



# Rule of Law, Security and Human Rights Crisis Response Catalogue

October 2025



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# Acronyms

ADR	alternative dispute resolution
CIJ	customary and informal justice
CO	UNDP Country Office
CSM	climate security mechanism
CSO	civil society organization
CRSV	conflict-related sexual violence
DDR	disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
DPPA	United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
DSC	Defence and Security Committee
DRR	disaster risk reduction
EE	energy and environment
EU	European Union
FBA	Folke Bernadotte Academy
FCAS	fragile and crisis-affected states
GBV	gender-based violence
HDP nexus	humanitarian-development-peace nexus
HLP	housing, land and property
HRBA	human rights-based approach
HRD	human rights defender
HRDD	human rights due diligence
HRDDP	United Nations Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on UN Support to non-UN Security Forces
IDP	Internally displaced person
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
MHPSS	mental health and psychosocial support
NGO	non-governmental organization
NHRI	national human rights institution
NMIRFs	national mechanisms for implementation, reporting, and follow-up
NSA	non-state actor
NSAG	non-state armed group
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PVE	prevention of violent extremism
RBAS	Regional Bureau for Arab States
RBG	rights-based governance
R2HE	right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment
ROLSHR	rule of law, security and human rights
SALW	small arms and light weapons
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SGBV	sexual and gender-based violence
SSR	security sector reform
TJ	transitional justice
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNGPs	United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

# Summary

This rule of law, security and human rights (ROLSHR) crisis response catalogue draws on key lessons learned from UNDP's experience in the crisis settings of the Arab States region. It provides a comprehensive toolkit of programmatic entry points to enhance UNDP's ROLSHR programming in fragile and conflict-affected settings (FCAS) in the Arab States region. The crisis response catalogue applies the three-tiered framework of UNDP's 2022 Crisis Offer—transforming protracted and fragile contexts, crisis anticipation and prevention, and sustaining development throughout crises—to two main categories of crisis relevant to ROLSHR-specific programming in the Arab States region:

1. **Crises from disasters**; and
2. **Political crises in areas of limited statehood**

The second category is further divided into: 2.a) situations of non-territorial limitations on state power, and 2.b) situations of de facto control by non-state armed groups (NSAGs).

The main ROLSHR programmatic entry points under these categories include:

## **For crises from disasters:**

- ✘ Missing persons and support to internally displaced persons (IDPs)
- ✘ Housing, land and property (HLP)
- ✘ Support to legislative and regulatory reform
- ✘ Environmental justice and the right to a healthy environment (R2HE)
- ✘ Climate security and adaptation
- ✘ Implementation of business and human rights principles

## **For political crises in areas of limited statehood:**

- ✘ People-centred security
- ✘ Control of small arms and light weapons (SALW)
- ✘ Customary and informal justice
- ✘ Human rights

- ✘ Transitional justice
- ✘ Combating gender-based violence (GBV)
- ✘ Justice sector reform
- ✘ Access to justice
- ✘ Juvenile justice
- ✘ Correctional systems support
- ✘ Protecting civic space
- ✘ Constitutional and legal reform
- ✘ Digitalization
- ✘ Business, human rights and peace

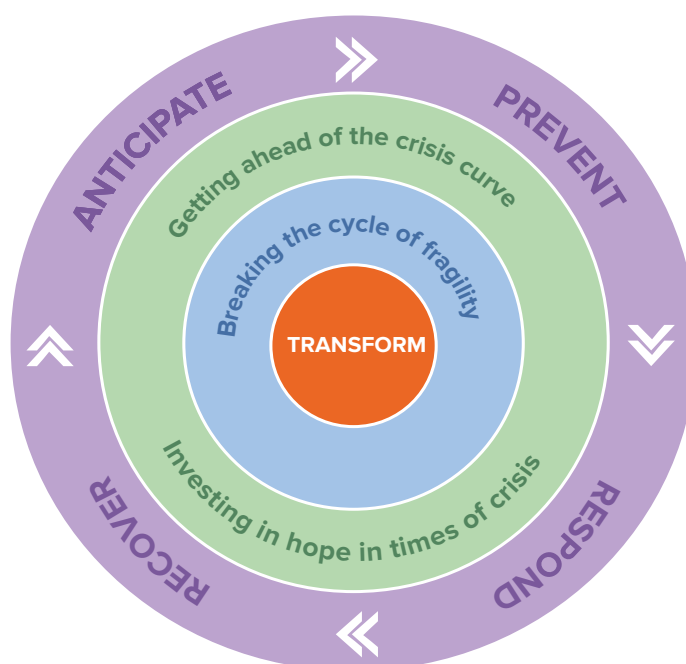
The catalogue provides numerous examples of key projects from UNDP's Country Offices (COs), primarily from FCAS within the Arab States region: Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Sudan, and Libya under each of the 20 entry points listed above. It is designed to guide UNDP's ROLSHR interventions in the region and to support internal and external consultations with donors, government parties, and other key stakeholders. The footnotes offers a summary of relevant UNDP and United Nations publications and knowledge products.

This catalogue complements the UNDP [Crisis Response Packages](#) linked to the various programmatic areas, providing practical documentation of projects and activities implemented in FCAS.

# Introduction

[UNDP's Crisis Offer](#) published in September 2022 outlines three main foundations for UNDP's development solutions and programmatic interventions in crisis settings:<sup>1</sup>

1. **Breaking the cycle of fragility:** UNDP aims to transform protracted and fragile contexts by maintaining a long-term perspective on governance and socio-economic conditions. This approach helps countries break the cycle of fragility, exit from crisis, and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda. UNDP focuses on structural transformations to address the root causes of crisis and fragility, strengthen the social contract, and promote risk-informed and resilient recovery for those furthest behind.
2. **Anticipation and prevention:** UNDP leads efforts to anticipate and prevent future crises by mitigating risks and addressing the drivers and root causes of conflicts, disasters, and other crises. Prevention is central to UNDP's mandate, aiming to reduce development deficits, fight inequalities, and foster inclusion. This focus is particularly relevant in contexts with increasing risks of conflict and recurrent human-made shocks.
3. **Sustaining development throughout crises:** UNDP remains active during crises to sustain development engagement. It supports local authorities, communities, and people affected by the crisis, initiating early recovery processes that pave the way for longer-term structural transformations, resilience building, and sustainable development. Emphasis is placed on green and equitable recovery pathways, especially following sudden-onset crises triggered by disasters or human-made shocks. Effective crisis response can transform a country's development roadmap and address pre-existing development gaps and vulnerabilities.



1 UNDP, Crisis Offer: A Framework for Development Solutions to Crisis and Fragility (2022).

These three foundations are not mutually exclusive. UNDP’s programmatic interventions often incorporate overlapping elements from all three solutions, even within the same locations. Depending on the context, UNDP Country Offices (COs) may adopt various approaches that embed these three elements, ranging from stabilization and area-based development to governance and resilience-based engagements.

***“Amid so much crisis, we have reached a once-in-a-generation moment. We must make choices that will determine what follows for the rest of our lives and for those who come after us.... We should not suspend nor delay development activities and investments, but instead pursue these directly with affected communities, rapidly and at scale, so people can get back on their own feet with dignity and agency. An end to crisis is for our common good and should be our common goal.”***

*Achim Steiner, Administrator, UNDP*

In fragile settings, UNDP’s rapid and large-scale stabilization programmes are crucial for restoring the social contract between the State and society and enhancing State capacities for service delivery. The importance of restoring the social contract is highlighted in UNDP’s 2022 report with Voluntas on Limited Statehood and non-State actors in the Arab States.<sup>2</sup> Another UNDP report, [Restore or Reform?](#), suggests that premature reforms can be counterproductive and destabilizing in fragile contexts. The report emphasizes the need to focus on restoring the basic functions of government institutions after crisis, rather than rushing to reform, such as by immediately calling for elections.<sup>3</sup>

A key area of UNDP interventions in crisis settings is strengthening the rule of law, security, and human rights (ROLSHR). In the immediate aftermath of crisis, the need for humanitarian assistance supersedes other considerations. However, ROLSHR programming is essential for accessing humanitarian aid. For instance, in conflict zones, personal identification cards and legal documents are necessary to access aid. If these documents are lost during war and displacement, ROLSHR interventions are crucial for their replacement. Additionally, ROLSHR programming can help fill the power vacuum left by collapsed government institutions through supporting legal and community-based mediation efforts, alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms, and safeguarding community safety and security.

2 UNDP and Voluntas, ‘Limited Statehood, Non-State Actors, and Service Delivery in the Arab States’ (internal, 2022).

3 UNDP, [Restore or Reform](#), UN Support to Core Government Functions in the Aftermath of Conflict (2015). Also see: UNDP and Oxford Policy Management, ‘Do Fragile and Conflict-Affected Countries Prioritize Core Government Function?’ (2019).

ROLSHR interventions are crucial for achieving the SDGs. They are particularly relevant for SDG5 on gender equality, and SDG16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions, specifically [the people-centric indicator SDG16.3.3](#).<sup>4</sup> From enhancing legal reforms and digital court management systems, to promoting access to justice and providing free legal aid to marginalized communities, strengthening ROLSHR programming is central to UNDP's strategy to [leave no-one behind](#). It augments service provision through [people-centred](#) and [rights-based](#) rule of law, justice, security and human rights programmes. Additionally, it enables UNDP to address immediate justice, security and human rights needs, as well as the underlying structural, social, economic, and political factors contributing to inequality, injustice, and insecurity.<sup>5</sup>

4 See OECD, UNODC, and UNDP, *From Data to Action: Strengthening Civil Justice with SDG 16.3.3* (2025).

5 UNDP, *The UNDP People-Centred Approach to Justice and Security: A Policy Framework for Justice and Security Programming* (2025). Also see UNDP, *The Human Rights-Based Approach to Development Programming: HRBA Toolkit* (2025); and Working Group on Customary and Informal Justice and SDG16+, *Diverse Pathways to People-Centred Justice*, Report of the Working Group on Customary and Informal Justice and SDG16+ (2023).

# I. Rule of law, security and human rights programming in fragile and conflict-affected Arab States

This ROLSHR crisis response catalogue updates [UNDP's 2012 ROL report](#)<sup>6</sup> by applying the three-tiered programmatic framework outlined in the 2022 Crisis Offer: transforming protracted and fragile contexts, crisis anticipation and prevention, and sustaining development throughout crisis. This crisis response catalogue is tailored to ROLSHR-specific interventions and services in FCAS in the Arab States region.

To begin, it is essential to define 'crisis settings' and to distinguish between political crises and disasters. According to the [standard operating procedures](#) (SOPs) for UNDP's engagement in crisis (2023), 'crisis settings' refer to "sudden-onset and escalating protracted crises, conflicts, and disasters such as wars or floods."<sup>7</sup> The [Supplementary Protocols](#) of these SOPs (2023) emphasize the importance of identifying risks and mitigation strategies. They also highlight the need to focus on the main drivers and root causes of conflict and disasters when drafting UNDP intervention strategies for crisis settings, particularly in contexts with increasing or recurrent risks of human-made or natural shocks. 'Political fragility' refers to countries experiencing or recently emerging from a prolonged political crisis that has significantly weakened or eroded State institutions.<sup>8</sup> The Regional Bureau for Arab States (RBAS) [framework on Conflict Prevention and Recovery](#) highlights the importance of the war-to-peace transition in preventing the recurrence of violence.<sup>9</sup>

**Instead of using the rather misleading term 'failed states' for countries emerging from or undergoing protracted political conflict, the term 'limited statehood' is applied. 'Limited statehood' refers to areas where central authorities lack the ability to implement and enforce rules and decisions, or lack a legitimate monopoly over the means of violence, at least temporarily. A country with limited statehood may have restricted ability to enforce law and order along various dimensions:**<sup>10</sup>

1. **Territorial:** in parts of the country's territorial spaces.
2. **Sectoral:** in specific policy areas, such as security and public order.
3. **Social:** in relation to specific parts of the population.
4. **Temporal:** for a certain period.

6 UNDP, Strengthening the Rule of Law in Crisis Affected and Fragile Situations (2012).

7 UNDP, Standard Operating Procedures for Crisis Response and Recovery (2023).

8 In July 2025, UNDP finalized an internal 'Pre-approved Operations and Programmatic Special Measures for Early Recovery Packages and Crisis Programming', which is classified as a guide and is accessible only to UNDP / UNCDF / UNV personnel using the following link: <https://popp.undp.org/document/pre-approved-operations-and-programmatic-special-measures-early-recovery-packages-and>

9 UNDP RBAS, Development as a Pathway for Conflict Prevention and Recovery, Regional Bureau for Arab States Framework (2023).

10 UNDP and Voluntas, 'Limited Statehood, Non-State Actors, and Service Delivery in the Arab States'.

For instance, non-State actors (NSAs) are sometimes involved in the provision of hybrid security (State/non-State) in areas of limited statehood, in which case the limitations on statehood would be sectoral in their nature. Examples from the Arab States region include Somalia and Libya.

