

# CONFLICT PREVENTION IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

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## OECD DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION WORKING PAPER 78

Authorised for publication by Jorge Moreira da Silva, Director, Development Co-operation Directorate

# Working Paper

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Please cite this paper as Desai, H. “Conflict prevention in fragile contexts” OECD Development Co-operation Working Papers, No 78 OECD Publishing, Paris.

# Abstract

Prevention is better than cure. The prevention of violent conflict in fragile contexts is cost-effective, it works and it should matter – to Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members and the broader international community – for sustaining peace. The challenge is in translating recent policy commitments to prevention into practice in fragile contexts. Using the OECD multidimensional fragility framework and insights from the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF), this paper presents lessons on preventing violent conflict that are rooted in a risk and resilience approach and that prioritise country-led and owned responses. It offers DAC members insights on how they can best support conflict prevention in fragile contexts, and it is one of ten working papers contributing to *States of Fragility 2020*.

# Acknowledgments

The author of this working paper is Harsh Desai, Junior Policy Analyst in the Crises and Fragility team of the Global Partnerships and Policy Division (GPP) in the Development Co-operation Directorate (DCD) of the OECD. This paper, which is a background document to *States of Fragility 2020*, was written under the supervision of Jonathan Marley (Policy Analyst, GPP/DCD), Cyprien Fabre (Policy Analyst, GPP/DCD) and Paloma Durán y Lalaguna (Head of Division, GPP/DCD).

The author would like to thank the following people for their guidance, support and encouragement, noting that all errors and omissions are his own: Erik Forsberg, Jonathan Marley, Kathleen Forichon, Cyprien Fabre and Lauren Harrison (OECD); Rachel Scott (UNDP); Sara Batmanglich (World Bank); Jonathan Papoulidis (World Vision); and Jago Salmon, as well as all of the members of the *States of Fragility 2020* reference group.

Aprille Knox and Cillian Nolan (J-PAL, Crime, Violence and Conflict) contributed Box 2.1 in this paper.

Thank you to Susan Sachs for her editorial support.

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# Abbreviations and acronyms

CDD	Community-driven development
CEA	Cost-effectiveness analysis
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation, and learning
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations

# Executive summary

In his first address to the United Nations Security Council in 2017, United Nations (UN) Secretary-General António Guterres made conflict prevention a centrepiece of the international agenda. The year before, in 2016, the Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace joint resolutions of the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council included conflict prevention in their definitions of sustaining peace, helping connect the pillars of development, peace and security with human rights and thus creating a shared agenda for the UN system. This agenda involves a proactive, nationally owned approach to create just, peaceful and inclusive societies that leave no one behind. Since the adoption of the joint resolutions, international institutions and members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) have reaffirmed their commitment to sustaining peace through investments in conflict prevention. For example, the World Bank emphasises a pivot to prevention in its new fragility, conflict and violence strategy (World Bank, 2020<sup>[1]</sup>). Similarly, the recent DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus underscores the importance of “prevention always, development wherever possible, humanitarian action when necessary” (OECD DAC, 2019<sup>[2]</sup>).

This paper makes the case for conflict prevention in fragile contexts, with a focus on how DAC members can improve their strategic approaches to preventing violent conflict and sustaining peace. It is a background paper to the OECD *States of Fragility 2020* report. It outlines why conflict prevention matters (Chapter 1); what DAC members are doing to prevent violent conflict in fragile contexts (Chapter 2); and how the international community can move forward by embracing a broader risk and resilience approach to prevention that supports nationally led prevention and peacebuilding strategies (Chapters 3 and 4). The OECD multidimensional fragility framework can inform such an approach to encourage holistic, risk-informed strategies and thereby improve the practice of prevention among DAC members.

Prevention is a broad and often unclear concept that lends itself to differing definitions and priorities among DAC members. Additionally, while there is robust evidence on what works to prevent violent conflict, what is missing is how to apply this evidence systematically, especially as the nature and scale of violent conflict have shifted since the UN was founded 75 years ago. The result is a lack of funding for and prioritisation of prevention (UN, 2020<sup>[3]</sup>). Among other aims, this paper unpacks the different conceptualisations of conflict prevention to provide a platform for peer learning and encourage greater investment in, and better practice of, prevention. While DAC members are the primary audience of this paper, it is important for all actors across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to engage with the prevention agenda, considering its cross-cutting mandate.

Key messages of this paper:

- **Chapter 1:** Violent conflict in fragile contexts affects everyone. In 2019, 76% of all active, state-based violent conflicts and 96% of battle-related deaths from armed conflict globally were concentrated in fragile contexts. These conflicts spill over to neighbouring countries and draw in external actors, impacting DAC members’ domestic and foreign policies and development co-operation. In 2017, two-thirds of the economic impact of violence borne by fragile contexts was due to direct and interpersonal violence<sup>1</sup>, while 86% of the economic impact of violence on DAC

member countries was due to the costs of containing violence globally. An effective system of conflict prevention is a global public good.

- **Chapter 2:** Despite robust evidence on the effectiveness of prevention, there is limited application of this evidence to prevent contemporary conflicts. There are examples of good practices by DAC members that have the potential to be scaled, but further investments are needed to compile such evidence of such practices and to help bridge the gap between the production of such evidence and its application in DAC members' strategic approaches to conflict prevention.
- **Chapter 3:** Violent conflict and fragility are not spontaneous but rather emerge from the complex interaction of sources of risk and resilience. Putting a premium on analysis, early and often, can help donors and practitioners navigate these interactions. The OECD fragility framework is one such analytical tool to guide conflict-sensitive and politically informed strategic approaches to preventing violent conflict and building resilience to its effects.
- **Chapter 4:** Sustaining peace is a national agenda, led by national actors with support from their international partners. DAC members have an important role to play in supporting national strategies for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Country platforms offer a mechanism to do so by bringing all relevant actors, including those across the humanitarian, development and peace nexus, around the same table to inform coherent and complementary approaches. The OECD fragility framework can serve as an independent, data-driven technical input into these country platforms to provide analytical capacity and inform risk and resilience approaches to preventing violent conflict and address fragility.

