procedures, significantly improved participation and implementation.



- **Leverage small-scale interventions for visible peace dividends:** The most impactful projects combined quick improvements in daily life—such as infrastructure repairs or community campaigns—with inclusive, dialogue-based processes. This dual approach helped build local confidence in peace as a viable alternative to conflict.



- **Use coordination mechanisms strategically:** The UN PSF Technical Committee was not only key for oversight but also served as a space for strategic alignment among UN actors and donors. Regular engagement and clear communication helped ensure responsiveness to evolving political dynamics.

Overall, the SGM illustrates how even modest, but well-targeted interventions can generate meaningful contributions to peace, especially when implemented through inclusive, locally rooted processes. By demonstrating that dialogue and collaboration deliver results, it has strengthened both local legitimacy and the foundations needed to sustain the broader UN-led peace process.

4. Annexes

Annex 1 – Key approaches to conflict prevention

The following section outlines several key strategies to reduce tensions, prevent escalation, and build more resilient and peaceful societies that have been observed and examined in the case studies. These approaches reflect both emerging innovations and established practices in the field.

Conflict analysis

Before intervening in any conflict context, it is crucial to first understand the conflict dynamics and causes to design interventions that are conflict-sensitive, context-specific, and fit for purpose. Without a strong analytical foundation, prevention efforts risk being poorly targeted, insensitive to local dynamics, or even exacerbating tensions (Rhodes, G., & Akram, M., 2023). A thorough analysis of the context and underlying issues is essential to ground conflict prevention efforts in local realities and ensure they remain responsive to evolving dynamics.

There are a range of conflict analysis tools and methodologies, which vary depending on the context, purpose, and entry point. These include actor and stakeholder mapping, scenario-building, conflict and gender analysis, participatory appraisal methods, and risk monitoring systems. Using a mix of approaches allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the drivers of fragility and opportunities for peace. Participatory analysis, an approach that engages national and local stakeholders in identifying conflict drivers and priorities, adds particular value by strengthening the relevance, legitimacy, and ownership of the resulting findings. One instrument for participatory analysis is the Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment (RPBA). The RPBA is a joint approach of the United Nations, the World Bank, and the European Union to identify and address immediate and medium-term recovery and peacebuilding requirements while laying the foundations for the elaboration of a longer-term recovery and peacebuilding strategy in a country facing conflict or transitioning out of a conflict-related crisis. It serves as a methodology and/or platform for joint analysis and planning, designed to maximize the effectiveness of national and international recovery and peacebuilding efforts.

Peacebuilding and peace responsiveness

Peacebuilding involves a multidimensional range of measures that can reduce the risk of a lapse or relapse into destructive conflict by addressing causes and consequences of conflict; strengthen national, community and individual capacities to effectively address conflict; and lay foundations for sustainable peace and development.

Peace responsiveness refers to the capacity of organizations operating in crisis-affected or fragile contexts, to deliberately contribute to building peace through core development programming. It's a holistic approach

that goes beyond simply trying to avoid doing harm and instead actively seeks to maximize positive contributions to peace. This means finding ways to integrate conflict prevention considerations into UNDP's programming and operations. Conflict prevention doesn't need to be a standalone initiative but can in fact be part of UNDP's core development and crisis programming.

Infrastructures for peace

Infrastructures for peace (I4P) is broadly understood as a dynamic network of actors, structures, mechanisms and processes, and associated skills, capacities, resources, values and institutions for building and sustaining peace. Over the past two decades, this concept has gradually evolved into a promising approach and a practical framework for peacebuilding at local, national and regional levels.

I4P emphasizes the importance of locally owned, inclusive and institutionalized mechanisms for dialogue, mediation, conflict prevention, and dispute resolution. These infrastructures can take multiple forms, from national peace councils and insider mediation networks to local peace committees and early warning systems. What makes them distinct is their ability to embed conflict resolution and prevention capacities into the everyday functioning of societies, rather than relying solely on ad hoc responses when crises erupt. It provides an important framework and approach for linking grassroots peace initiatives with national processes and strategies, ensuring that dialogue and trust-building at community level reinforce political settlements and institutional reforms.

Insider mediation

An Insider Mediator (IM) is an individual or group of individuals who derive their legitimacy, credibility and influence from a socio-cultural and/or religious – and, indeed, personal – closeness to the parties of the conflict, endowing them with strong bonds of trust that help foster the necessary attitudinal changes amongst key protagonists which, over time, prevent conflict and contribute to sustaining peace. Operating across local, sub-national, and national levels, insider mediators engage in activities such as early warning, outreach, and amplifying marginalized voices, using their deep-rooted relationships to detect tensions early and strengthen social cohesion. Their diverse backgrounds bring varied perspectives and enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts. Recognizing and supporting this diversity is essential to addressing a broader range of grievances and sustaining peace.