The opposite of ‘limited statehood’ is therefore not ‘unlimited,’ but ‘consolidated’ statehood, where the government effectively maintains a monopoly over the means of violence and enforces law and order. This is a conventional objective and the preferable outcome of many State-centric peacebuilding initiatives as supported by the ‘good governance’ agenda of leading international organizations. In contrast, UNDP’s approach to crisis, conflict, and fragility is rooted in a [people-centred approach to justice and security](#). This approach combines institutional support (top-down) with community-based (bottom-up) interventions tailored to the specifics of each context, political complexity, and emerging needs. It is grounded in understanding the challenges and lived experiences of rights-holders, while aiming to strengthen human rights protection.<sup>11</sup>

Importantly, a primary challenge for UNDP’s Regional Hubs and globally is the issue of illegitimate or unrecognized substate entities and territories established de facto within internationally recognized states. These territories pose a territorial restriction on state sovereignty and often result from prolonged armed conflict or political crises where the State fails to reclaim control over parts of its territory from non-State armed groups (NSAGs). Examples include northern Yemen and the Kurdish regions of Syria, where irredentist claims exist; and the Gaza Strip, where internal opposition and inter-State conflict overlap.

Similar legitimacy issues apply to unrecognized governments of entire states. For instance, the severe human rights violations committed by the former Syrian regime during and after the Syrian uprising (2011-2024) led to the regime losing international legitimacy, resulting in a ‘no-contact policy’ in Syria that was maintained until late 2024 by UNDP and other leading international agencies.

UNDP’s efforts to conceptualize its role within territories governed by illegitimate or unconstitutional authorities include joint reports with the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) and ongoing studies on rights-based governance, people-centred security, and donor engagement with hybrid governance and security actors in conflict settings.<sup>12</sup> In November 2024, UNDP also finalized an internal practice note on development in contexts of unconstitutional changes of government.<sup>13</sup> Ensuring the wellbeing and governance of affected populations until a final political settlement is reached remains a major concern for UNDP and sister United Nations agencies, including addressing basic needs and access to justice. The lack of international recognition of de facto authorities and the absence of lasting political solutions often hinders development efforts and limits governance and ROLSHR engagements, with a few exceptions such as Somaliland in the Arab States region.

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11 UNDP, The UNDP People-Centred Approach to Justice and Security.

12 See, for example: UNDP and the Folke Bernadotte Academy, ‘Service Delivery and Non-State Actors: Lessons for Engagement in Fragile and Conflict Affected Settings’ (internal, 2024).

13 UNDP, ‘UNDP Practice Note: Delivering Development Solutions in Contexts of Unconstitutional Changes of Government’, (internal, 2024).

Each situation involving illegitimate or unconstitutional governments has unique circumstances, and not all de facto territories or authorities can be viewed through the same lens. While some NSAGs are classified as terrorist organizations by the United Nations System, others are classified differently by different Member States. These de facto territories, resulting from long and protracted conflict, may also represent a middle phase of potentially more conflicts, which underscores the urgency to intervene in such locations and prevent future crisis.

This ROLSHR crisis response draws on key lessons learned from UNDP's extensive experience in FCAS, aiming to provide a comprehensive toolkit of programmatic entry points to enhance UNDP's ROLSHR programming in fragile and conflict affected Arab States. It applies the three-tiered framework of the 2022 Crisis Offer—transforming protracted and fragile contexts, crisis anticipation and prevention, and sustaining development throughout crisis—to two main categories of crisis:

1. crises from disasters
2. political crises in areas of limited statehood, further divided into:
  - a) Situations of non-territorial limitations on state power in countries undergoing or recently emerging from protracted armed conflict or political crisis; and
  - b) Situations of de facto control by Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) within established states.

Under 2.a, there is a growing interest within the donor community to support the engagement of some NSAs in providing community security and integrating them into the official security institutions of the state through what is increasingly referred to as hybrid security.<sup>14</sup> This represents a situation of sectoral limitations on statehood. In the Arab States region, Somalia is the only place where hybrid NSAs have been supported through UNDP programming. Besides donor preferences and their increasing appetite for risk, various other factors influence this support, including the level of effective control the NSA maintains over relevant state territories, their classification as a terrorist organization, their human rights record, and whether they are clan-based or tribal groups already part of existing informal justice mechanisms. A further factor is whether any external third parties or neighbouring states have made reservations over the engagement of NSAs as they are gradually integrated into the official security institutions of the state.

Many states in the Arab States region, for example Libya, face challenges from a combination of political fragilities described in categories 2.a and 2.b.

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14 UNDP's Advisory Group on the People-Centred Approach to Security held its third meeting on 23 April 2024. See Ed Laws and Deval Desai, 'Engaging with Hybrid Security: Analysis, Operations, and Risks – Forthcoming'. Also see: UNDP, Democracy—Not Military Coups—is Our Preferred Path: People-Centred Views on the Need for Democratic Renewal Across Africa, 2023.

## II. Rule of law, security and human rights crisis response catalogue for the Arab States Region

II.1

### Crises from disaster

#### Breaking the cycle of fragility

UNDP's ROLSHR programming in disaster-prone regions could include supporting the review of legal frameworks related to construction, safety, and environmental standards, while supporting risk mitigation strategies and legal reforms to empower communities in fragile areas. Strengthening local, national and regional resilience also requires partnering with other relevant stakeholders such as with [the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies \(IFRC\)](#)<sup>15</sup>, and enhancing cross-sector collaboration within UNDP, especially with the energy and environment (EE) and disaster risk reduction and recovery (DRR) teams. In parallel, the global response to the triple planetary crisis has elevated [the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment \(R2HE\)](#)<sup>16</sup> as a key human rights priority. The [United Nations Secretary-General's Call to Action on Human Rights](#)<sup>17</sup> emphasizes the need to increase United Nations-wide support for R2HE, ensuring access to justice and effective remedies for environmental concerns, protecting the rights of future generations, safeguarding human rights defenders and environmental activists, and strengthening partnerships with the business sector on environmental protection and climate change.<sup>18</sup> This broader framing of [environmental justice](#) as R2HE has led to its consideration at high-level forums, including the United Nations Security Council and the United Nations General Assembly, and the passage of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 63/281 (2021) on climate change and its possible implications.

#### Crisis anticipation and prevention

The impact of climate change and extreme weather events is disproportionately felt by the Global South, yet effective solutions require joint global action and commitments. *Investing in ROLSHR initiatives significantly intersects with climate action and risk prevention* and reduction, from UNDP's support for countries transitioning to solar and renewable energy to combating coastal erosion. Local ROLSHR initiatives could focus on legal reforms aimed at ratifying relevant international protocols and treaties, enhancing environmental policing, and [reducing the carbon footprint of both private and public sector entities](#). In the area of business and human rights, ROLSHR programming can further support initiatives in key areas such as training businesses on [human rights due diligence and the environment](#), and ensuring adherence to the latest environmental regulatory frameworks by local and international businesses.<sup>19</sup>

15 United Nations Development Programme and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), *Effective Law and Regulation for Disaster Risk Reduction*, 2014; UNDP and IFRC, *The Handbook and Checklist on Law and Disaster Risk Reduction*, 2015.

16 OHCHR, 'Environmental crisis: High Commissioner calls for leadership by HRC member states' (13 September 2021).

17 United Nations, *The Highest Aspiration: A Call to Action for Human Rights* (2020).

18 UNDP, *Promoting Environmental Justice: Securing our Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment through UNDP Programming* (2022). Also see: OECD, *Environmental Justice: Context, Challenges and National Approaches* (2024); United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures Office, *The Right to a Healthy Environment: A User's Guide* (2024); and UNEP, *Environmental Courts and Tribunals: A Guide for Policy Makers* (2016).

19 UNDP, *Corporate Social Responsibility as Enabler of Green Growth and Climate Action* (2016); UNDP, *Human Rights Due Diligence and the Environment: A Practical Tool for Business* (2024).

## Sustaining development throughout crisis

In the early stages of disaster recovery, such as after floods and earthquakes, UNDP's ROLSHR efforts focus on recovering human remains, and addressing documentation and housing, land, and property (HLP) issues. To expedite recovery and help communities rebuild, UNDP has strengthened partnerships with agencies like the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). "Resolving HLP legal issues often faces delays due to dysfunctional courts, case backlogs, or discriminatory and diverse legal and regulatory frameworks."

Therefore, UNDP supports ADR, legal mediation, and, where possible, informal or community-based justice avenues.

### What UNDP offers:

#### 1. Missing persons and support to internally displaced persons

While UNDP has provided substantial programmatic support with locating missing persons and their families in post-conflict settings and transitional justice processes, including in Libya, there are few examples of such support directed at the aftermath of disasters like the Derna floods.<sup>20</sup> To address this gap, disaster / recovery readiness and early intervention plans should be developed through UNDP's ROLSHR programming for high-risk areas.

These plans should include various levels of support for the families of the missing, such as transparency of information, accountability, and socio-economic assistance. Additionally, disasters often result in large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs), making it essential that all interventions are evidence-based. This includes credible assessments of damage to housing, property losses and potential violations, such as expropriation; and the development of mitigation measures to ensure the safety of returning IDPs and prevent conflict with host communities. ROLSHR programming can further support IDPs by providing access to justice; reforming judicial and legislative remedies; and ensuring compensation, reparation, insurance settlements, and accountability for human-made contributions to crises. Support can also address legal issues related to alternative housing solutions, such as rent contracts, community safety, and temporary shelters. This is vital for maintaining the social contract and strengthening people's trust in state Institutions when disasters occur.

In Libya, UNDP's ongoing partnership with the General Authority for the Search and Identification of Missing Persons (GASIMP) made important contributions in response to the Derna Floods. This also demonstrated GASIMP's potential as a strategic partner in the region on related issues. Ongoing ROLSHR programmes in Libya are intended to streamline legal frameworks and institutional mandates, as well as to centralize data management systems through coordinated advocacy (for example, the Mafqood campaign). Notably, UNDP's CO in Libya has supported initiatives in Murzuq to reconstruct houses and government buildings, alongside long-term rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for IDPs, including agricultural projects and professional training.

20 According to the Libyan Missing Persons Authority, 3,800 individuals have been reported missing following the 2023 floods in Derna, Libya, based on DNA samples collected. This figure remains contentious as it only accounts for bodies that have been recovered.

## 2. Housing, land and property

By collaborating with specialized programmes at sister United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on housing, land and property (HLP), UNDP can better meet the needs of disaster-affected populations and expedite their return to a dignified life using people-centred and rights-based approaches.

Key programmatic entry points for UNDP's ROLSHR units include: safeguarding access to justice: providing legal aid, advocacy, and capacity building for formal court systems; legal and regulatory reforms: supporting necessary changes to improve HLP frameworks; gender-sensitive ADR mechanisms: promoting legal mediation and consultation; document replacement: facilitating the replacement of lost documents related to land and property ownership, property registration, and personal identification; women's land and property rights: advocating for legal recognition and protection, and providing legal aid and access to justice services for women seeking land and property restitution; and support for displaced women and single mothers: addressing the needs of women affected by disasters:

In areas affected by earthquakes, UNDP's ROLSHR programming can support removal and recycling of debris, initiating the rebuilding process with the necessary consent of property owners. This process can be complex, especially where residents have passed away, been displaced, or have legal disputes over ownership. Gender and child justice issues are also streamlined throughout, particularly for separated and unaccompanied children, widows, and single mothers. ROLSHR programming can further support in the reconstruction process by ensuring adherence to construction laws for instance, and rebuilding infrastructure so that it is hazard proof and resilient.

In Libya, HLP issues are central to transitional justice, reconstruction, and addressing the needs of IDPs. Challenges include dealing with legacies of past violations, such as Qaddafi's expropriation laws, and ongoing HLP rights violations, like forced evictions without proper compensation. Conflicts between renters and owners are at the core of many tensions, preventing the return of IDPs.

In Syria, pre-existing, conflict-related HLP violations were worsened by the earthquake, with massive property damage and documentation loss. The United Nations, notably UNDP and UN-Habitat, coordinated a multiphase response involving legal aid, mobile services, and digital platforms, with a focus on women and persons with disabilities. Across all countries, the integration of legal aid, community engagement, and digital tools was central to addressing the complex legal and protection issues in the aftermath of disasters.

### 3. Support to legislative and regulatory reform

In partnership with the EE and DRR teams at UNDP, the ROLSHR unit should initiate its transformative disaster programming by thoroughly reviewing existing legal and regulatory frameworks. This effort should advocate for a strengthened, inclusive resource-management system at the local level and promote proactive, [comprehensive community resilience building](#) and adaptation to climate change. By collaborating with local communities and enhancing legal and regulatory frameworks, conflicts over scarce resources can be mitigated, preparedness levels heightened, and risk-management measures implemented.

Additionally, advocacy should focus on aligning local frameworks with SDG targets and integrating [women, peace and security \(WPS\)](#) principles into climate adaptation and resilience mechanisms. This includes ensuring women's participation in decision-making on community resource management, enhancing women's legal literacy, and building their capacity to engage in lawmaking and policy reform related to environmental governance and disaster risk management.

“In 2024, UNDP’s Environmental and Climate Justice Project in Iraq completed an assessment of the country’s regulatory and legal frameworks on climate and environmental justice.” The objective was to inform reform recommendations, align local standards with international standards, and provide essential recommendations to improve Iraq’s overall environmental justice landscape.<sup>21</sup>

In Lebanon, UNDP implemented two phases of the ‘Institutional Strengthening of the Ministry of Environment’ project, focusing on enhancing the Ministry’s capacity through three integrated building blocks: 1) environmental policy development: creating laws, regulations, and other policy mechanisms; 2) mainstreaming the SDGs: integrating the SDGs into local development planning and programming; and 3) institutional strengthening and capacity building: focusing on environmental monitoring.<sup>22</sup>

### 4. Environmental justice and the right to a healthy environment

UNDP’s Environmental Justice Strategy defines environmental justice, including climate justice, as promoting justice and accountability in environmental matters. This involves respecting, protecting and fulfilling environmental rights, and promoting the ‘environmental rule of law’ as coined by UNEP. UNDP’s environmental justice and the right to a healthy environment (R2HE) programming includes promoting procedural rights such as access to justice, information, and public participation in environmental action; as well as substantive elements like the right to clean air, a safe climate, healthy ecosystems, biodiversity, safe and sufficient water, sustainable food production, and non-toxic environments.