# 1 The necessity of conflict prevention

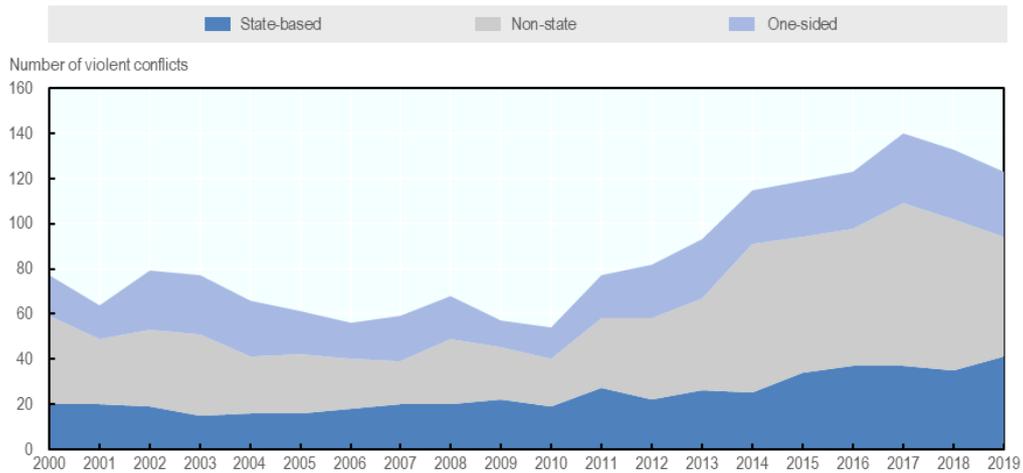
The international community, and DAC members especially, should care about preventing violent conflict because of the collective responsibility to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”, as outlined in the Preamble of the United Nations (UN) Charter (UN, 1945<sup>[4]</sup>). As evidenced by ballooning security and humanitarian budgets, the costs of responding to violent conflict are becoming astronomical, while the benefits of preventing it are clear and compound with each year that protracted crises persist around the world. Prevention is urgently needed not only because it works (see Chapter 2), but also because the alternative is unsustainable. An international system that invests in prevention is a global public good.

## The landscape of violent conflict is changing, increasing costs and challenges for DAC members

Violent conflict and fragility are not synonymous. More than a third of chronically fragile contexts<sup>2</sup> – 8 of the 21 – have not been in active, state-based conflict since 2009, and only 3 out of 5 people in fragile contexts were living in conditions of violent conflict in 2019 (Desai and Forsberg, 2020<sup>[5]</sup>). The presence of violent conflict does not automatically make a context fragile (OECD, 2016<sup>[6]</sup>).

However, though violent conflict and fragility are not synonymous, it is nonetheless clear that they contribute to and reinforce each other. The number of violent conflicts active in fragile contexts increased by 128% over a nine-year period, from 54 in 2010 to 123 in 2019 (Figure 1.1). Violent conflict also is affecting a more diverse set of fragile contexts. In 2009, 15 of the 25 contexts affected by armed conflict were fragile based on the 2020 OECD fragility framework, amounting to 60% of the total. A decade later, in 2019, 22 of 31 contexts affected by violent armed conflict, or 71% of the total, were fragile. That is the second highest share historically, lower only than the share in 2013.

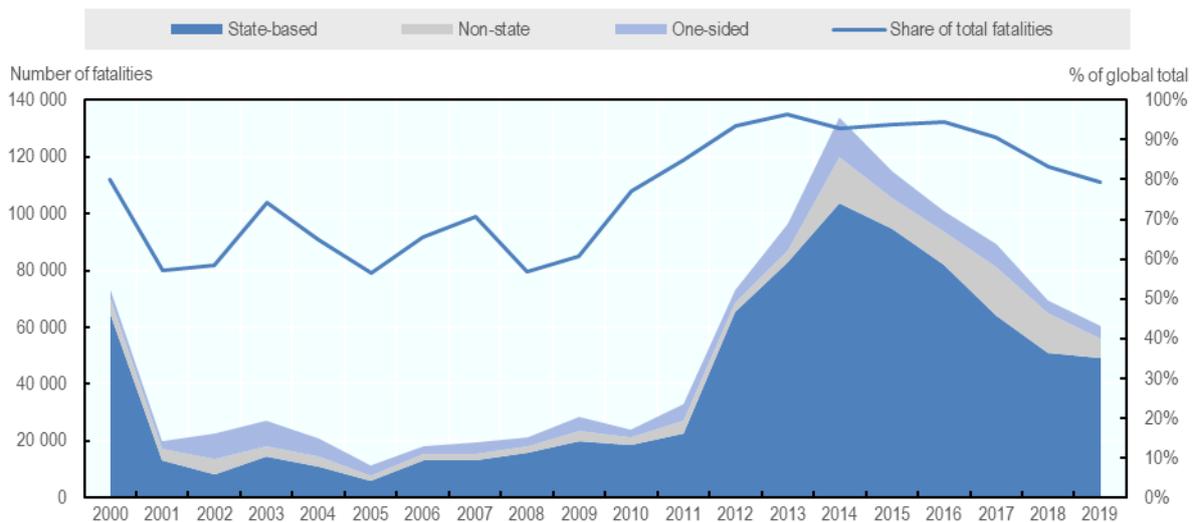
**Figure 1.1. Number of active violent conflicts in fragile contexts by type, 2000-18**



Note: The categories of state-based, non-state, and one-sided violent conflict are derived from Pettersson and Öberg (2020<sup>[7]</sup>).  
 Source: Pettersson and Öberg (2020<sup>[7]</sup>), "Organized violence, 1989-2019", <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0022343320934986>; Gleditsch et al. (2002<sup>[8]</sup>), "Armed conflict 1946-2001: A new dataset", <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0022343302039005007>; UCDP (2020<sup>[9]</sup>), *Uppsala Conflict Data Program* (database), <https://ucdp.uu.se/>.

Deaths due to violent conflict are also concentrated in fragile contexts. Though deaths due to violence are difficult to measure (GREVD Consortium, 2020<sup>[10]</sup>), available evidence from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) suggests that 79% of the total global deaths from violent conflict in 2019 were in fragile contexts, a drop from the historical high of 97% in 2013 (Figure 1.2). Additionally, 96% of deaths from state-based armed conflict occurred in fragile contexts in 2019 (Pettersson and Öberg, 2020<sup>[7]</sup>), with Afghanistan and the Syrian Arab Republic accounting for a significant share of the total (Figure 1.3).