Early warning early response (EWER)

EWER consists of a system of data collection, sharing, and analysis to identify conflict trends and dynamics at various levels. Data can be collected through several sources depending on the context, including trained monitors across the country, SMS-gateway, web-application or hotline. The analysis informs recommendations for timely and appropriate preventive action, or early response options, to targeted stakeholders. Drawing on a network of response partners, EWER enables timely response at sub-national levels to decrease tensions. By facilitating shared monitoring and analysis, it fosters communication between state institutions and civil society actors to raise mutual trust and promote timely response.

Dialogue and mediation support

Dialogue and mediation are widely prevalent conflict prevention initiatives to address disputes, prevent the escalation of tensions or conflict, and sustain peace. Dialogue aims to bridge communities and address their

concerns. By supporting a culture of communication and helping to build trust, it has the potential to transform relations between conflict parties. Mediation rests on the assistance of a third party, the mediator, to resolve the differences between disputants who accept its assistance. It requires careful preparation, a thorough understanding of the actors involved and their interests, adaptability, and sensitivity to cultural differences.

Mediation rests on multiple levels of engagement: Formal track-1 processes – high-level negotiation with the elite and leadership – where DPPA and UN Peace Operations are generally directly involved; Track 2 processes involving non-official, influential actors and opinion makers; Track 3 processes with grassroots actors. These processes interact, complement each other and communicate in various ways. UNDP typically engages on Track 2 and 3 levels, working with local peacebuilders through insider mediation, community engagement and infrastructures for peace, promoting dialogue and trust at national and sub-national levels.

Youth engagement

Young people play a crucial role in preventing conflicts and their escalation. The Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda, established by the UN Security Council Resolution UNSCR 2250 (2015) emphasizes the need for their inclusion in all levels of peace processes and decision-making. When meaningfully engaged, youth play a unique role to bring diverse perspectives, local legitimacy and innovative approaches, contributing to address the grievances of marginalized groups and the root causes of conflict.

Evidence from the Darfur case study shows that structured youth engagement, for example through insider mediation, can broker local ceasefires, contributing to community resilience.

Far from being a homogenous group, youth represent a variety of interests, needs and vantage points. Accounting for this diversity is essential to harness the full potential of youth participation. To foster youth meaningful participation, conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts need to engage young people from a variety of backgrounds, accounting for their specific needs, vulnerabilities and vantage points.¹¹¹

To strengthen the inclusivity and sustainability of efforts, age-disaggregated data and analysis are essential to account for specific needs and vulnerabilities.

However, their contributions are often underrecognized due to structural barriers and social norms. Recognizing and addressing structural hidden barriers to their meaningful engagement is essential for their meaningful inclusion.

Women's engagement

The UN Security Council's Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) recognized women's crucial role in peace and security. Women's participation in peace processes leads to better and more sustainable outcomes. Research consistently shows that peace agreements are more durable when women are involved.¹¹² Despite their critical role, women continue to face structural barriers and are excluded from peace processes (in 2023 women made up only 5 per cent of negotiators, 9 per cent of mediators and 19 per cent of signatories to peace and ceasefire agreements).¹¹³ Despite women's exclusion in most formal peace efforts,

¹¹¹ 2025 Peacebuilding Fund Thematic Review on Youth, Peace and Security. Youth participation in peacebuilding through an intersectional lens [thematic_review_cohort_3_brief_web.pdf](#)

¹¹² [Women, peace, and security | United Nations](#)

¹¹³ [Facts and figures: Women, peace, and security | UN Women – Headquarters](#)

women play key roles in local peacebuilding, pushing for inclusive and sustainable outcomes. Evidence from Yemen case study shows that women civil society organizations, funded by the Small Grants mechanism, implemented projects that contributed to improve the community overall sense of safety, triggering significant shifts in attitudes and community relations.

A gender-sensitive peacebuilding approach recognizes that conflict affects women, men, girls, and boys differently, and that sustainable peace requires inclusive processes that address these diverse experiences and needs. This requires a gender-sensitive conflict analysis, or a tool such as the SCORE index, to understand how gender roles, power dynamics, and inequalities contribute to conflict and peace. A gender-sensitive peacebuilding approach ensures the meaningful participation of women and marginalized gender groups in peace processes, recognizing their unique experiences and contributions. It addresses gender-based violence, promotes equitable access to resources, and challenges harmful gender norms that fuel conflict. By integrating gender analysis and accountability mechanisms, it strengthens the inclusivity and sustainability of peace efforts. There is also a need for more gender-focused data to better understand the underlying factors driving conflict. The Caribbean case study highlights this need and shows how gender data and analysis from a SCORE index can be used to better shape gender focused and gender-sensitive policies.

Preventing violent extremism

Preventing violent extremism (PVE) is an essential conflict prevention strategy that reframes violent extremism from a purely security issue to one rooted in development and governance challenges. Although there is no single agreed definition of violent extremism, UNDP approaches PVE as a multidimensional challenge that requires addressing a broad set of factors beyond ideology or narratives. This includes tackling socio-political grievances, economic exclusion, marginalization, and lack of access to education and employment—conditions that can make communities more vulnerable to recruitment and radicalization.

By focusing on these underlying drivers, PVE initiatives seek to reduce risks while also strengthening resilience, fostering social cohesion, and promoting tolerance.