21 UNDP, Assessment of the Current Landscape on Environmental and Climate Justice in Iraq (2024).

22 UNDP Lebanon, ‘Institutional Strengthening of the Ministry of Environment, Phase II (2017-2021)’.

To realize R2HE, UNDP works to establish, enforce and implement enabling legal frameworks within each thematic area. Environmental justice is integral to all six of UNDP's signature solutions, leveraging its expertise in rule of law, human rights, governance, nature, climate, and energy, and spanning areas like crisis prevention and livelihoods. The UNDP Global Policy Network promotes an integrated approach, linking conflict prevention, climate security, social cohesion, and peacebuilding to prevent, respond to, and recover from crises and conflicts.

UNDP's ROLSHR programming promotes [environmental justice](#) through three key entry points. First, it establishes enabling legal frameworks that integrate the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment (R2HE) into national laws and policies, while fostering public awareness, inclusive decision-making, gender equality, and pollution control. Second, it strengthens people-centred and effective institutions to ensure access to justice and the respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights in environmental matters, including by enforcing environmental laws. Third, it increases access to justice and legal empowerment, enabling individuals and communities—especially women and marginalized groups—to claim and defend their environmental rights, with support from civil society, legal professionals, and targeted legal aid services.<sup>23</sup>

In Palestine, the Sawasya III Joint Programme supports local partners to identify environmental crimes, navigate the litigation process, and facilitate legislative reforms if necessary. Primary support is directed towards the inspection departments within the High Judiciary Council and the Public Prosecution service. This includes developing and implementing a capacity-building programme for judges and prosecutors, particularly those in the inspection departments and the newly established environmental public prosecution service, tailored to the Palestinian context. Sawasya also coordinates with civil society organizations (CSOs) working on environmental issues and with the Palestinian Environmental Authority.

In Lebanon, UNDP has contributed to advancing environmental justice by facilitating critical collaboration between the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of the Environment to address over US\$2 billion in unpaid dues from the quarrying sector. This effort included convening dialogue sessions and supporting the development and legal enactment of a new collection mechanism, including SOPs for prosecuting environmental crimes across various sectors.

Internally, UNDP's [social and environmental standards \(SES\)](#) offer a mandatory, organization-wide policy that requires all UNDP programmes, including ROLSHR programming, to maximize their social and environmental benefits and manage adverse risks. The standards underpin UNDP's commitment to mainstreaming social and environmental sustainability, and to supporting sustainable development.

## 5. Climate security and adaptation

Climate change is widely recognized as [a threat multiplier](#), affecting both state and human security. In contexts of state fragility, uneven resource distribution, and water scarcity, climate change can intensify threats, leading to conflict, increased migration, and the submergence of low-lying areas and small island states.<sup>24</sup> The linkages between [climate change, peace, and security](#) have therefore gained recognition, as insecurity hinders climate adaptation efforts, leaving vulnerable communities poorer and less resilient.<sup>25</sup>

A key example of UNDP programming for climate security is the [Regional Programme on Climate Security in the Western Sahel \(2022-2026\)](#). This programme aims to improve the resilience of Sahelian societies against climate-induced shocks and stressors, including violent conflicts, while supporting social cohesion and local governance through the sustainable and equitable use of natural resources. The programme employs an integrated approach to climate-related security risks through four main pathways: 1) effective decision-making: enhanced monitoring and information management for early action on climate-related security risks; 2) integrated regional policy collaboration across the climate-security nexus; 3) strengthened local governance for managing climate-related security risks and natural resources; and 4) improved community resilience through sustainable and diversified livelihoods.<sup>26</sup>

Additionally, the climate security mechanism (CSM), a joint initiative by the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), UNDP, and UNEP, aims to strengthen the United Nations system's capacity to address the adverse impacts of climate change on peace and security. The CSM promotes a gender-sensitive understanding of the issues and supports capacity-building efforts at United Nations entities and regional organizations for preventing and managing climate-related security risks.

At the regional level of Arab States, UNDP's RBAS has proposed key focus areas and programmatic entry points in the climate-security nexus.<sup>27</sup> An original approach has been developed by the EE and gender teams at RBAS for a regional project on climate security, aiming to provide a comprehensive and integrated response to the complex links between climate change and security. The project will cover key areas such as assessing the relationship between climate change, environmental degradation, conflict, and migration; building national and local capacities in governance, peacebuilding, and environmental management; integrating WPS principles into climate action; and promoting cross-sectoral resilience strategies. It also focuses on mainstreaming environmental concerns into conflict-sensitive and development programming, adopting an integrated portfolio approach centred on social cohesion and human security, investing in early warning systems, enhancing collaboration and transparency among actors, and increasing flexible financing to address climate-security challenges effectively.

24 See, for instance: Sherri Goodman and Pauline Baudu, 'Climate Change as a "Threat Multiplier": History, Uses, and Future of the Concept', Center for Climate and Security, Council on Strategic Risks Briefer No.38 (January 2023).

25 UNEP and EU, Climate Change and Security Partnership Project Final Report: March 2017 – February 2022 (2022); The Environmental Justice Foundation, The Gathering Storm: Climate Change, Security and Conflict (2014).

26 UNDP, 'Regional Programme on Climate Security in Western Sahel', 2022.

27 UNDP, 'Climate Change, Environmental Degradation, Conflict, and Displacement in the Arab States Region' (internal, 2023). Also see: United Nations, CROSSROADS: Practical, cross-sectional, modular, authoritative guidance on security sector reform & governance, module 10.2 SSR and Climate Change (n.d.), <https://www.un.org/ssr/en/guidance/crossroads>.

In Somalia, the Building Accountable and Sustainable Security in Somali Federal Member States (BASIS) project (2022-2025) integrates climate security as a central pillar of its approach to strengthening Somalia's security-sector governance. Recognizing the profound impact of climate change on conflict dynamics—such as resource scarcity, displacement, and competition over land—the project supports Federal Member States in developing climate-informed security policies and risk assessments. Through inclusive community engagement, BASIS ensures that climate vulnerabilities are addressed in local security planning, particularly for marginalized groups including women, youth, and displaced populations. By embedding climate resilience into the design of security institutions and fostering coordination under the National Security Architecture, the project aims to build a security sector that is not only accountable and people-centred, but also adaptive to environmental stressors and future climate risks.

## 6. Implementation of business and human rights principles

The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) reiterate the responsibility of governments to protect human rights, establish the responsibilities of business to respect human rights, and stipulate the responsibilities of both actors to provide effective remedies to victims of business-related abuses. These responsibilities are particularly pronounced in crises resulting from disasters, where workers, communities and the environment are at increased risk of exploitation. In these settings, UNDP is well placed to support governments and businesses in discharging their responsibilities under the UNGPs.

UNDP has significant entry points to support businesses—often key actors in the recovery from a disaster—in acting responsibly by conducting human rights due diligence (HRDD). This involves identifying, preventing, mitigating, and accounting for adverse human rights impacts associated with their activities and business relationships. UNDP has released a range of tools to help businesses conduct human rights due diligence, including the [Human Rights Due Diligence Training Facilitation Guide](#).<sup>28</sup>

In addition, responding to a demand from businesses for clearer guidance on how HRDD should be applied to the environment, the UNDP released [a toolkit](#) addressing this issue. This toolkit provides key programming entry points for UNDP's ROLSHR initiatives at both country office and regional levels, elaborating on the UNGPs parameters (which do not specifically address environmental issues). The toolkit provides practical advice to businesses on how they can play a central role in addressing the triple planetary crises by preventing and mitigating their environmental harm; and proactively protecting, restoring, and improving the environment.

The toolkit aims to equip businesses of all sizes and structures and from all sectors with experience and insights on integrating environmental considerations into their HRDD processes. Additionally, the [toolkit](#) supports businesses in gathering, monitoring, and reporting information to comply with the ever-increasing range of disclosure requirements, be they national or international, and mandatory or voluntary.<sup>29</sup>

28 UNDP, Human Rights Due Diligence and the Environment.

29 UNDP, Human Rights Due Diligence and the Environment.

## II.2

## Political crisis in areas of limited statehood

### Breaking the cycle of fragility

For countries experiencing a political crisis or emerging from prolonged political conflict, stabilizing and enhancing service provision and key ROLSHR functions are fundamental components of the UNDP framework aimed at transforming societies and breaking the cycle of political fragility. Community safety and security sector reform (SSR) are also crucial pillars of ROLSHR programming, where the situation allows.

While it is essential to be mindful of the sensitivity of each context, ROLSHR programming in politically fragile settings is not fundamentally different from that in areas of consolidated statehood, provided the central government maintains its domestic and international legitimacy. However, in areas with hybrid or unrecognized de facto authorities, legitimacy issues often limit the scope of ROLSHR programming. This has typically led UNDP to channel most of its interventions through community-based committees, informal justice mechanisms, and CSOs, where the situation permits.

Beyond the question of whether to engage with government authorities, UNDP can further facilitate national dialogue and local reconciliation processes as part of a nationally owned and transparent transitional justice process. This includes investing in multilateral actions through local and international coalitions for [transitional justice](#), in collaboration with local CSOs and sister United Nations agencies such as OHCHR.<sup>30</sup>

### Crisis anticipation and prevention

When one considers the most common drivers of conflict—contestation over power, territory, or resources; lack of recognition and / or representation in the state; and human rights abuses—it becomes readily apparent how constitutional and legal reforms aimed at addressing these drivers are crucial strategies for crisis prevention. These reforms can serve as effective tools for building or restoring [the social contract](#) and proactively addressing potential crises.<sup>31</sup> Promoting the implementation of human rights treaties and various international frameworks related to equal representation before the law can also significantly advance state consolidation and protect against territorial fragmentation. This understanding of the rule of law and human rights as a relationship between the state and society is emphasized by Agenda 2030 and SDG 16.

UNDP's work on data-driven analytics validates the importance of including rule of law and human rights perspectives in crisis anticipation. To identify emerging risks, it is essential to maintain a focus on signals and trends related to ROLSHR areas. This enables situational monitoring and provides analysis to feed into programme design and adaptation, as well as strategic positioning and advocacy.

30 See OHCHR, 'Guidance Note of the Secretary General on Transitional Justice: A Strategic Tool for People, Prevention and Peace' (11 October 2023).

31 See, for example, UNDP and The Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, 'Engaged Societies, Responsive States: The Social Contract in Situations of Conflict and Fragility' (concept note, April 2016).

Therefore, UNDP’s conflict prevention programming in countries with limited or weak state consolidation should prioritize strengthening the social contract through legal and constitutional reforms. The trustworthiness, legitimacy, and accountability of justice and security actors, institutions, and human rights systems are crucial determinants of the quality of the state-society trust relationship and, consequently, the quality of the social contract.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, efforts should continue to ensure that the fulfilment of international human rights standards is integrated into domestic legislative and law enforcement mechanisms, with particular emphasis on gender equality and the rights of minority groups. This can be achieved by supporting human rights monitoring and accountability mechanisms, such as partnering with sister United Nations agencies, engaging with CSOs and national human rights institutions (NHRIs), and supporting local advocacy and promotion campaigns.

The 2024 Pact for the Future affirmed the primary responsibility of states in identifying and mitigating the risks of conflict and violence, and called on Member States to develop context-specific national prevention strategies. These strategies encompass whole-of-government approaches that integrate political, security, development, human rights and social policies, while also emphasizing inclusivity and local participation. Colombia, Kenya, Mauritania, Norway, and São Tomé and Príncipe have recently developed national strategies. Nationally led prevention efforts can also take the form of national peace infrastructure, such as the National Peace Council in Ghana.

Strengthening the synergies between UNDP’s ROLSHR and conflict prevention initiatives is particularly relevant in these contexts. [Insider Mediation \(IM\)](#), promoted by UNDP’s local action team,<sup>33</sup> is a powerful approach that focuses on building the capacities of local mediators as key agents of change in peacebuilding. This method supports inclusive, politically engaged, and long-term reconciliation efforts through the creation of mediator networks. IM aligns closely with ROLSHR programming, particularly in areas such as ADR and customary and informal justice (CIJ), contributing to communal reconciliation and the development of infrastructure for peace. This approach requires bottom-up, localized strategies that incorporate gender equality, youth engagement, and the alignment of local and national reconciliation efforts. It is crucial that international actors work in closer coordination with local initiatives to avoid unintended negative consequences. Adopting a [people-centred](#) and [human rights-based approach](#)—grounded in [local ownership](#) and designed to promote the rule of law and human rights through inclusive, context-specific, and participatory programming—is essential for achieving lasting impact.<sup>34</sup>

## [Sustaining development throughout crisis](#)

### **a. Situations of non-territorial limitations on state power**

The majority of UNDP’s ROLSHR programming is concentrated in areas with limited or weak state consolidation. This includes direct engagement with, and capacity building of, ministries and public institutions such as the Ministry of Justice, the police, and the prosecutor’s office through [people-centred](#) and [rights-based](#) approaches. Since UNDP’s development efforts are generally initiated based on the Country Programme Document (CPD), carefully drafted in consultation with the host country, much of ROLSHR programming in this area has focused on supporting the consolidation of statehood through people-centred and rights-based programmes. This encompasses safeguarding access to justice, gender and child justice; community policing; security sector reform; justice sector reform; transitional justice; and the general approach of [combining grassroots initiatives \(bottom-up\) with state-building initiatives \(top-down\)](#).