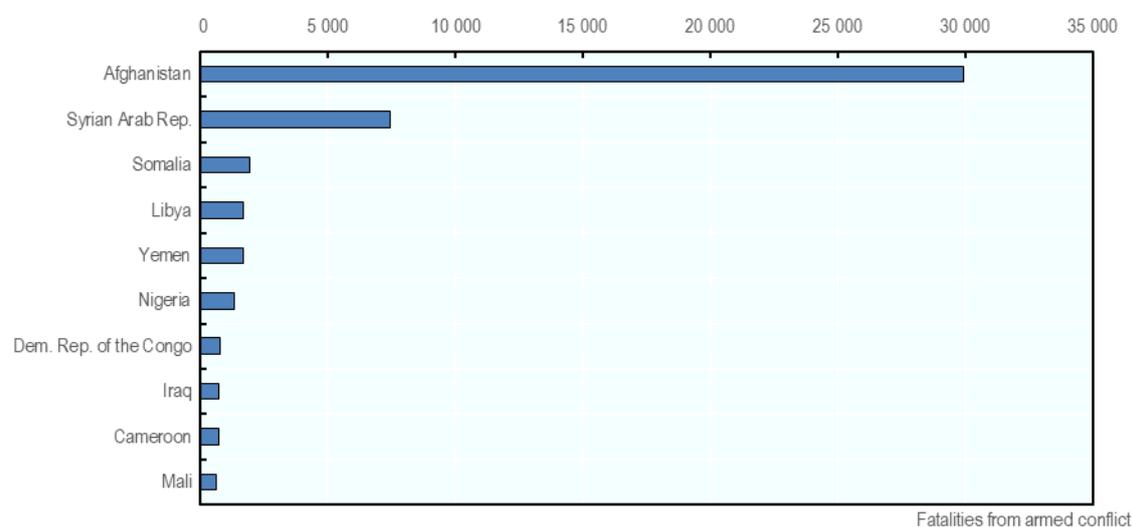
**Figure 1.2. Fatalities from violent conflict in fragile contexts by type, 2000-18**



Note: The categories of state-based, non-state, and one-sided violent conflict are derived from Pettersson and Öberg (2020<sup>[7]</sup>).  
 Source: Pettersson and Öberg (2020<sup>[7]</sup>), "Organized violence, 1989-2019",

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0022343320934986>; Gleditsch et al. (2002<sub>[8]</sub>), “Armed conflict 1946-2001: A new dataset”, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0022343302039005007>; UCDP (2020<sub>[9]</sub>), *Uppsala Conflict Data Program* (database), <https://ucdp.uu.se/>.

**Figure 1.3. Fatalities from armed conflict in fragile contexts by top ten contexts affected, 2019**



Note: The categories of state-based, non-state, and one-sided violent conflict are derived from Pettersson and Öberg (2020<sub>[7]</sub>).

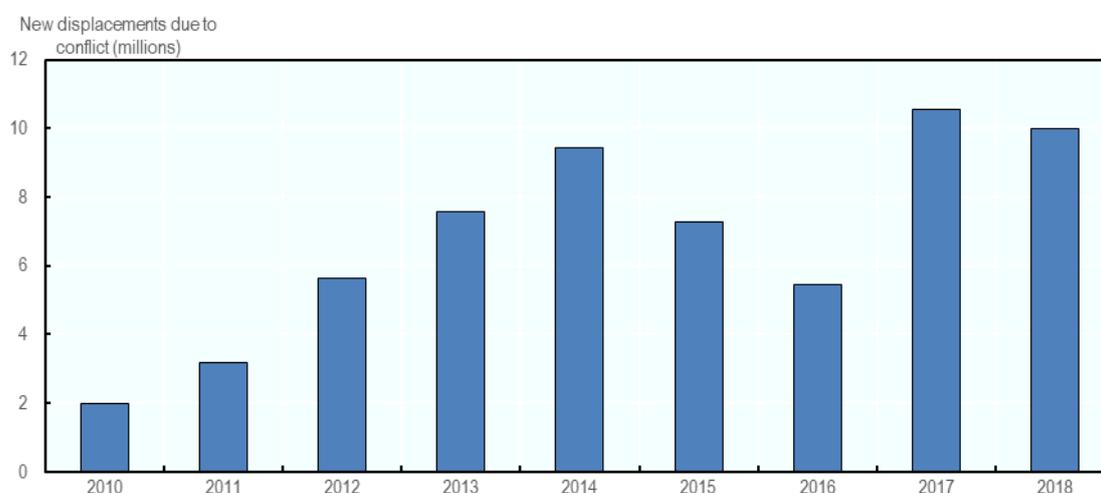
Source: Pettersson and Öberg (2020<sub>[7]</sub>), “Organized violence, 1989-2019”,

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0022343320934986>; Gleditsch et al. (2002<sub>[8]</sub>), “Armed conflict 1946-2001: A new dataset”, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0022343302039005007>; UCDP (2020<sub>[9]</sub>), *Uppsala Conflict Data Program* (database), <https://ucdp.uu.se/>.

More violent conflicts are starting than are ending. Over the period of 2017 through 2019, there were more active violent conflicts globally than during any comparable period in recent history (Pettersson and Öberg, 2020<sub>[7]</sub>). In fragile contexts, 22 conflicts started between 2010 and 2017, the most in any seven-year period since the Second World War<sup>3</sup> (Pettersson, Höglbladh and Öberg, 2019<sub>[11]</sub>; Gleditsch et al., 2002<sub>[8]</sub>). Such violence is cyclical: it persists and leads to more violence (UN/World Bank, 2018<sub>[12]</sub>; World Bank, 2011<sub>[13]</sub>). For example, reported fatalities from armed conflict in Afghanistan increased every year from 2007 through 2019, the most recent year for which data are available (Pettersson and Öberg, 2020<sub>[7]</sub>). Yemen’s ongoing conflict is estimated to be among the highest intensity conflicts since the end of the Cold War (Moyer et al., 2019<sub>[14]</sub>).