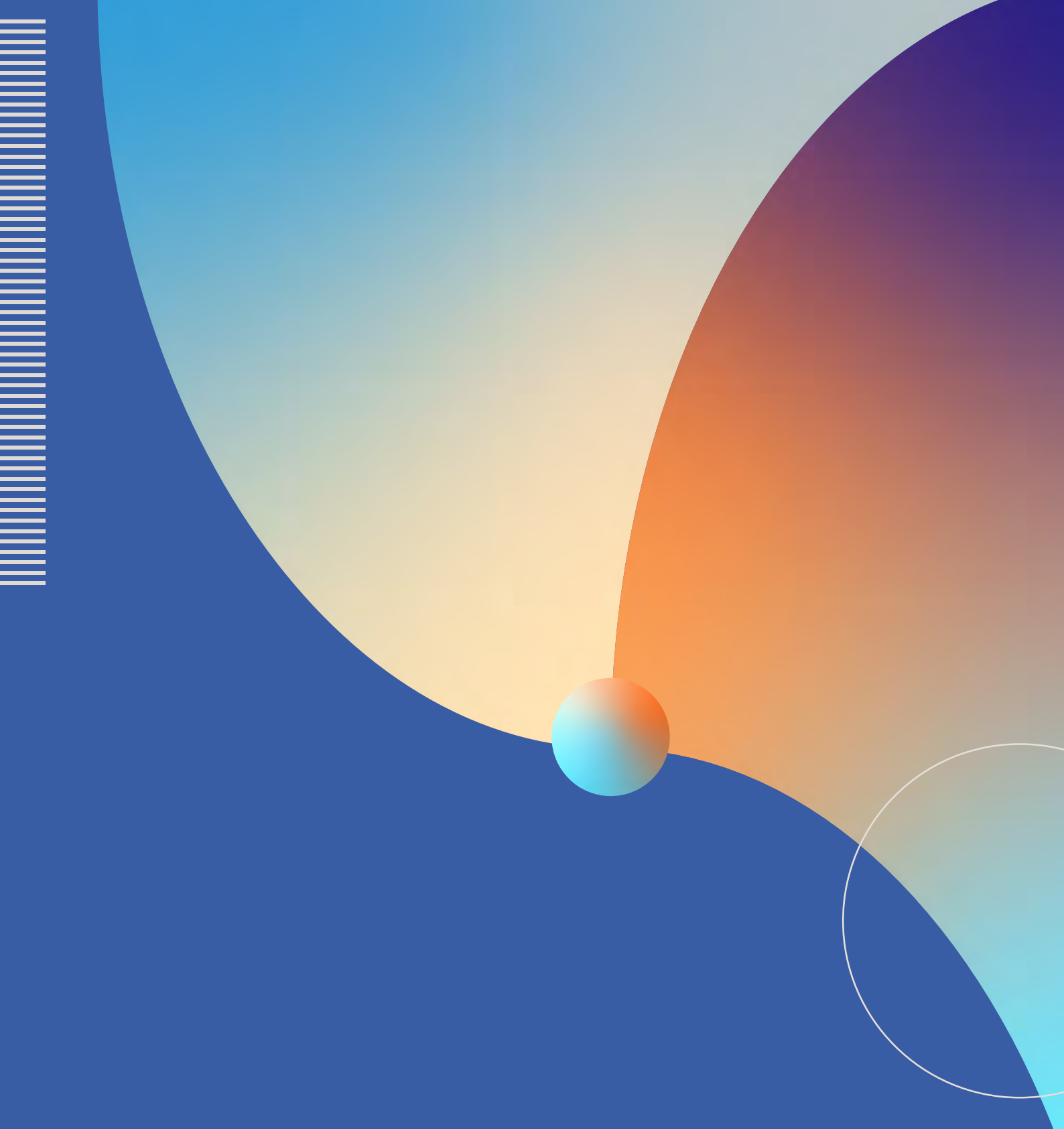
UNDP's whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach emphasizes national ownership through the development of PVE strategies and action plans that complement broader counter-terrorism efforts. By investing in grassroots engagement and addressing structural inequalities, PVE not only mitigates the risk of violence but also strengthens the foundations for sustainable peace.

Data-driven tools for strengthening social cohesion

To strengthen conflict prevention and social cohesion, particular attention needs to be paid to address the lack of data on key factors and drivers that exist in a particular context. One tool that has been developed to address data gaps in prevention settings and measure the drivers of weak social cohesion is the Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) index. The SCORE is a robust and versatile assessment instrument that combines participatory research with advanced data analysis. It also uses diagnostic and predictive analysis to understand social cohesion and identify the potential interrelations, barriers, and tensions that exist and looks with particular attention at gender and youth dimensions as positive drivers of social cohesion. Evidence collected through the SCORE index can be used to design specific programmes or adapt existing programming to strengthen cohesion, including through gender and youth mainstreaming; to counter potential violence and transform violent conflict into positive, sustainable peace; and to develop a shared vision for a country's peaceful development.

Annex 2 – List of interviewees and review contributors

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