32 UNDP, The UNDP People-Centred Approach to Justice and Security.

33 UNDP, Sustaining Peace Through Insider Mediation in the Arab States (2025).

34 UNDP, Local Approaches to Conflict Prevention in the Arab States Region (2023).

## b. Situations of de facto territories and non-state armed groups

While humanitarian and development conditions in de facto territories are often bleak, the relative stability in many of these territories amid prolonged political crises presents a critical window of opportunity to sustain development efforts. UNDP’s ROLSHR programming in these areas adopts a people-centred, rights-based approach aimed at safeguarding the rule of law, ensuring access to justice, and addressing evolving legal and security needs. Key programmatic entry points include facilitating access to public services, issuing or replacing civil documentation, combating GBV, advocating for gender- and child-sensitive justice and legal reforms, and providing free legal aid in criminal and family matters. However, the lack of legitimacy and international.

Recognition of many non-state armed groups (NSAGs) often limits direct engagement with de facto authorities; in regions with a ‘no-contact policy’—such as the Gaza Strip and northern Yemen—ROLSHR interventions are primarily implemented through CSOs and informal justice mechanisms.

Concurrently, there has been an increased level of investment in ADR—including legal consultation, mediation, and arbitration—alongside growing attention to HLP issues in the aftermath of conflict to support early recovery and the restoration of law and order. These efforts are vital to rebuilding trust in the social contract and advancing progress toward the SDGs, particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

What UNDP offers:

### 1. People-centred security

Security Interventions are grounded in UNDP’s People-Centred Justice and Security approach. The 2025 publication [The UNDP people-centred approach to justice and security](#) presents a comprehensive policy framework that reimagines justice and security systems by placing people—especially the most vulnerable—at the heart of programming. It critiques conventional state-centric models and advocates for a transformative, rights-based approach that emphasizes inclusion, empowerment, and accountability. The framework is built around five interlinked elements: supporting social transformation, enabling systems change, delivering holistic and integrated programming, empowering people and communities, and engaging the state and its institutions. By combining top-down institutional support with bottom-up community engagement, the approach seeks to address both immediate needs and structural drivers of injustice and insecurity. It promotes adaptive, context-specific, and multidisciplinary programming, aligning with UNDP’s human development mandate and the broader goals of Agenda 2030 to foster peaceful, just, and inclusive societies.

A key programmatic entry point for people-centred security in crisis settings is community security.<sup>35</sup> This approach brings together a diverse range of state and local actors to collaborate to identify the root causes of insecurity and to facilitate coordinated responses at the community level. Community security initiatives can notably be aligned with the WPS agenda, aiming to ensure women’s participation in community policing, as seen in Somalia and Iraq, and to protect women in conflict and fragile areas. These initiatives are designed to empower women, enhance their safety, and promote their active role in peacebuilding and community development.

35 See: UNDP, Community Security and Social Cohesion: Towards a UNDP Approach, (2009).

Community security also serves as a critical foundation for broader stabilization programmes, which require a baseline of legitimacy and trust between local populations and state security institutions. This can involve activities including: preparing security forces for redeployment: ensuring that security personnel are ready and equipped to re-engage with communities; conducting awareness campaigns: educating the public and security forces about their roles and responsibilities; strengthening command and control structures: enhancing the organizational frameworks that govern security operations; and ensuring human rights compliance training: providing training to security forces to prevent renewed violence against civilians.

[Stabilization programmes](#), like community security and hybrid security strategies, adopt a human security approach that seeks to ensure communities are ‘free from fear’ and increasingly address broader social and economic needs for ‘freedom from want’. UNDP’s stabilization efforts emphasize coordinated engagement with local, national, and international security forces through standard mechanisms such as civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) and civil-military coordination (CMCoord), ensuring coherent and lifesaving support while maintaining a strong preference for civilian-led interventions to prevent the securitization of development.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, while stabilization efforts are typically short-term endeavours, usually lasting around 18 months, community security is often embedded within longer-term ROLSHR programmes in the region and beyond.

Community security can be further integrated into broader [SSR](#) to combine bottom-up and top-down approaches. SSR is a political and technical process aimed at improving state and human security through good governance, democratic oversight, rule of law, and human rights. It involves both state and non-state actors and addresses justice and security interlinkages. SSR programming varies by context but may focus on system-wide reforms, specific geographic areas, policy domains, or institutional roles. Gender mainstreaming is central, aligning SSR with the WPS agenda through national policies, training, and inclusive participation, as seen in Iraq and Lebanon.<sup>37</sup>

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) is another post-conflict process that aids the transition of former combatants into civilian life or security roles, contributing to peace and reducing violence.<sup>38</sup> While DDR and SSR are closely linked, they are most effective when addressed as distinct but complementary efforts. Community-based reintegration is key, focusing on [reconnecting ex-combatants with society](#) and supporting their role in social life. Reintegration intersects with broader initiatives like human security, governance, reconciliation, and transitional justice.<sup>39</sup> Conflict sensitivity and community involvement in all stages of DDR are essential, and when possible, [DDR](#) should align with reintegration efforts for IDPs and refugees.<sup>40</sup> Gender equality is also a critical dimension, as shown by the [South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons](#) (SEESAC) initiative in Southeast Europe.

36 UNDP, ‘Guidance Note on Stabilization Programming’ (February 2024).

37 DCAF Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, ‘Security Sector Reform: Applying the Principles of Good Governance to the Security Sector’, SSR Backgrounder Series (2019).

38 Also see: DCAF and the United Nations Inter-Agency Security Sector Reform Task Force, ‘Security Sector Reform and Governance (SSR&G) and Sustaining Peace’, policy note (October 2024).

39 Elman Peace, FBA, Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) and UNDP, ‘Guidance Note on Supporting Community-Based Reintegration of Former Members of Armed Forces and Groups’ (2024). A complementary note to the UN Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) and the 2018 Addenda to the 2015 Madrid Guiding Principles in the context of armed groups designated as terrorist organisations.

40 Elman Peace et al., ‘Guidance note on supporting community-based reintegration’. Also see: UNDDR, Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards (April 2020), on the UN DDR Resource Centre website: <https://www.unddr.org/>.

UNDP's security interventions are guided by the [United Nations Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on UN Support to non-UN Security Forces](#) (HRDDP), adopted by the Secretary General's Policy Committee in 2011. Applying the HRDDP is mandatory for UNDP programming that engages non-United Nations security sector actors. To support its application, UNDP has developed [Guidance: UNDP Implementation Tool for the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy](#) and a [Risk Assessment Form: UNDP Implementation Tool for the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy](#), in line with existing risk management mechanisms and the [UNDP Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures \(POPP\)](#). The overall objective of UNDP's [implementation tool](#) is to enable UNDP managers to make risk-informed decisions when entering a programmatic commitment with the security sector, and to provide a framework for the implementation of the policy.

In Yemen, UNDP promoted community security through inclusive participation and collaboration with local governance, guided by the Leave No One Behind principle. Community consultations identified safety concerns and generated around 400 proposals, with 64 selected for microgrants under \$3,000 based on criteria like inclusivity, feasibility and sustainability. A key issue was the presence of unexploded ordnance, prompting integrated efforts between rule of law and mine action teams. About 70,000 people received risk awareness training, and coordination among local authorities—especially police and explosive responders—was improved to enhance safety responses.

In Iraq, UNDP supported the transformation of the national police force from a militarized entity into a people-centred, rights-respecting service as an essential component of post-conflict stabilization and long-term peace. Central to this effort is the Model Police Stations (MPS) initiative, which integrates community engagement, gender inclusion, and evidence-based reforms to rebuild public trust and improve policing services. UNDP's support has spanned political, institutional, and community levels, emphasizing strategic planning, inclusive training and partnerships across the justice sector. The initiative has led to increased public confidence, improved service delivery, and a national commitment to expand people-centred policing, which can be replicated in other conflict-affected contexts.

In Somalia, the Joint Police Programme (JPP), implemented from 2018 to 2024, aimed to enhance security and justice by supporting the development of a federated policing system under the New Policing Model. Funded by the European Union (EU), the United Kingdom and Germany, and implemented by UNOPS and UNDP, the JPP provided comprehensive support across nine output areas, including infrastructure, training, stipends, legal frameworks, civilian oversight, and community engagement. It facilitated 144 activities across Somalia, improving police capabilities, accountability, and community trust. The programme emphasized Somali ownership, aligning interventions with local priorities, and contributed to institutional, organizational, individual, and community-level reforms. Despite challenges such as political fragmentation, limited financial sustainability, and gender inclusion gaps, the JPP laid a strong foundation for a more professional, accountable, and community-oriented police force. Its lessons underscore the importance of strategic clarity, local ownership, and sustained political will for future security and justice initiatives.

## 2. Control of small arms and light weapons

The Secretary-General's report (S/2023/823) to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) underscores the persistent global threat posed by small arms and light weapons (SALW), linking them to armed conflict, terrorism, organized crime, and human rights violations.<sup>41</sup> It outlines the efforts of the United Nations to mainstream control of SALW across peace operations, development agendas, and arms embargo enforcement, while advocating for stronger international cooperation, gender-sensitive approaches, and the adoption of new technologies and frameworks like the Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management.

UNDP and the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs are working actively to combat the illicit proliferation of SALW through the [SALIENT initiative](#) and broader global strategies. The SALIENT initiative aims to provide sustained, integrated funding for SALW control, emphasizing gender inclusion, national ownership, and alignment with development goals.

UNDP and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan co-led the SALIENT initiative in South Sudan (October 2021–October 2023), which supported voluntary civilian disarmament by enhancing firearm tracking, improving coordination between police and security agencies, and training officers—especially women—in gender-sensitive policing. It also strengthened border control, raised public awareness through surveys and radio outreach, and trained over 880 officials in disarmament and arms management.

UNDP CO in Lebanon is currently working to implement the SALIENT 1.0 Initiative.

## 3. Customary and informal justice

As a member of the Working Group on Customary and Informal Justice and SDG16+, UNDP codeveloped the report [People-centred justice: Report of the working group on customary and informal justice and SDG16+](#) that was presented at the SDG Summit in September 2023. This report aims to build a policy consensus for engaging CIJ systems and establish best practices, thereby driving more relevant and effective justice investments. It recognizes the crucial role of CIJ systems in delivering people-centred justice and their potential to bridge the justice gap.

To enhance the integration of CIJ systems into global and national frameworks, the report outlines six key recommendations. It calls for the adoption of a justice ecosystems approach that recognizes the diverse range of justice providers and the essential role CIJ plays in many communities. The report also urges a significant expansion of CIJ engagement to advance access to justice for all by 2030. Additional priorities include empowering marginalized groups to engage with and benefit from CIJ systems, promoting the participation and leadership of women and girls within these systems, and encouraging development partners to support CIJ as part of broader efforts toward people-centred justice. Finally, the report emphasizes the need to increase investment in CIJ systems to strengthen inclusive and effective justice delivery.

These recommendations align with Agenda 2030 and SDG target 16.3, which promotes the rule of law at national and international levels and ensures equal access to justice for all. Engaging customary and informal justice (CIJ) pathways is essential to achieving these goals in many parts of the world. The recommendations also support SDG 5 (gender equality and women's empowerment), SDG 13 (climate action), and SDG 15 (life on land).

41 United Nations Security Council, Small arms and light weapons. Report of the Secretary-General, S/2023/823 (2023).

However, a carefully crafted approach is needed, as CIJ systems can reinforce unequal power dynamics and perpetuate harmful social norms, particularly affecting women, children, youth, and the poor. They also lack proper enforcement mechanisms, which can undermine their effectiveness in the long run. Despite these challenges, CIJ mechanisms play a vital role in restorative justice processes due to their community base, flexible rules and procedures, cultural resonance, and consent-based negotiated solutions.<sup>42</sup> Establishing human rights-based terms of reference that ensure the principle of ‘do no harm’ is consistently followed throughout ROLSHR engagements with CIJ systems is a key starting point.

Yemen’s judicial system is complex and inconsistent, with weak state-run institutions operating primarily in urban areas. The separation of northern and southern governorates has undermined the formal justice system, leading to a preference for CIJ. The ongoing conflict has weakened governance, making tribal law crucial for stability due to the government’s limited capacity. Tribal and traditional authorities, synonymous with CIJ, play a significant role despite the lack of references to these authorities in the Yemeni Constitution.

The Civil Code allows custom consistent with Islamic Sharia when no applicable text exists, provided it is “general and long-established” and not in conflict with public order and morality. The Criminal Code does not permit customary law, but it is often applied under the Yemeni Law of Arbitration within Yemeni law principles.<sup>43</sup>

In Yemen, UNDP focuses on grassroots engagement, targeting sub-national units like governorates, districts, and neighbourhoods, avoiding national level interventions. The Promoting Inclusive Access to Justice in Yemen (PIAJY) project prioritizes rights-holders to inform capacity-building and accountability for duty-bearers. PIAJY emphasizes inclusivity, focusing on vulnerable groups to ensure a plurality of voices and stronger local accountability.

The project has formalized inclusion quotas for women, youth, persons with disabilities, and IDPs in Community Committees in Aden, as well as strengthened links between informal and formal justice providers to improve accountability and accessibility, supporting the Ministry of Justice in Aden to formalize community mediation / paralegal teams at police stations and local courts through endorsed SOPs.