Violent conflicts are also becoming increasingly internationalised. These conflicts are not distant phenomena whose consequences are confined to the most fragile contexts. Conflict is a major driver of protracted crises, with 45.7 million people internally displaced by conflict as of the end of 2019 (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2020<sub>[15]</sub>). Fragile contexts averaged 6.8 million displacements due to conflict every year from 2010 through 2018, with the number of displacements in 2019 (10.0 million) being five times higher than in 2010 (2.0 million) (Figure 1.4). Additionally, in 2019, fragile contexts hosted 13.0 million refugees, and seven of the top ten refugee-hosting developing contexts are fragile (UNHCR, 2020<sub>[16]</sub>). At the same time, 18.4 million refugees originated from fragile contexts compared to 1.5 million refugees from non-fragile developing contexts.

Figure 1.4. Number of new displacements due to conflict, 2010-18

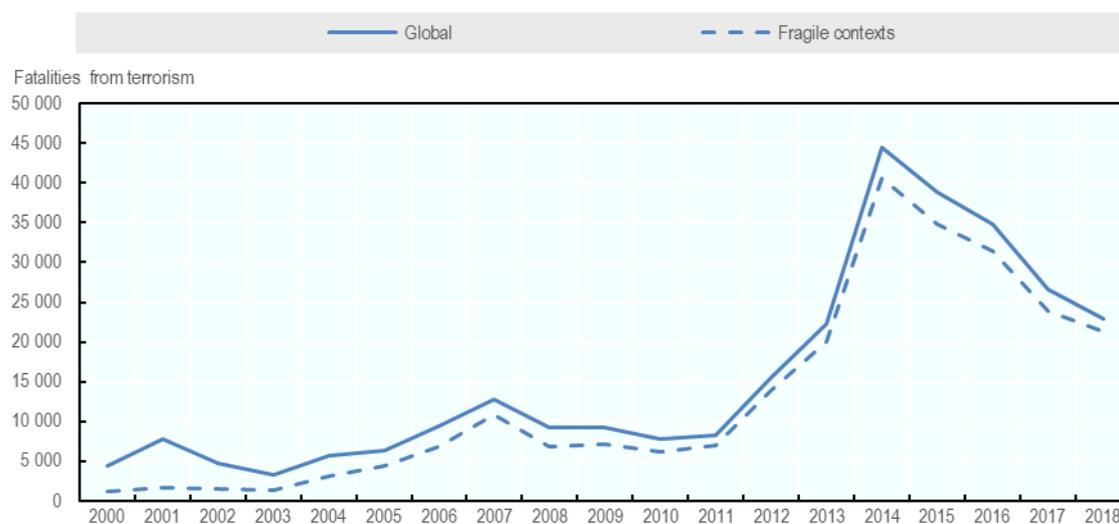


Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2020<sup>[15]</sup>), “GRID 2020: Global Report on Internal Displacement”, <https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/2020-IDMC-GRID.pdf>.

In 2019, there were 25 internationalised violent conflicts, meaning they involved foreign military forces, which was the most ever recorded (Pettersson and Öberg, 2020<sup>[7]</sup>). Of these, 19 were in fragile contexts. The likelihood of foreign intervention in conflicts has increased over time, with common determinants being proximity, colonial ties, ethnic ties, commonalities in language or religion, and concerns about the negative spillover of forced displacement (World Bank, 2020<sup>[17]</sup>). Terrorism is also a trigger for foreign intervention, as is the duration of a conflict (World Bank, 2020<sup>[17]</sup>). New research on violent conflict in sub-Saharan Africa – home to 35 of the 57 fragile contexts – suggests that internal conflicts are more transnational than previously understood (Twagiramungu et al., 2019<sup>[18]</sup>). Such interventions tend to prolong and intensify armed conflict, with recent evidence that they are associated with a 77% higher likelihood that war will continue (World Bank, 2020<sup>[17]</sup>). However, foreign military interventions can also help secure the peace after warring sides have reached a peace agreement (UN/World Bank, 2018<sup>[12]</sup>).

Terrorism is increasingly concentrated in fragile contexts. The number of terrorism incidents and associated fatalities has declined from a 2014 peak both globally and in fragile contexts (Figure 1.5). These findings suggest a decline in the overall impact of terrorism (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019<sup>[19]</sup>). However, 93% of global deaths from terrorism happened in fragile contexts in 2018, which is a historical peak, and 95% of deaths from terrorism that same year occurred in countries experiencing violent conflict (Miller, LaFree and Dugan, 2019<sup>[20]</sup>).

Figure 1.5. Fatalities from terrorist incidents, globally and in fragile contexts, 2000-18



Source: Miller, LaFree, and Dugan (2019<sup>[20]</sup>), *Global Terrorism Database (GTD)* (database), <https://www.start.umd.edu/research-projects/global-terrorism-database-gtd>.

The risk of terrorism affecting national security has shaped the security, development and diplomatic strategies of DAC members (Stephens, Sieckelinck and Boutellier, 2019<sup>[21]</sup>; World Bank, 2020<sup>[17]</sup>). Development assistance is seen to alleviate the drivers that lead people to resort to violence and terrorism (OECD, 2016<sup>[6]</sup>; USAID, 2019<sup>[22]</sup>). Additionally, countries invest in internal security, military expenditure and peacekeeping to prevent violent extremism, to varying effects (Shahzad and Farooq, 2019<sup>[23]</sup>).

The Global Fragility Act enacted by the United States in late 2019 and the associated Strategic Prevention Project draw out this link between conflict and terrorism by calling for investments in building resilience to fragility and violent conflict. Rather than focusing solely on the act of terrorism and its effects, this approach towards prevention and resilience requires a broad understanding of the underlying root causes of terrorism, some of which are political and driven by disparities in power and access to resources.

### **Why does the changing nature of violent conflict matter for DAC members?**

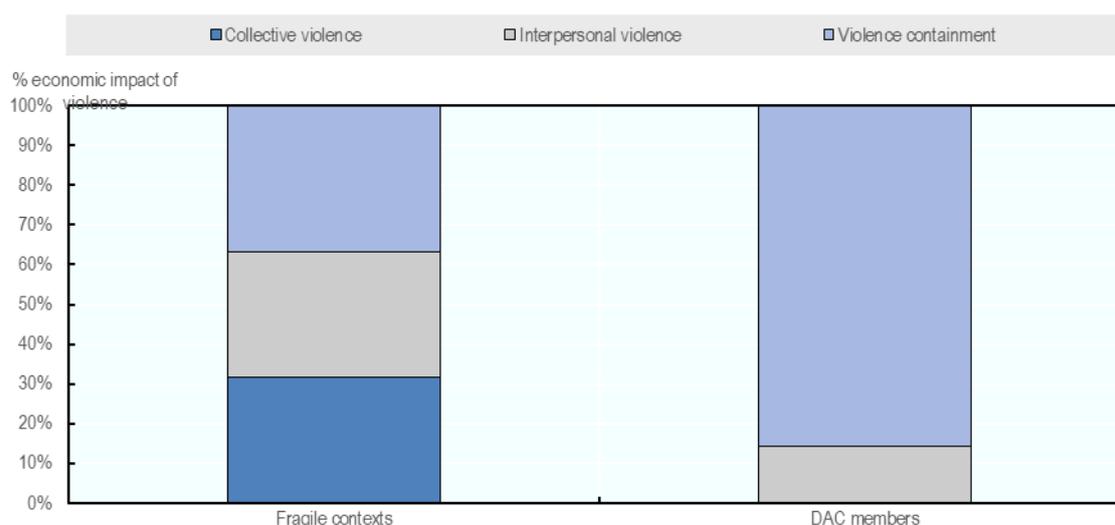
The changing nature of violent conflict is inhibiting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Cliffe and Steven, 2017<sup>[24]</sup>). It also is affecting DAC members' perceptions of their security, which in turn shape their foreign policy interests and development co-operation policies. It is in the national interest of DAC members to strengthen the global architecture for prevention instead of relying on one that favours crisis response.

The UN-initiated sustaining peace agenda is tied to Agenda 2030, which emphasises that there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development (de Coning, 2018<sup>[25]</sup>; Wolff et al., 2020<sup>[26]</sup>). Both agendas highlight the importance of prevention and resilience as strategies to reduce the risk of global threats such as violent conflict, and they both embrace the core values of universality, national ownership and positive peace (UN, 2019<sup>[27]</sup>). Sustaining peace is particularly linked to SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). However, progress towards SDG 16 has stagnated or declined in 41 of the 54 fragile contexts for which data are available (out of the 57 on the 2020 OECD fragility framework), including 12 of 13 extremely fragile contexts (Sachs et al., 2020<sup>[28]</sup>). Meanwhile, progress on this goal is moderately improving or on track in 35 of 68 non-fragile, developing contexts. This disparity underscores the urgency of investing in sustaining peace in fragile contexts. Violent conflict also inhibits progress towards other key SDGs, given its effects on human capital accumulation,

infrastructure, economic growth and livelihoods, food insecurity, and gender equality, among others (Samman et al., 2018<sup>[29]</sup>; Justino, 2011<sup>[30]</sup>).

DAC members spent USD 5.1 trillion in 2017 on measures to contain violence, according to Iqbal, Bardwell and Hammond (2019<sup>[31]</sup>) and author calculations. These measures, which include investments in internal security, national defence expenditure, peacekeeping and development assistance, amount to 86% of the economic impact of violence on those countries (Figure 1.6). At the same time, two-thirds of the economic impact of violence on fragile contexts is due to direct or interpersonal violence (Iqbal, Bardwell and Hammond, 2019<sup>[31]</sup>). These figures underscore that the costs of violence are increasingly global in an interconnected world and that DAC members shoulder a disproportionate share of the costs of containing it. DAC members thus have a stake in preventing violent conflict, meaning that supporting an international architecture for prevention is in members' self-interest. While the global economic impact of violence decreased over the three-year period from 2017-19, it is still USD 1.25 trillion higher in 2019 than it was in 2012 (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020<sup>[32]</sup>). The cyclical nature of violence means that any economic benefit from preventing violent conflict will be compounded over many years. This is the multiplier effect of prevention. The ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) situation is likely to exacerbate risks to violent conflict and fragility and therefore further raise the costs of crises response; addressing its potential effects in fragile contexts necessitates a shift towards prevention (Box 1.1).

**Figure 1.6. Economic impact of violence by category in fragile contexts versus DAC members, 2017**



Note: Please see Iqbal, Bardwell, and Hammond (2019<sup>[31]</sup>) for definitions of the categories used.

Source: Iqbal, Bardwell, and Hammond (2019<sup>[31]</sup>), "Estimating the global economic cost of violence: Methodology improvement and estimate updates", <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10242694.2019.1689485>.

### Box 1.1. Conflict prevention and coronavirus (COVID-19)

Although still developing as of the writing of this paper, the COVID-19 pandemic has implications for multilateral efforts to prevent violent conflict in fragile contexts. Despite the UN Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire on 23 March 2020 in response to the pandemic, and UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2532 that subsequently affirmed his proposition, violent conflict in conflict-affected situations such as Yemen, Libya and Myanmar has continued unabated (Political Settlements Research Programme, 2020<sup>[33]</sup>; Asia Foundation, 2020<sup>[34]</sup>). Moyer and Kaplan (2020<sup>[35]</sup>), assessing increased risks of violent conflict due to the socio-economic and political consequences of COVID-19, suggest that 13 additional contexts are likely to experience conflict by 2022, a 56% increase over pre-pandemic forecasts. Early evidence indicates that the short-term risk of increased armed conflict varies across regions, with armed conflict due to government lockdowns increasing in the Middle East and decreasing in Southeast Asia and the Caucasus (Mehri and Thurner, 2020<sup>[36]</sup>). In turn, the consequences of conflict add to the socio-economic challenges that people are facing due to the pandemic, for example in places such as Libya where conflict has decimated health infrastructure and increased needs (ICRC, 2020<sup>[37]</sup>). In Yemen, the most fragile context on the 2020 OECD fragility framework, COVID-19 has "made the health system's collapse complete" following years of war and conditions of famine (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2020<sup>[38]</sup>).