In Syria, UNDP initiated a community security and access to justice project in 2017 to enhance resilience in the context of the ‘no-contact’ policy with the former Syrian regime. This project aimed to address immediate community security needs, enhance capacities for peaceful dispute resolution, foster inclusive inter-communal dialogue, and build the capacities of local CSOs. Due to persistent issues with the formal justice system under the Assad regime, UNDP piloted a community dispute resolution (CDR) mechanism in 2019 in Douma, Dara’a, and Al-Tel. These committees, involving local dignitaries and community leaders supported by an independent lawyer, successfully resolved disputes on various issues, including HLP and domestic family affairs. The CDR mechanism offered participatory, transparent, human-rights-based, gender-mainstreamed, and locally driven processes for free dispute resolution.

42 UNDP and the UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), *Strengthening Access to Justice in Fragile Contexts: A Gender-Focused Approach to Customary and Informal Justice Systems* (2024).

43 INANGA, *Customary and Informal Justice: An Analysis of UNDP Engagement and Approaches (in Yemen)*, (n.d.).

In Libya, the Rule of Law project assessed justice needs at the municipal level in Benghazi, Gharyan, and Sabha through localized surveys. These assessments captured the views of 678 Libyans on their needs and access to justice and legal services, revealing that informal justice actors—including local reconciliation councils, tribal and community leaders, councils of elders and sages, and religious leaders—play an active role. In Sabha, 90 percent of respondents rated such non-State actors as accessible, while 74 percent considered them affordable. Informal justice actors are preferred due to personal familiarity and higher levels of trust. Although used less frequently than formal institutions, they address a broad range of disputes, including property conflicts, family matters, and criminal offences. Survey respondents in Gharyan viewed informal justice mechanisms positively, citing accessibility, affordability, and timeliness. However, challenges such as corruption, gender insensitivity, security risks, and case backlogs affect the informal justice system. Additionally, informal systems can perpetuate exclusion, particularly for women and ethnic minorities.

#### 4. Human rights

**Support to national human rights institutions (NHRIs):** [NHRIs](#) are crucial at the country level for ensuring adherence to international human rights commitments, including those monitored by United Nations Treaty Bodies, special procedure mandate holders, and the United Nations Human Rights Council. They also play a vital role in advocating the translation of these responsibilities into law and practice.<sup>44</sup> NHRIs are particularly critical in crisis settings, as they are key actors in monitoring and reporting on human rights violations, advocating the protection of human rights, and providing redress for victims. Evidence indicates that the presence of NHRIs, acting as information providers to potential mobilizers and domestic legal systems, significantly reduces the likelihood that the State will be an egregious violator of human rights.<sup>45</sup>

In crisis contexts, NHRIs are often on the front line defending rights, operating not only as monitors and advocates but also as human rights defenders (HRDs) themselves. Their staff and leadership frequently face direct threats, intimidation, and reprisals for exposing violations or providing redress, particularly in situations of armed conflict, political instability, or shrinking civic space.

As such, NHRIs and their staff require dedicated protection measures and political backing to carry out their mandates independently and safely. Similarly, broader networks of HRDs—journalists, community leaders, and civil society partners—face heightened risks of harassment, arbitrary detention, or violence during crises, making the safeguarding of their work an essential dimension of any international support strategy. UNDP’s engagement therefore includes not only strengthening institutional capacity, but also promoting protective environments, enabling secure digital tools for monitoring and reporting, and advocating with governments and international partners to ensure the safety and recognition of NHRIs and HRDs as indispensable actors in crisis prevention, response, and recovery.

In 2015, UNDP and OHCHR published [a Toolkit for Collaboration with National Human Rights Institutions](#) (currently being updated). This toolkit serves as a practical guide for United Nations country teams on how best to support NHRIs, ensuring their compliance with the [Paris Principles](#) and supporting their ability to fulfil their mandates through the provision of policy advice, technical assistance, and capacity development from the pre-establishment phase onwards.

44 UNDP and OHCHR, UNDP-OHCHR Toolkit for Collaboration with National Human Rights Institutes (2015).

45 Ryan M. Welch, ‘National Human Rights Institutions: Domestic Implementation of International Human Rights Law’, *Journal of Human Rights*, vol.16, no.1 (2016), pp. 96-116.

It includes information on country planning processes and capacity assessments, identifies challenges and opportunities NHRIs may encounter, and suggests how to handle situations that threaten their effectiveness.<sup>46</sup>

**Support to CSOs and HRDs:** In addition to supporting NHRIs, UNDP's ROLSHR programming in the Arab States region extends various levels of support to local CSOs and HRDs working on human rights monitoring and advocacy, legal reform, awareness raising, gender mainstreaming, juvenile justice, capacity building, legal aid, and legal research. CSO engagements form the basis of people-centred and human rights-based approaches to justice and security, especially in areas where the United Nations system maintains a no-contact policy with the government. Their work is key to restoring trust in the social contract, protecting and promoting legal rights in familial and other disputes, combating GBV, and pushing for the fulfilment of international human rights standards at the local level. CSOs also play a vital role in creating and protecting civic space.

In Palestine, the Sawasya I–III Joint Programme has established a strong and enduring partnership with the Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), which is Palestine's national human rights institution and ombudsman. Despite the challenges of occupation and political division, ICHR has maintained its independence and effectiveness, earning 'A' status accreditation and actively participating in global human rights networks. The programme also provides sustained support to a wide range of human rights organizations across Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem in monitoring and accountability. A key element of this support is the programme's roster of relevant CSOs in Palestine—an essential pillar of its engagement in ROLSHR.

In Lebanon, despite significant operational and institutional challenges, the National Human Rights Commission remains firmly committed to fulfilling its monitoring mandate. With joint support from UNDP and OHCHR, the Commission has focused on strengthening its capacity to monitor places of deprivation of liberty, including through its contributions to a key report on the human rights situation in detention centres. This mandate was also exercised through a human rights assessment conducted in the aftermath of the 2024-armed conflict and is further reflected in the continued publication of annual reports on the state of human rights in the country.

**Support to national human rights systems:** National human rights systems are central to ensuring that states translate their international commitments into effective national action. They encompass institutional mechanisms, policy frameworks, and participatory processes that enable countries to engage with Treaty Bodies, the Human Rights Council, and special procedures in a systematic and accountable manner. UNDP works with governments, NHRIs, and civil society to strengthen these systems by embedding human rights into planning and budgeting frameworks, creating spaces for inclusive participation, and linking international obligations with development and recovery priorities.

In fragile and crisis-affected contexts, robust national systems provide coherence where institutions may otherwise be fragmented or weakened. National mechanisms for implementation, reporting, and follow-up (NMIRFs) and national human rights action plans (NHRAPs) are particularly important, as they institutionalize reporting and follow-up processes while aligning national policies with the SDGs. Human rights budgeting further ensures that financial resources are transparently directed toward protecting rights, addressing inequalities, and preventing grievances that can fuel conflict. UNDP supports states in designing and operationalizing these frameworks so that international human rights commitments become actionable policies, backed by budget lines and measurable outcomes.

46 UNDP and OHCHR, UNDP-OHCHR Toolkit for Collaboration with National Human Rights Institutes.

A key aspect of UNDP's engagement is ensuring that these systems remain inclusive and resilient during times of crisis. By supporting the participation of women, youth, minorities, and CSOs in NMIRFs and NHRAP processes, UNDP helps to build legitimacy and restore trust in institutions. This includes investing in data systems for monitoring recommendations, strengthening government–civil society coordination, and providing technical support for integrating human rights into fiscal and recovery strategies. In doing so, UNDP enables governments to fulfil their obligations while empowering local actors to shape national responses, ensuring that rights-based governance contributes to stability, peacebuilding, and long-term development.

## 5. Transitional justice

[Transitional justice \(TJ\)](#) is a crucial tool for reconciliation and stabilization in politically fragile settings and countries with limited or unconsolidated statehood. A successful TJ process includes truth-seeking after crises, accountability for past crimes, reparations, victim compensation, and institutional, legislative, and socio-economic guarantees to prevent the recurrence of past crimes.

In Yemen, Tunisia, Libya, and Palestine, UNDP's ROLSHR interventions have provided comprehensive support to TJ processes, including by facilitating national dialogues, truth-seeking initiatives and reparations efforts. These interventions have also promoted the meaningful participation of civil society, youth, women, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups. Strategic partnerships have been established with local governments, key international actors such as OHCHR, regional organizations, academic institutions, and the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ).

For a TJ process to be successful, it must be tailored to the specific local context while addressing cross-cutting issues such as mental health and psychological support (MHPSS), access to information, outreach and awareness raising. TJ processes must adopt a victim-centred approach to ensure mechanisms to protect victims' safe and informed participation.<sup>47</sup>

Through its Strengthening Rule of Law and Justice project (2022–2027), UNDP Libya has supported national reconciliation efforts by assisting in the drafting of a reconciliation law, and training government officials in MHPSS for families of missing persons. Around 4,000 individuals are still missing due to political violence, but Libya's current legal framework largely overlooks these families in favour of those deemed 'martyrs' of the revolution, depriving them of compensation, recognition, and justice. The ongoing presence of NSAGs and informal detention centres has only worsened the issue, prompting the project to advocate inclusive, international-standard mechanisms like truth-seeking, DNA identification, and reparations.

The project also emphasizes better coordination among institutions and proposes a centralized 'one-stop shop' for services to affected families. It strengthens national bodies such as GASIMP, the Attorney General's Office, and the Ministry of Justice to implement reconciliation strategies and trauma-sensitive protocols that ensure victim participation. In parallel, support is extended to CSOs through advocacy training, networking and trust-building, enabling them to push for national and international action, including an international investigative mechanism. These efforts align with broader TJ and SSR goals and draw on regional experiences from Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq.

47 OHCHR, 'Guidance Note of the Secretary General on Transitional Justice'.

## 6. Combating gender-based violence

In conflict-affected settings, women and girls not only face the direct impacts of violence and displacement but also heightened discrimination and increased risk of GBV and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). These conditions severely undermine access to justice and deepen gender inequality. The erosion of protection systems during conflict makes it especially difficult for survivors to seek redress and security. Advancing gender justice is therefore critical to restoring peace and promoting inclusive development. UNDP works across [the Arab States to strengthen gender responsive rule of law institutions](#), contributing to the achievement of SDG 5 and the broader goal of peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

To address pervasive risks of GBV and CRSV in countries such as Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Sudan, UNDP integrates survivor-centred approaches into its development programming. This includes building the capacity of justice and security sectors; supporting legislative reforms; and promoting access to holistic services, such as legal, health, and psychosocial support, delivered in safe and confidential environments. UNDP also supports national efforts to investigate and prosecute CRSV, end impunity, and uphold international standards of accountability through its collaboration with United Nations partners. By working with CSOs and national institutions, UNDP helps ensure that survivors receive dignified, comprehensive support and that justice systems are equipped to respond effectively to GBV in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

In Somalia, UNDP is fostering generative dialogue to tackle gender inequality within the patriarchal traditional justice system by enhancing women's participation in ADR mechanisms. This initiative has led to increased female leadership in non-violent communication (NVC) groups and improved women's understanding of legal processes, boosting trust in both traditional and formal justice systems. Community-led discussions across Somali Federal Member States have addressed issues like sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), gradually empowering women and minority clans to contribute meaningfully. These dialogues have produced practical, locally driven solutions in collaboration with authorities. Additionally, UNDP established three one-stop centres offering medical and psychosocial support to SGBV survivors and hired six paralegals through the Persons with Disabilities Project to provide legal aid and help survivors navigate the justice system.

In Palestine, since 2014 the Joint Sawasya Programme implemented by UNDP, UN Women, and UNICEF has strengthened the Family Protection Units of the Palestinian Civil Police. In 2016, the Chief of Police adopted the first strategy, regulation and SOPs for managing GBV cases, including risk assessment and reporting mechanisms. The High Judicial Council is reviewing draft SOPs on violence against women in judiciary procedures, to be finalized in 2025. The programme has also supported the establishment of 11 Family and Juvenile Protection Units in the West Bank and three one-stop centres, improving access to essential services for GBV survivors.

In Yemen, UNDP partners with UNFPA to integrate humanitarian protection in development programming for GBV survivors. This ensures seamless case referrals between emergency services and development interventions, including legal aid and economic empowerment. UNDP, in partnership with local women-led organizations like the Yemen Women Union (YWU), established a new GBV shelter in Aden, serving 4,800 survivors annually. Additional initiatives include expanding women-friendly spaces in workplaces and establishing Women's Police Stations in Aden and Mukalla. UNDP's advocacy of women's leadership in rule of law institutions has resulted in the promotion of eight women police officers and eight women judges to managerial positions.

In Tunisia, UNDP adopts a gender-responsive approach to security through legal reforms, awareness campaigns, capacity building, and rehabilitation efforts. Key initiatives include developing specialized training guides for handling cases of female survivors of violence, including cyberviolence, and conducting mobile unit trainings to reach remote areas. UNDP has also equipped specialized investigative units to enhance victim protection and case management. The Legal Aid and Social Protection Project integrates legal aid with social protection systems, ensuring comprehensive support for female victims of violence.<sup>48</sup>

In Sudan, since the outbreak of war in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces, women and girls have borne the brunt of the humanitarian crisis, facing a staggering rise in GBV and limited access to essential services. According to [UN Women's December 2024 Gender Alert Report](#), there has been a 288 percent increase in GBV survivors seeking help, with over 6.9 million women and girls at risk, while fewer than 25 percent of health facilities remain operational. In response, UNDP is implementing a comprehensive support programme for GBV survivors, focusing on MHPSS, vocational training and economic empowerment, and improved access to legal aid. This initiative aims to restore dignity, resilience, and hope to those most affected by the conflict, addressing both immediate needs and long-term recovery.