The pandemic has also affected other forms of violence beyond violent conflict. For example, while demonstrations have declined by a third since the start of the pandemic globally, violence against civilians and mob violence have increased; additionally, as lockdowns and other government restrictions loosen, demonstrations in contexts such as Iraq and Lebanon rebounded in August 2020, reflecting underlying tensions (Pavlik, 2020<sup>[39]</sup>). The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) Project COVID-19 Disorder Tracker has recorded more than 2 251 episodes of political violence related to the pandemic in fragile contexts that resulted in 477 fatalities as of 1 August 2020 (ACLED, 2020<sup>[40]</sup>). Additionally, the Executive Director of UN Women has warned of a "shadow pandemic" due to the increased risk of violence against women and girls posed by lockdowns and other movement restrictions (Mlambo-Ngcuka, 2020<sup>[41]</sup>). Global figures quantifying the impact of the pandemic on gender-based and domestic violence are not yet available. However, early reports from some fragile contexts suggest an increase in cases over the months preceding the pandemic and specifically in Liberia (Mulbah, 2020<sup>[42]</sup>), Kenya (International Rescue Committee, 2020<sup>[43]</sup>) and Honduras (International Rescue Committee, 2020<sup>[44]</sup>). The reported case numbers are likely underestimates, as women generally are less able to report incidents due to challenges such as movement restrictions, lockdowns and fear (International Rescue Committee, 2020<sup>[43]</sup>). Evidence from previous crises, such as the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014-15, suggests that confinement leads to increased violence against women and children (OECD, 2020<sup>[45]</sup>).

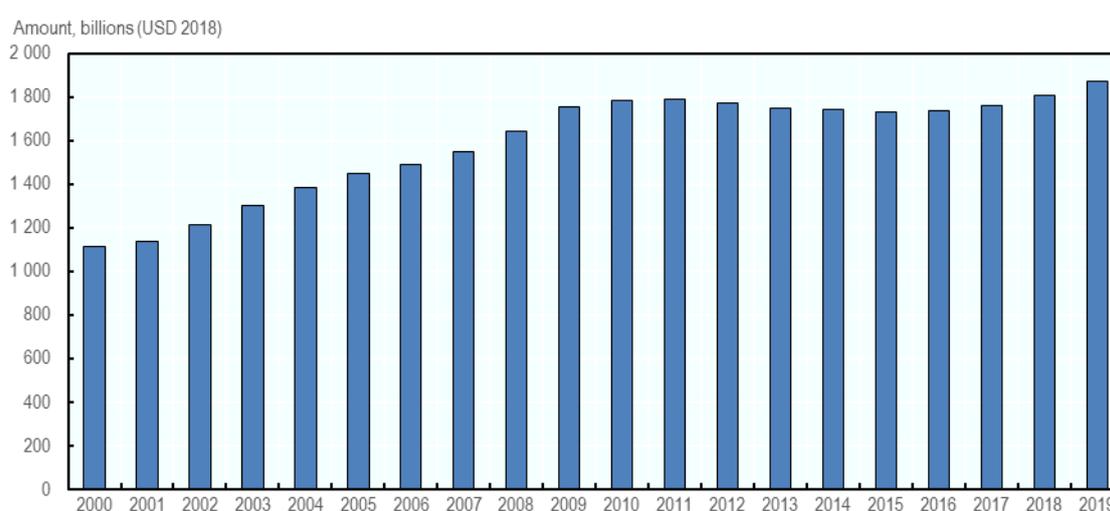
Policy responses to the pandemic in fragile contexts will require conflict sensitivity to avoid doing harm and to capitalise on opportunities for promoting a positive peace. The pandemic is an also opportunity to reflect on the state of international institutions for crisis management and shift attention towards prevention over response. However, the months-long delay in adopting UNSC Resolution 2532 to support the call for a global ceasefire reflects long-standing challenges to multilateralism (Papoulidis, Graff and Beckelman, 2020<sup>[46]</sup>). It is important for multilateral actors to consider how they can structure their existing tools, institutions and incentives to prioritise the prevention of crises and build resilience to protect vulnerable populations from the impacts of future crises, including black swan events such as COVID-19. Finally, the pandemic's impact in fragile contexts reinforces the need to focus on fragility over the long term, as it is evidence that fragility exacerbates the negative effects of the crisis on vulnerable populations.

## There is a strong business case for prevention: Prevention is better than cure and has high value for money and impact

The cyclical and protracted nature of violent conflict has led to escalating costs of crisis response and well-documented economic impacts such as reversals in economic growth, acceleration of inflation and other macroeconomic pressures, damage to existing infrastructure, and spillover effects on neighbouring countries (UN/World Bank, 2018<sup>[12]</sup>). It also takes a social and political toll, particularly on women, youth and other disadvantaged populations who are affected disproportionately by the effects of violence (OECD, 2017<sup>[47]</sup>). Social exclusion is both a cause and consequence of violent conflict (Khan, Combaz and McAslan Fraser, 2015<sup>[48]</sup>).

The social and economic costs of responding to violent conflict are rising. Conflict and forced displacement are major drivers of humanitarian need, with 199 million people now assessed to be in need of humanitarian assistance in fragile contexts based on UN appeals (Development Initiatives, 2020<sup>[49]</sup>). In 2019, global military expenditure amounted to USD 1.9 billion, a 4% increase over the previous year and the highest annual increase in a decade (Figure 1.7). DAC countries account for USD 1.1 trillion of this total. Additionally, DAC member spent an estimated USD 12 billion on multilateral operations worldwide, including for their troop contributions, in 2019 (Forsberg, 2020<sup>[50]</sup>). In both volume and share of total official development assistance (ODA), humanitarian ODA – at USD 29.6 billion and 15% respectively – was at a historical high in 2018, the latest year for which data are available (OECD, 2020<sup>[51]</sup>). This is also the case in fragile contexts: humanitarian assistance in 2018 from DAC members was the second highest amount ever after 2017 (OECD, 2020<sup>[51]</sup>) and represented 25% of members' ODA to fragile contexts. By comparison, DAC members gave only 4% of their ODA in 2018 towards conflict, peace and security-related objectives in fragile contexts. Recent research for the Stockholm Peace Research Institute finds that armed conflict in a country drives higher military spending by that country and greater need for ODA, whereas peace helps lower military spending and countries' reliance on external aid (Tian and da Silva, 2020<sup>[52]</sup>).

**Figure 1.7. Global military expenditure, 2000-19**



Note: Amount is represented in USD constant prices, 2018.

Source: SIPRI (2020<sup>[53]</sup>), *SIPRI Military Expenditure Database*, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>.

Violent conflict interrupts growth trajectories and leads to reversals. The case for prevention is clear given its economic value for sustainable development. Historical conflict in Africa is negatively associated with

subsequent patterns of development (Besley and Reynal-Querol, 2014<sup>[54]</sup>). Violent conflict has diverse and multiplying effects on the economies of affected countries including on their gross domestic product (GDP), infrastructure and human capital (Imus, Pierre and Rother, 2017<sup>[55]</sup>). These effects are persistent and intergenerational. They are also gendered, as the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence is higher in conflict-affected and post-conflict settings (UN, 2019<sup>[56]</sup>). In 2019, the economic cost of violence in Afghanistan, South Sudan and Syria exceeded 50% of each context's GDP. Additionally, nine of the top ten contexts with the highest economic costs of violence as a share of GDP are fragile, except for Cyprus (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020<sup>[32]</sup>).

Growth in war-affected countries was 4.8% less per year than growth in times of peace, according to analysis of violent conflicts from 1989-2015 (Milante et al., 2020<sup>[57]</sup>). Due to ongoing conflict in Syria since 2011, Syria's GDP contracted by two-thirds compared to its pre-war 2010 level, and assuming a stable and final resolution to the conflict, it would still take Syria at least ten years of uninterrupted growth to recover that same pre-war GDP level (Devadas, Elbadawi and Loayza, 2019<sup>[58]</sup>). A recent estimate of the costs of violent conflict in Yemen suggests that a continuation of conflict through 2030 would set Yemen's sustainable development back 39 years (Moyer et al., 2019<sup>[14]</sup>). Transitions to high-income status are associated with long periods of uninterrupted rather than rapid growth (World Bank, 2017<sup>[59]</sup>). Therefore, even after peace is achieved, a resumption of conflict can undermine gains, which speaks to the importance of preventing conflict recurrence (Mueller and Tobias, 2016<sup>[60]</sup>).

Conflict has significant neighbourhood and contagion effects. The economic and social effects of violent conflict are not confined within national borders, but rather can spill over into neighbouring countries (Collier et al., 2003<sup>[61]</sup>). Such spillover can occur even after a conflict has ended, as people with incentives towards violence flow into neighbouring countries alongside weapons and goods (Bara, 2018<sup>[62]</sup>). This regionalisation is a notable characteristic of contemporary conflicts and underscores the importance of systemic prevention, especially when conflict spillovers result from the diffusion of technology, policy or regulatory changes, and contagion effects (World Bank, 2020<sup>[17]</sup>; OECD, 2016<sup>[6]</sup>). Violent conflict can have global economic ramifications, such as its effects on global networks of trade through disruptions to shipping routes or its effects on commodity prices, which in turn can contribute to a higher risk of conflict. Additionally, recent research finds that violence in developing contexts is associated with greater risks of fiscal and banking crises and a greater risk of such crises spilling over to affect neighbouring contexts (Compaoré et al., 2020<sup>[63]</sup>).

The impacts of violent conflict are self-reinforcing, creating a conflict trap that is difficult to escape (Collier et al., 2003<sup>[61]</sup>; World Bank, 2011<sup>[13]</sup>). This means that the economic benefits of preventing violent conflict accrue and compound over many years. The deprivations resulting from violence and armed conflict lead to more grievances and perceptions of exclusion that fuel further conflict or vulnerability to violent extremism (UN/World Bank, 2018<sup>[12]</sup>; Trisko Darden, 2019<sup>[64]</sup>). Hegre, Nygård and Ræder (2017<sup>[65]</sup>) quantify the magnitude of the conflict trap by accounting for diverse "pathways" that contribute to it, namely conflict continuation, recurrence, escalation and diffusion. They find that the conflict trap in low-income economies – with specific reference to armed conflict – is more severe than previously understood in terms of its effects on conflict recurrence, duration and spillover to neighbouring countries. This suggests the need for greater investments in prevention. Preventing violent conflict and fostering positive peace can inhibit further cycles of violence, creating incentives for pathways for peace (UN/World Bank, 2018<sup>[12]</sup>). As noted, the intensity and diffusion of violence in certain fragile contexts provide empirical support for this phenomenon.

**The return on investment (ROI) to conflict prevention is clear.** Reinforced by several studies, including by Mueller (2017<sup>[66]</sup>) and the Institute for Economics and Peace (2017<sup>[67]</sup>), the World Bank and UN, in *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*, established that every USD 1 invested in prevention yields a return of USD 16 (UN/World Bank, 2018<sup>[12]</sup>). This estimate of ROI is based on Mueller (2017<sup>[66]</sup>), which elaborates that even if prevention is effective only half of the time, for every

USD 2.1 billion spent on prevention activities, USD 33.3 billion is saved from the averted costs of violence. Limon and Montoya (2018<sup>[68]</sup>) extend this analysis from Mueller (2017<sup>[66]</sup>) and UN/World Bank (2018<sup>[12]</sup>) to atrocity prevention, finding a 5-to-1 return on measures for preventing gross and systematic human rights violations. Milante et al. (2020<sup>[57]</sup>) also updated the analysis from *Pathways for Peace* to suggest USD 3.1-9.8 trillion in cumulative savings, based on three scenarios of action taken on conflict prevention, from 2020 through 2030. These authors also find that even modest success in preventing violent conflict, over a baseline, status quo scenario based on a historical dataset, would result in 17 additional countries at peace, USD 6.6 trillion in savings, and 205 000 fewer deaths by 2030. Finally, Milante et al. (2020<sup>[57]</sup>) project that if no action is taken on preventing violent conflict from what is being done currently, three more countries will be at war and nine at high risk of war by 2030 as compared to 2020.<sup>4</sup> These estimates highlight the compounding costs of war.

Prevention should not only be framed using cost-effective analysis (CEA). There is a moral imperative to save lives and free future generations from endless violence (World Bank, 2011<sup>[13]</sup>). However, CEA is a useful tool to clarify and communicate the benefits of prevention. It provides a measurable indicator of prevention's value relative to other investments. It also uses language tailored for political leaders, treasuries and, increasingly, donor agencies (OECD, 2019<sup>[69]</sup>). Leaders can also use CEA to sell the benefits of prevention to the public. CEA is especially useful when the result is difficult to quantify, such as in the case of conflict, and in such instances, it can clarify expected benefits to make a business case that guides strategic investments. The DAC has endorsed the efficiency criterion to encourage the use of CEA and cost-benefit analysis in evaluations (OECD, 2019<sup>[69]</sup>). The ability to define this investment potential is especially relevant given the need to consider the value proposition of investments in the post-coronavirus (COVID-19) landscape.