## 7. Justice sector reform

Justice sector reform encompasses all legal and law-enforcement institutions within a state. It can relate to a broad range of issues across justice, rule of law, human rights and security, and includes efforts to ensure the effective implementation of laws and measures; improve judicial procedures; and enhance support services for GBV survivors, people affected by injustice, and those seeking remedy. In crisis contexts, critical justice sector reform issues include pre-trial and arbitrary detention, conditions of detention, access to legal information and representation, and judicial independence. Connected to gender equality, reform efforts may also aim at increasing women's representation in judicial institutions and strengthening justice institutions to promote gender equality and non-discrimination.

Justice sector reform efforts must be coordinated and carefully planned to ensure they are people-centred, human rights-based, and advance rule of law principles. This is critical for the effective management of reform efforts across the justice areas outlined below. In this context, planning for justice sector reform provides a foundation to strengthen specific parts of the justice system. It should involve coordination across government agencies and institutions and judicial actors, and be undertaken with the participation of rights holders, justice users and non-governmental actors.

In April 2024, Somalia launched its first-ever Justice System Strategy under the United Nations Joint Justice and Corrections Programme (JJCP) (2023–2027), in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs. This strategy aims to strengthen both formal and informal justice actors across local and Federal Member States by promoting integrative justice solutions through political dialogue, learning, data collection, and coordination. Central to the strategy is the development of a sustainable Somali Justice and Correction Model (JCM), guided by principles such as inclusivity, accessibility, community leadership, a people-centred approach, accountability, transparency and adaptability. The strategy emphasizes national ownership, political legitimacy, and alignment with Somalia's broader development goals, while also recognizing the limitations of current systems and ensuring robust monitoring and evaluation. The strategy represents a significant step toward building a more effective, inclusive, and resilient justice system tailored to Somalia's unique context.

In Lebanon, UNDP is actively spearheading efforts for comprehensive judicial reform by leveraging national expertise and strategic partnerships—including with the Venice Commission—to advance foundational legislation, regulations and guidelines. Central to this initiative is the establishment of the Justice Forum, an inclusive, nationally led dialogue platform that brings together justice sector stakeholders to assess the challenges facing justice institutions comprehensively and develop a unified roadmap for reform. Through the Forum, comprehensive recommendations were produced to inform the draft law on the independence of judicial courts.

## 8. Juvenile justice

Juvenile justice is critical in crisis settings, where conflict, displacement, and instability can expose children to heightened risks of violence, exploitation, and recruitment by armed groups. In such environments, ensuring that justice systems are equipped to address the unique needs and rights of children is essential to protect their wellbeing, support their rehabilitation, and prevent cycles of harm and reoffending. A child-sensitive approach grounded in international standards can help restore dignity, foster resilience, and contribute to broader peacebuilding and recovery efforts.

In Palestine, the joint Sawasya III programme jointly implemented by UNDP, UNICEF and UN Women works to support children in conflict with the law. Prior to the war, the programme's partnership with UNICEF led to critical support for juvenile justice in the Gaza Strip. This included assistance to specialized detention facilities and collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development to enhance the capacities of vocational training centres that provide alternatives to detention for children.

In Libya, the joint project Developing Juvenile Justice in Libya, led by UNDP Libya, UNODC, and UNICEF, is grounded in the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international and national legal frameworks. Building on the achievements and lessons learned from Phase I, the project made significant progress in promoting alternatives to detention and expanding access to legal aid for children in contact with the law. Key accomplishments included strengthening Family and Child Protection Units (FCPSs), developing SOPs, improving coordination and information systems, and rehabilitating child-friendly environments. Detention conditions were enhanced through upgrading infrastructure, vocational and life skills training, and the institutionalization of tools and training materials, all of which were adopted by the Libyan government.

## 9. Correctional systems support

Improving the conditions within correctional systems is a key focus of UNDP's ROLSHR interventions, especially given the heightened vulnerability of prisons during conflicts. In crisis settings, mass escapes are a recurring challenge. Beyond safeguarding detention facilities, correctional systems serve as a strategic tool for rehabilitating and reintegrating offenders, including those convicted of ordinary crimes. Importantly, this also addresses the human rights dimensions of detaining individuals accused of terrorism, ensuring their lawful treatment, rehabilitation, and reintegration into society.

The Joint Sawasya III Programme, led by UNDP, UNICEF, and UN Women, supports CSOs and justice sector organizations in Palestine to improve the criminal justice system by enhancing detention procedures, promoting humane alternatives to detention, and ensuring compliance with international human rights law. The launch of the E-prison monitoring system in 2020, strengthening oversight of detention facilities, was a key achievement. The programme also provides targeted support to female inmates in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including legal aid and efforts to improve their detention conditions.

## 10. Access to justice

Safeguarding access to justice is a foundation of ROLSHR interventions in crisis settings, particularly for women, children, and economically disadvantaged groups. In various parts of the Arab States region, UNDP collaborates with UN Women, UNICEF, and other United Nations agencies to provide free legal aid services through CSOs. Concurrently, efforts are being made to ensure the sustainability of these services by advocating and supporting reforms in domestic legal frameworks.

UNDP addresses emerging legal needs in crisis settings by supporting the replacement of vital personal documents lost due to conflict, such as birth and marriage certificates, and by facilitating access to justice in family-related matters like custody and inheritance. Through partnerships with humanitarian actors in Palestine and Syria, UNDP safeguards HLP rights by providing legal aid, raising awareness, and assisting with property documentation. In conflict-affected areas, it also helps expedite reconstruction by resolving HLP disputes and verifying ownership. Special attention is given to vulnerable groups—such as widows, single mothers, and unaccompanied children—ensuring their rights to housing and property are protected, with a strong focus on gender- and child-sensitive justice through collaboration with agencies like UNICEF and UN Women.

The UNDP's Access to Justice support in Lebanon has addressed the compounded effects of multiple crises—including the Syrian war, economic collapse, COVID-19, the Beirut Port explosion, and the 2024-armed conflict with Israel—by providing legal aid to vulnerable populations. In partnership with UNHCR and under the leadership of Lebanon's Ministry of Justice, UNDP established a network of legal aid helpdesks offering comprehensive services such as legal awareness, representation, counselling, and ADR. These services, delivered through fixed, mobile, and hotline platforms, reached over 10,000 beneficiaries in 2024, including women, non-Lebanese persons, and IDPs. The initiative emphasizes adaptability, expanding geographically and thematically to address emerging legal needs like housing, documentation loss, and GBV. Despite challenges like resistance from legal institutions and a weakened justice system, the programme has demonstrated the value of a flexible, community-based, and institutionalized approach to legal aid in crisis settings.

## 11. Digitalization

[Digital justice solutions](#) are vital for safeguarding ROLSHR in conflict settings,<sup>49</sup> where traditional justice systems are often disrupted or inaccessible. In conflict-affected areas, digital tools also serve as a protective mechanism for legal data—such as court records, property deeds, and personal identification documents—by securing them against destruction, loss or tampering. By enabling remote access, preserving vital information, and enhancing transparency and

49 Also see: UNDP, 'Digital Innovation in the Rule of Law and Human Rights Sector: A Solutions Catalogue' (internal, April 2025).

accountability, digital justice and human rights solutions maintain access to justice during crises and strengthen long-term resilience and inclusivity of legal systems, particularly for vulnerable groups such as women, children, and displaced populations.

UNDP provides support to national partners to establish NMIRFs and develop digital tracking systems to monitor the implementation of human rights commitments, such as [Universal Periodic Review](#) (UPR) recommendations and treaty body obligations. UNDP notably supports the development and deployment of digital platforms in countries to monitor human rights violations and use this data to signal emerging social tensions or conflict risks, serving as an early warning mechanism for conflict prevention. By integrating artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, these platforms can detect trends and provide actionable insights, making them powerful tools for both governance and peacebuilding.<sup>50</sup>

During the war in Gaza, the award-winning<sup>51</sup> court management system (Mizan) of the Sawasya Joint ROL Programme (UNDP / UN Women / UNICEF) extended its support to Palestinians displaced to Egypt. Through the Palestinian Embassy in Cairo, Mizan assisted with family-related issues such as marriage, legal documentation, and alimony. In the West Bank, Sawasya supports justice sector institutions with an electronic complaint system, allowing Palestinian citizens to upload and follow up on complaints virtually. This system enhances accessibility to justice institutions and minimizes security risks. Since 2021, Sawasya has also developed and activated the Electronic Inspection System, used by inspection teams in courts and the Public Prosecution to enhance accountability.

## 12. Constitutional and legal reform

In countries emerging from political crises, [constitutional reform](#) is a critical step toward conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and the establishment of inclusive, effective, and rights-based governance and the rule of law. Constitutional reform typically unfolds in four stages: (1) process design, including selecting the types of institutions that will manage the constitutional review, the timelines for completing the review, and the scope of the review itself; (2) institutional capacity-building, for example, supporting the constitution making body or bodies, including the secretariat, in developing rules, strategic plans, and good practices in order to maximize efficiency and the likelihood of successfully fulfilling the mandate of the constitutional reform process; (3) research, negotiation, consensus building, and drafting of comparative constitutional design options, including through public consultation, so as to reach agreement on a new constitution that both serves as a social compact and a legal framework for effective governance and the rule of law; and (4) constitutional implementation, including the establishment of new constitutionally mandated laws and institutions. [UNDP supports each phase on request](#), ensuring national ownership.<sup>52</sup>

Constitutions in fragile contexts serve both substantive and procedural roles, defining the state-society relationship and facilitating national dialogue to address root causes of conflict like exclusion and discrimination. Interim arrangements may also be necessary to stabilize

50 In Latin America, the digital human rights platforms SIGOB and SIMORE Plus have been instrumental in enhancing transparency and accountability by enabling governments to collect, analyse and report on human rights data in real time. UNDP's support ensures that these platforms are inclusive, multilingual and adaptable to national contexts, reinforcing the role of digital innovation in advancing human rights and sustainable development.

51 In 2024, Mizan received international recognition, winning second place in the SDG Digital Game Changers Award in the 'Peace' category for its contributions to SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) and SDG 5 (gender equality). The award highlighted Mizan's scalability, replicability, and focus on vulnerable groups, especially women and children.

52 UNDP, 'Guidance Note on Constitution-Making Support' (2014).

governance post-crisis. Additionally, legal and administrative reforms, including gender-sensitive measures, help align national frameworks with international human rights and equality standards, promoting inclusive and rights-based governance.<sup>53</sup> Together with partner United Nations agencies, UNDP has supported constitutional reform processes in various countries emerging from crises, including Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, and Tunisia.

The UNDP-UNSOM Joint Project (2024–2026) aims to support Somalia’s democratization and state-building by facilitating an inclusive, Somali-led constitutional review process. The project focuses on building consensus among federal and state actors, ensuring broad civic participation—especially of women, youth, and marginalized groups—and harmonizing the federal constitution with state laws and institutions. It emphasizes a phased, inclusive approach to constitutional reform, grounded in rule of law and human rights, and aligned with Somalia’s federalist vision and the 2022 National Consultative Council agreement. The project also strengthens institutional capacities, promotes civic education, and fosters coordination among national and international stakeholders to ensure adaptability and sustainability in a complex political and security environment.

### 13. Protecting civic space

The ‘public sphere’ refers to the diverse spaces where individuals engage as a community to express and negotiate different visions of the public good. UNDP strengthens social contracts by enhancing the inclusivity and quality of these spaces, ensuring meaningful, non-discriminatory participation for all. [Guided by international human rights treaties](#) like the ICCPR and ICESCR, ROLSHR programmes focus on four key areas: civic engagement, access to quality information, civic competence and dialogue, and equal participation in public life. Context-specific interventions include participatory budgeting to foster transparency and inclusion; legislative reforms that promote gender equality and civic freedoms; and initiatives to combat discrimination through raising awareness, capacity-building, and dialogue. These efforts are supported by integrated information ecosystems that counter misinformation and promote informed, inclusive public discourse.<sup>54</sup>

The Tamkeen Project by UNDP Tunisia aims to strengthen democratic governance and social cohesion in post-revolution Tunisia by empowering CSOs. It supports their autonomy and specialization to foster inclusive political participation, reduce inequalities, and combat corruption, especially at the local level. Through partnerships with Norway and the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), Tamkeen promotes citizen engagement, particularly among youth, women, and marginalized groups, and encourages dialogue as a tool for peacebuilding. The project also enhances CSO capacities in governance, accountability and project management, while supporting initiatives that promote integrity, civic education and local mediation.

53 United Nations, ‘Guidance Note of the Secretary General on United Nations Constitutional Assistance’ (September 2020).

54 UNDP, Governance for People and Planet, Promoting an Open and Inclusive Public Sphere, A Programming Framework (2025).

## 14. Business, human rights and peace

UNDP's work on business, human rights and peace (BHR+P) leverages global thought leadership to drive impact at the country level. Its core components are:

- ✘ **Developing and implementing a normative framework.** UNDP and the United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights developed the [Guide on Heightened Human Rights Due Diligence for Business in Conflict-Affected Contexts](#)—the leading guidance on the topic. The EU's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) cites the Guide as a benchmark, as does the US National Action Plan on Responsible Business Conduct. Norway requires companies seeking subsidies for Ukraine operations to comply with it. Rooted in the [United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#), the Guide advises businesses to continuously assess and address the impact of their operations on both human rights and conflict dynamics, using international human rights and humanitarian law as a baseline. In cases of interstate war, companies must apply heightened due diligence in both countries, and if the conflict is unlawful under international law, they should avoid contributing to the aggressor's war efforts, particularly considering the effects on vulnerable populations.<sup>55</sup> Responding to investor demand for clearer guidance in conflict-affected contexts, UNDP is also developing an Investors' Guide on heightened due diligence, to be launched in 2026.
- ✘ **Supporting COs in crisis settings.** UNDP is partnering with COs to support governments, businesses and rights-holders. It supports the development of policies including National Action Plans on Business and Human Rights in countries such as Palestine, while engaging with companies in conflict-affected contexts such as Ukraine (where it has trained over 900 companies on responsible business practices) and Libya (see box below). In addition, it supports NHRIs in contexts such as Palestine and Somalia in strengthening their capacities to provide victims of business-related abuses with access to remedy.
- ✘ **Hosting a global community of practice on business and conflict.** UNDP co-hosts a global community of practice (CoP) involving business associations, civil society, and other stakeholders. Since its launch in November 2022, the CoP has grown to around 200 members. It meets monthly online and annually in person, serving as the leading global platform for exchange and learning on this topic.

In Libya, businesses, including those from the extractive sector, are having significant impacts on conflict dynamics. Their revenues help to sustain the state, other non-state authorities and armed groups, as well as local communities in remote areas. This means companies, including state-owned enterprises and foreign companies operational in Libya, have a responsibility to conduct heightened HRDD, ensuring they mitigate and prevent the negative impacts of their operations on conflicts and on human rights. UNDP is helping to train and advise Libyan authorities, state-owned enterprises, foreign companies and other actors including NHRIs and civil society groups to ensure that businesses contribute to peace and human rights.<sup>56</sup>

55 United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures and UNDP Business and Human Rights Unit, *Heightened Human Rights Due Diligence for Business in Conflict-Affected Contexts: A Guide* (2022). Also see: OHCHR, 'UN Rights Office Issues Report on Business Activities Related to Settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory', press release (20 February 2020).

56 Also see: Sinsa Milatovic, Olena Mytnyk, and Olena Ovarova, 'Conflict-Sensitive Business Conduct Guides Ukraine's Recovery' (UNDP, 26 June 2025).

## III. Strategic engagement

### 1. Human rights-based approach and rights-based governance

UNDP recognizes human rights as central to sustainable development, alleviating poverty and ensuring a fair distribution of development opportunities and benefits, and peace and security. UNDP further recognizes human rights as a powerful and effective problem-solving tool to further sustainable development. To advance these commitments, the human rights based approach (HRBA) to sustainable development has been a programming principle for UNDP for over 20 years, reflected as an engagement principle in UNDP's Strategic Plan. HRBA is further instrumentalized through the Social and Environmental Standards, which applies HRBA as a principle to all areas of UNDP programming and requires screening of all UNDP projects for concrete measures to mainstream human rights and apply HRBA. In 2025 UNDP published the [Human Rights-Based Approach \(HRBA\) to Development Programming Toolkit](#) to guide efforts in applying HRBA to programming, including in crisis contexts.

Rights-based governance (RBG) aims to strengthen the social contract and enhance service delivery, ensuring the fulfilment of human rights. This approach differs from the people-centred approach, which focuses on bottom-up development through greater inclusion of local actors such as community leaders, marginalized groups, women, and youth to address societal and structural inequalities. Both the RBG guidance, produced by UNDP in partnership with the FBA, and the recently published UNDP HRBA toolkit utilize the PLANET framework to guide UNDP's ROLSHR and relevant programming. PLANET stands for: participation, link to international human rights, accountability, non-discrimination and equality, empowerment and capacity development, and transparency.

Recognizing people and communities affected in crisis and post conflict settings as rights holders rather than just at-risk beneficiaries is critical to the HRBA. Interventions aim at supporting rights holders to participate fully in development decisions that affect them, and empowering people to secure their own rights. In applying the HRBA, UNDP recognizes that the state has a duty to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, including in crisis settings, and to deliver development interventions aimed at ensuring accountability for human rights obligations. UNDP also recognizes that this duty must be carried out without discrimination against vulnerable and marginalized groups.

While the RBG framework is focused on governance programming in crisis settings, the HRBA toolkit is comprehensive, aiming to integrate international human rights frameworks, including through the application of human rights principles and standards, into all areas of UNDP's work. Additionally, the toolkit connects with UNDP's Social and Environmental Standards, conflict sensitivity, the 'do no harm' approach, and other overarching frameworks and policy guidance implemented at UNDP.<sup>57</sup>

### 2. Gender, youth, persons with disabilities, and leaving no one behind

UNDP's ROLSHR programming in crisis and post-conflict settings prioritizes inclusive approaches that address the distinct needs of women, youth, and persons with disabilities. Gender equality is a central pillar, with interventions designed to transform discriminatory norms, support women's leadership, and ensure access to justice. These efforts are guided by regional frameworks such as the Gender Justice Framework for the Arab States<sup>58</sup> and align with the UNDP Gender

57 UNDP, HRBA Toolkit; UNDP and the FBA, Supporting Rights Based Governance in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings (forthcoming).

58 UNDP RBAS, Gender Justice Framework.

Equality Strategy and the [WPS agenda](#).<sup>59</sup> Legal reforms, capacity-building for women justice professionals, and partnerships with women-led organizations further reinforce gender justice and protection from gender-based violence.

Youth inclusion is equally vital, particularly in fragile contexts where young people are vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups and socialization into violence. UNDP’s ROLSHR programmes promote youth participation in peacebuilding, governance, and community safety, aligning with the global [youth, peace, and security \(YPS\) agenda](#).<sup>60</sup> Across the Arab States region, efforts focus on empowering youth as agents of change through participatory approaches and collaboration with UNDP’s prevention of violent extremism (PVE) initiatives. For persons with disabilities, UNDP works to ensure accessible and inclusive justice services. These efforts are critical in regions with high disability rates due to conflict, reinforcing the importance of mainstreaming disability inclusion in justice and stabilization programming.

The ‘leave no one behind’ (LNOB) and ‘reach the furthest behind first’ (RFBF) principles are centred on equality, equity, and non-discrimination. [The Formative Evaluation of the Integration by UNDP of the principles of Leaving No One Behind \(LNOB\)](#) has further assessed how effectively UNDP has embedded these principles into its strategies, operations, and programming from 2018 to mid-2022.<sup>61</sup> The report finds that while UNDP has made conceptual contributions (for example, its five-factor framework and multidimensional poverty metrics), institutional integration remains uneven, with limited operational clarity, inconsistent leadership messaging, and insufficient resource allocation. Programmatic performance varies across Signature Solutions, with stronger results in areas like poverty and inequality, governance, and gender equality, but weaker intersectional targeting and limited focus on non-discrimination. The evaluation recommends adopting an “equality+” approach, developing a clear implementation path for RFBF, enhancing civil society engagement, improving funding mechanisms, and updating metrics to better capture LNOB impacts. It concludes that UNDP must move beyond rhetorical commitments to systemic, inclusive, and accountable integration of LNOB principles to truly serve the most marginalized populations.

### 3. Risk management and conflict sensitivity

To manage the complex risks associated with security-sector engagements, UNDP applies its Risk Assessment Form as a key tool for implementing the United Nations HRDDP. This policy requires a thorough evaluation of the risks and benefits of supporting non-United Nations security forces.<sup>62</sup> including non-State actors, with each United Nations agency responsible for developing its own framework.<sup>63</sup> In crisis contexts, United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) lead the development of HRDDP frameworks. UNDP COs must align with these frameworks, although the final decision to proceed with a project rests with UNDP. Risk assessments must consider factors such as the recipient’s compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law, accountability for past violations, the effectiveness of corrective measures, and the

59 UNDP RBAS, Development as a Pathway for Conflict Prevention and Recovery.

60 UNDP RBAS, Regional Strategic Framework on Youth, Peace and Security in the Arab States (forthcoming). UNDP RBAS, Development as a Pathway for Conflict Prevention and Recovery.

61 UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, ‘Formative Evaluation of the Integration by UNDP of the Principles of Leaving No One Behind’ (2022).

62 Risk assessment form in UNDP, UNDP Implementation Tool for the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy, Decision-making Process in Managing the Risks of Engagement with the Security Sector (2024). Risk assessment form available separately here: <https://popp.undp.org/document/risk-assessment-form-undp-implementation-tool-un-human-rights-due-diligence-policy>.

63 OHCHR’s General and Preliminary Risk Assessment Framework (GPRAF) is another helpful tool (in United Nations, Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on United Nations Support to Non-United Nations Security Forces: Guidance note and text of the policy (2015)). However, it cannot be seen as a stand-alone instrument that can be applied to individual initiatives. At the time of writing, only UNDP and UNHCR have developed their own frameworks.

feasibility of monitoring. Lebanon’s UNCT, for example, has developed a SOP (2024) to guide HRDDP implementation.

Stabilization programming carries significant reputational, financial, and physical risks, which vary by context and must be continuously reassessed. UNDP must ensure that funds and activities are not linked to terrorism or criminal entities, though partner vetting can delay urgent interventions, as seen in Palestine. To address this, risk management must be conflict-sensitive, incorporating ongoing conflict analysis, impact assessments, and adaptive programming to uphold the ‘do no harm’ principle. [The United Nations Sustainable Development Group’s Good Practice Note](#)<sup>64</sup> offers guidance on integrating conflict sensitivity into programming to support peacebuilding and the SDGs. Examples of this approach include Lebanon’s development of [conflict sensitivity toolkits](#),<sup>65</sup> and Iraq’s integration of conflict sensitivity in preventing violent extremism.

#### 4. Partnerships

UNDP co-leads [The Global Focal Point for the Rule of Law \(GFP\)](#) with the United Nations Secretariat, fostering collaboration among United Nations entities such as UNODC, UNHCR, UN Women, and others to deliver coordinated rule of law assistance in crisis settings. This arrangement reduces duplication, leverages diverse expertise, and promotes innovation while advancing United Nations norms, including gender equality and HRBAs. The GFP operates across various contexts, from prevention and peacebuilding in Yemen to post-conflict recovery in Iraq, Libya, and Somalia, and transitional settings like Sudan. UNDP also partners with the [United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict](#), supporting national authorities in ensuring accountability for conflict-related sexual violence, as mandated by UNSC Resolution 1888.<sup>66</sup> This collaboration strengthens justice systems and reinforces the international recognition of sexual violence as a threat to peace and security.

In parallel, UNDP and UNHCR have established a [Global Collaboration Framework](#) to enhance joint responses to forced displacement. Building on their 2017–2021 Joint Action Plan, the framework promotes the inclusion of refugees and IDPs in national legal systems and development planning. Key areas of focus include improving access to justice, strengthening local governance, and developing tools for assessing preparedness in host communities. At the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, UNDP committed to mobilizing additional funding by 2027 to support over 30 countries affected by displacement, through enhancing service delivery, livelihoods, and social cohesion. The commitment also includes promoting access to development financing and addressing the root causes of displacement—such as conflict, violence, and climate change—through integrated peacebuilding efforts.<sup>67</sup>

UNDP also engages in dialogue and partnerships with other United Nations entities, particularly OHCHR, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNODC, UN-Habitat and UN Women and international NGOs. In Palestine, the Sawasya Joint Programme exemplifies a collaborative, people-centred approach to justice, involving UN Women, UNICEF, and OHCHR. In Yemen, UNDP has worked with UNFPA and UNICEF on gender and child protection components.

64 United Nations Sustainable Development Group, Good Practice Note: Conflict Sensitivity, Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace (2022).

65 Also see: UNDP ‘Tension Monitoring System – Lebanon, Conflict Sensitivity and Monitoring and Evaluation Toolbox’ (2024).

66 See United Nations Team of Experts on Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, Annual Report (2023).

67 UNDP and UNHCR, Global Collaboration Framework for Inclusion and Solutions 2023-2025, (2022).

These partnerships extend to thematic areas such as supporting NHRIs. UNDP works with OHCHR and the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) through the [Tri-Partite Partnership to Strengthen NHRIs](#), which provides targeted assistance to establish and strengthen NHRIs' institutional frameworks and capacities in line with the Paris Principles; advance NHRI roles in areas such as digitalization, environmental justice, and the protection of human rights defenders; and enable NHRIs to learn from one another and influence global policy debates. This work is carried out in coordination with global and regional NHRI networks, through GANHRI at the global level, the Asia Pacific Forum (APF) for Arab States, and increasingly the Arab Network for National Human Rights Institutions (ANNHRI), which complements official mechanisms by fostering technical exchange and collaboration in the region.

UNDP also engages in humanitarian clusters, including Protection, Debris, and Shelter, particularly in Palestine. Additionally, UNDP is exploring partnerships with international NGOs like the NRC, which leads efforts related to HLP rights in Palestine and Syria. These collaborations aim to accelerate recovery, including documentation, debris removal, and reconstruction, while ensuring inclusive and rights-based approaches.

## 5. Humanitarian-development-peace nexus

[The humanitarian-development-peace \(HDP\) nexus](#) is particularly relevant in the Arab States region, where overlapping crises demand integrated responses that bridge immediate humanitarian needs with long-term development and peacebuilding goals.<sup>68</sup> Grounded in global policy frameworks such as the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, the 2017 New Way of Working, and the 2019 OECD Recommendations, the HDP nexus promotes joint programming that is both practical and transformative. UNDP plays a key role in operationalizing this approach by supporting first responders and authorities through capacity-building, conflict-sensitive and gender-responsive resilience strategies, and early recovery initiatives. Examples include Lebanon's Tension Monitoring System, solar-powered water stations in Sudan, transformative resilience in Palestine, and area-based programming in Somalia. UNDP also co-leads the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), reinforcing its commitment to integrated responses.

Despite its promise, the HDP nexus faces challenges such as difficulties in demonstrating impact to donors, fragmented coordination frameworks, and political sensitivities around peacebuilding. Many governments still treat humanitarian and development work as separate mandates, complicating joint efforts. To overcome these barriers, UNDP must adopt more agile, risk-informed programming and clearly define its role in humanitarian response plans (HRPs), while allowing flexibility for COs to adapt to local contexts. Leveraging its leadership in the Early Recovery Cluster and partnerships with agencies like UNHCR, particularly on issues of forced displacement, UNDP can help bridge the gap between immediate relief and sustainable development, ensuring that interventions are both impactful and context sensitive.<sup>69</sup>

## 6. Area-based programming

UNDP allocates over half of its annual budget to fragile and crisis-affected settings, with 9 of its 10 largest country programmes operating in such contexts. In response to the growing complexity and protracted nature of crises, UNDP has prioritized breaking down silos across the HDP nexus and early recovery efforts. A key strategy in this shift is [area-based programming \(ABP\)](#), which targets specific geographic areas facing complex development challenges through

68 UNDP, 'HDP Nexus Deep Dive, Regional Peer-Learning Workshop, Amman 17-18 April 2024, workshop report.

69 Also see UNDP and the United Nations Issue Based Coalition, 'Operationalization of the HDP Nexus in the Arab States' (March 2024).

integrated, inclusive, and flexible approaches.<sup>70</sup> Since 2020, ABP has been increasingly used in countries like Mozambique, Afghanistan, and Myanmar, enabling tailored responses in crisis-affected environments.

ABP is adaptable across a range of contexts—from post-disaster recovery, as seen in the Dominican Republic, to post-conflict stabilization in Iraq, and long-term development in Uzbekistan and Mozambique. It is particularly effective in protracted crises, such as Myanmar’s Rakhine Area-Based Triple Nexus Project. By enabling multi-sectoral programming and empowering local communities to identify priorities and address systemic challenges, ABP fosters local ownership, enhances sustainability, and reduces aid transaction costs. In Myanmar, for example, UNDP’s engagement with civil society, women, youth, and minority groups has led to more accurate targeting and holistic development outcomes. This approach supports both immediate stabilization and long-term transformation, making it a cornerstone of UNDP’s work in fragile settings.<sup>71</sup>

## 7. Stabilization

The [concept of ‘stabilization’](#) gained prominence during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, and was formalized in the United Nations’ Capstone Doctrine, which outlines three phases: stabilization, peace consolidation, and long-term recovery.<sup>72</sup> Initially associated with military-led efforts to halt violence, stabilization has evolved into a broader, civilian-led approach. UNDP’s current model emphasizes rebuilding trust between communities and authorities, restoring basic services, enabling returns, and laying the groundwork for peace and development. This shift reflects a move away from prolonged humanitarian cycles toward integrated, time-bound interventions that support recovery and prevent relapse into conflict.<sup>73</sup>

UNDP’s stabilization programme in Iraq is widely recognized as a model for addressing immediate and medium-term needs in areas liberated from ISIS. This model has since been adapted to other fragile contexts, including Libya, Mozambique, and the Lake Chad and Liptako Gourma regions. Stabilization programmes are narrowly focused and designed to deliver quick, visible peace dividends in areas recently cleared of conflict, helping to extend legitimate political authority and support peace processes. These programmes are structured around three pillars: rehabilitation of essential infrastructure, reassertion of rule of law and social cohesion, and revitalization of local economic activity.<sup>74</sup>

Under Pillar 2 of UNDP’s stabilization programmes—rule of law—it is crucial for the general population to perceive a greater sense of physical security to function normally. Essential components achievable within the stabilization timeframe include community-level reconciliation activities; special courts for SGBV; fast-track and mobile courts; rehabilitation of local courts, police stations, and prisons; equipping and training police officers; establishing basic operating procedures for criminal investigations and managing demonstrations; rotating trained judges to local levels; and early steps in removing and disposing of mines and unexploded ordnance.

70 Naysan Adlparvar, Amita Gill, Marina LoGiudice, Zoë Pelter, Luca Renda, Sam Rizk, Carlo Ruiz and Monica Sepka, ‘Fit for Purpose? Area-Based Programming in Contemporary Crisis and Development Response’, UNDP Development Future Series Global Policy Network Policy Brief (December 2023).

71 Naysan Adlparvar et al., ‘Fit for purpose?’

72 UNDP, ‘Guidance Note on Stabilization Programming’.

73 UNDP RBAS, *Stabilization and UNDP in the Arab States Region* (2018).

74 UNDP RBAS, *Stabilization and UNDP in the Arab States Region*; ‘UNDP, Guidance Note on Stabilization Programming’.

Given the political sensitivity and high-risk nature of stabilization, UNDP programmes are overseen directly by the Resident Representative in coordination with the Regional Bureau and Crisis Board. Implementation is managed at both country and regional levels, with COs establishing dedicated stabilization units and regional hubs providing technical and operational support. Monitoring and evaluation responsibilities are shared between COs and headquarters, while resource mobilization is led by the country and regional teams. Policy direction is jointly determined by senior leadership, and funding allocations are performance-based, ensuring that stabilization efforts are both accountable and strategically aligned with broader peacebuilding and development goals.<sup>75</sup>

## 8. Prevention of violent extremism

A fractured relationship between the state and its citizens is a key driver of violent extremism, often rooted in poor governance, lack of accountability, and inadequate service delivery. PVE requires reimagining the social contract to ensure it is inclusive, legitimate, and responsive to citizens' needs. This involves improving service delivery in sectors like security and justice through citizen engagement, strengthening oversight of security actors via independent civilian bodies, and reinvigorating anti-corruption efforts to rebuild trust. Participatory national PVE action plans, especially those addressing youth concerns, along with investments in democratic institutions, civic education, and social cohesion, are essential to fostering a resilient and peaceful society.<sup>76</sup>

[UNDP's regional PVE initiative in East Africa \(2024-2027\)](#), covering Kenya, Somalia, and South Sudan, exemplifies this approach by focusing on community empowerment, peacebuilding, and socio-economic resilience. The project enhances livelihoods for youth and women, strengthens early warning and response systems, and leverages data and technology to promote peaceful coexistence. It builds on UNDP's earlier six-year multi-country PVE programme in Africa, but with a more expansive reach to address the interconnected dynamics of violent extremism across Africa and the Arab States. Drawing from the world's largest evidence base on pathways to and from violent extremism, this initiative aims to deliver targeted, evidence-based interventions that address root causes and support long-term peace and development.

## 9. The people-centred approach

The UNDP [people-centred approach to justice and security](#) integrates both top-down institutional support and bottom-up community engagement to address the complex and often political nature of justice systems. Grounded in principles of human rights, inclusion, participation, and accountability, this approach focuses on five interlinked elements: building accountable and responsive systems, enabling adaptive and context-specific change, delivering holistic and multi-sectoral programming, empowering communities to claim their rights, and engaging state institutions in transformative ways. This framework aims to create justice and security systems that are not only effective, but also equitable and trusted by the people they serve, contributing to long-term peace and social cohesion.<sup>77</sup>

75 UNDP, 'Guidance Note on Stabilization Programming'.

76 UNDP, Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa and Arab States: A Development Approach (2022 – 2025) (internal document, n.d.). UNDP, Prevention is Better than Cure: Executive Summary from the Report: Journey to Extremism in Africa Pathways to Recruitment and Disengagement (2023). UNDP, Stories of Prevention (internal document, 2022). UNDP and KOICA programme, 'Building Resilience and Community Empowerment for Peace (Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan), Sept 2024 – June 2027'.

77 UNDP, The UNDP People-Centred Approach to Justice and Security. Also see: Mark Sedra, 'A People-Centred Approach to Security', contributing paper, (UNDP and FBA, 2022).

UNDP's work in Yemen illustrates how this approach can be applied in fragile contexts. With most disputes resolved through CIJ, UNDP's Promoting Inclusive Access to Justice in Yemen (PIAJY) project embraced CIJ as a key entry point for justice services. The project emphasized innovation, inclusion, and integration by forming multi-stakeholder committees, promoting demographic diversity, and bridging formal and informal systems. It also institutionalized grassroots gains through sub-national SOPs and generated people-centred data, such as reducing pre-trial detention through collaboration between women mediators and police. Looking ahead, UNDP is exploring area-based, multi-sectoral peacebuilding strategies that build on these local partnerships and capacities, particularly through the roles of women mediators and paralegals.

In Somalia, UNDP has similarly prioritized community engagement to address justice and security challenges. Through the Joint Justice and Corrections Programme, local communities and institutions co-design justice solutions using participatory dialogue methods. The Women, Peace and Protection Programme has established women's peace networks in 17 communities, fostering inclusive peacebuilding and advocacy. Additionally, the BASIS Programme connects security institutions with communities through inclusive consultations, enabling more responsive and locally informed security strategies. These initiatives reflect UNDP's commitment to placing people at the centre of justice and security reform, ensuring that solutions are grounded in local realities and driven by those most affected.

## 10. Systems and portfolio approaches in crisis settings

Traditional development models are not equipped to handle the complexity and uncertainty shaping today's world. Over the past five years, UNDP has been working with governments and partners in over 100 countries and cities to reimagine how change happens, by using systems and portfolio approaches. Building on this practice, UNDP is advancing a new approach which is now backed by a policy and a dedicated set of instruments.

At UNDP, a portfolio is a dynamic set of interconnected interventions designed and dynamically managed to generate a continuous supply of new options over time. It helps deliver strategic development impact in the face of complex, system-level challenges. The implications of this work are extensive: the need to rethink how large transitions are financed (system driven development finance); how to understand change in fast moving contexts while pursuing long term transformation (learning driven monitoring and evaluation frameworks); how to pivot from transactional to relational collaboration and joint research and development (institutional innovation, organizational design and partnerships); and what capabilities to build and invest in to be able to navigate uncertainty over time.

Adopting a portfolio approach leads to more holistic and effective solutions. It helps leaders avoid unintended consequences, uncover greater opportunities for transformation, and improve people's lives in lasting ways. From a partner and organizational perspective, portfolios offer several advantages:

- ✘ Achieving greater impact: By targeting funding and expertise at key intersections—like where governance shapes economic opportunity—portfolios unlock higher levels of results.
- ✘ Using development finance more effectively: Portfolios combine existing resources in smarter ways, reduce duplication, and attract new investments, making every dollar go further.

- ✘ **Expanding policy options and scaling up solutions:** Portfolios generate a steady stream of intelligence and insights, opening new pathways for action and supplying continuous new ideas as contexts evolve.
- ✘ **Reducing risk through alignment and adaptability:** By engaging multiple stakeholders around shared long-term goals, portfolios align diverse actors—even with differing perspectives—around common objectives, enhancing collaboration and coordination.

The RBAS in Amman, in collaboration with the Crisis Bureau, is advancing the use of systems thinking and the portfolio approach in crisis settings, as detailed in a 2024 research paper developed with input from COs in the Arab States region. The study explores how this approach can be both challenged and enabled by crisis conditions—such as volatility, limited information, and humanitarian focus—while also highlighting the potential for systemic transformation during structural shifts. It emphasizes the importance of fostering a learning culture, leveraging existing resources, and ensuring inclusive, purpose-fit teams.<sup>78</sup> Key applications include post-crisis support for communities affected by the 2023–25 Gaza war. The initiative is part of a broader collaboration involving the Crisis Bureau, the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, 14 COs across five regions, and four Regional Hubs, with ongoing efforts to address challenges like information overload that can hinder strategic development thinking.<sup>79</sup>

## 11. Mental health and psychosocial support

One in five people living in conflict-affected areas suffer from significant mental health conditions, making MHPSS a critical component of inclusive, victim-centred transitional justice and peacebuilding. Unaddressed trauma—such as grief, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—can hinder individual and collective healing, obstruct social cohesion, and undermine justice efforts. Integrating MHPSS into peacebuilding enhances wellbeing, strengthens resilience, and empowers individuals to resist violence and engage constructively in rebuilding their communities. UNDP’s Rule of Law programme in Libya, for example, is developing MHPSS guidelines for officials working with the families of missing persons, embedding mental health into broader transitional justice efforts.

[UNDP’s 2022 Guidance Note](#) outlines nine principles for integrating MHPSS into peacebuilding, emphasizing co-creation with diverse practitioners, holistic and inclusive approaches, and strong coordination and local ownership. It advocates for joint context analysis, balancing short- and long-term goals, and integrating local understandings of trauma and recovery into national frameworks.<sup>80</sup> The guidance also stresses the importance of addressing stigma around mental health and adhering to the ‘do no harm’ principle. By embedding MHPSS into justice and peacebuilding processes, UNDP aims to foster sustainable peace, support structural transformation, and ensure that healing and justice go hand in hand.

78 UNDP RBAS, *Embracing Complexity, Thriving in Uncertainty: Applying a Portfolio Approach in Crisis and Fragile Contexts* (2024).

79 UNDP, *Systems and Portfolio Protocol for Crisis Contexts: CO Sensemaking Report* (forthcoming).

80 UNDP, ‘Guidance Note, Integrating Mental Health and Psychological Support into Peacebuilding’ (2022).