Estimates of ROI are common in other sectors, such as health. Ozawa et al. (2016<sup>[70]</sup>), for instance, estimated that childhood immunisation programmes in low- and middle-income countries have a 16-to-1 return based on the costs of illnesses averted – the same estimated return as found for investments in conflict prevention. Although the two figures are not directly comparable due to differing methodologies, the health example provides context to better understand and conceptualise the relative merits of investments in conflict prevention. Donors and international organisations are increasingly citing the ROI of prevention in their strategic documents, programme-level appraisals and business cases, and international commitments to prevent violent conflict<sup>5</sup>. It is important that they continue to do so to elevate the case for prevention.

### ***Why does the multiplier effect of prevention matter for DAC members?***

**Prevention is better than cure.** The socio-economic cost of crisis response is increasing every year. Substantial investments are being made in humanitarian assistance rather than prevention: 25% of DAC members' ODA, for instance, goes towards humanitarian assistance and just 4% towards conflict, peace, and security (OECD, 2020<sup>[51]</sup>). Given high levels of need, it is important and appropriate that donors are directing resources towards crisis response. However, there is much to gain from investing in prevention as a way to reduce the humanitarian burden and redirect savings towards sustainable development and peace, as outlined in the DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (OECD DAC, 2019<sup>[2]</sup>).

**Prevention is value for money.** The cyclical nature of violence can exacerbate existing fragilities and undercut the development and humanitarian potential of members' programmes in such a way that their value for money is reduced. Given that violence undermines development co-operation and humanitarian assistance, coherence, complementarity and co-ordination among humanitarian, development and peace actors are of crucial importance, as highlighted in the DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (OECD DAC, 2019<sup>[2]</sup>).

**Prevention improves impact.** DAC members are working not only on conflict but also in conflict (FAO and Interpeace, 2020<sup>[71]</sup>). Violence affects the access to and delivery of humanitarian assistance. In 2019, for example, there were 277 attacks on aid workers resulting in 125 casualties, with 260 attacks and 123 casualties being in fragile contexts (Stoddard et al., 2020<sup>[72]</sup>). Recurring violence can destroy infrastructure or systems that donors have supported and in situations of insecurity and violence, development investments are less likely to be sustained. Actors in ongoing conflicts such as in Syria and Yemen often target critical infrastructure including hospitals and schools (Briody et al., 2018<sup>[73]</sup>).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This paper focuses on the prevention of violent conflict rather than interpersonal violence, which consists of indicators such as homicide, violence and sexual assault, crime, and incarceration.

<sup>2</sup> Chronically fragile contexts are those contexts that have appeared in each OECD fragility report since the first one in 2005, based on the OECD's methodology for classifying fragile contexts.

<sup>3</sup> Data from the source is only published through 2017.

<sup>4</sup> According to Milante et al. (2020<sup>[57]</sup>), a country is considered to be at war if it meets one or more of the following conditions: more than 0.04 battle deaths or more than 0.04 civilian fatalities per 100 000, based on data from the UCDP or ACLED, or a coding of genocide by the Political Instability Task Force Worldwide Atrocities Dataset. Countries considered to be at high-risk of war are based on an extensive set of criteria described by Milante et al. (2020<sup>[57]</sup>). See page 39 of the report at [https://530cfd94-d934-468b-a1c7-c67a84734064.filesusr.com/ugd/6c192f\\_e252b926005c47c39a815cf6da0c3086.pdf](https://530cfd94-d934-468b-a1c7-c67a84734064.filesusr.com/ugd/6c192f_e252b926005c47c39a815cf6da0c3086.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, a business case appraisal from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development: [http://iati.dfid.gov.uk/iati\\_documents/36308599.odt](http://iati.dfid.gov.uk/iati_documents/36308599.odt).



## 2 What works for conflict prevention

Even when it is not always effective, investing in prevention is high value for money and has a significant socio-economic impact. It is important to understand what works, and how, to prevent violent conflict and sustain peace in order to maximise the value of prevention and ensure that it aligns with the principle of do no harm and informs DAC members' practice in fragile contexts. Modelling and forecasting the cost-effectiveness of conflict prevention under universal assumptions, as described in Chapter 1, can only go so far in helping make the business case for prevention. This chapter outlines lessons learned from existing work on the prevention of violent conflict, particularly drawing on the results of an International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) Survey on Strategic Approaches to Conflict Prevention in fragile contexts. Findings from the Survey highlight the importance of investing in prevention and resilience as strategies to mitigate the risk of violent conflict.

### Challenges to evaluating conflict prevention and peacebuilding programmes

There are several challenges to monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, many of which were cited by respondents to the INCAF Survey. Navigating complex, rapidly changing environments with limited data and time are well-known issues, but in the case of prevention, evaluators face the additional challenge of attributing impact to a programme based on the absence of an event happening (Bennett et al., 2010<sup>[74]</sup>; Gaarder and Annan, 2013<sup>[75]</sup>). Much like fragility, violent conflict is a multidimensional phenomenon with multiple, intersecting root causes and varying definitions (OECD, 2016<sup>[6]</sup>). Moreover, the long-term effects of prevention are difficult to capture, especially when preventive programming has a shorter time frame than the structural behaviours and political incentives that it is trying to influence (Laws, 2018<sup>[76]</sup>; UN, 2020<sup>[3]</sup>). Prevention is also a political exercise that is costly and non-linear and involves a broad set of actors – attributes that complicate monitoring and evaluation. Evaluation in conflict zones also raises political and ethical issues (Bush and Duggan, 2013<sup>[77]</sup>). The evaluation may apply assumptions that do not align with the socio-political or conflict context, for example, potentially leading to underrepresentation or exclusion of marginalised groups from the results of the evaluation. Recent updates to the DAC evaluation criteria further reflect these potential concerns (OECD, 2019<sup>[69]</sup>).

Such issues in MEL underscore the importance of adaptive approaches to revisit assumptions and learn iteratively from both the broader context and the programme's intended beneficiaries (Pasanen and Barnett, 2019<sup>[78]</sup>). Many respondents to the INCAF Survey indicated that their MEL frameworks, while tailored to each programme and its context, have not developed specific routines or procedures for evaluation beyond the 2012 DAC guidelines on evaluating conflict prevention and peacebuilding programmes in fragile settings (OECD, 2012<sup>[79]</sup>). These responses offer an opportunity to update current guidance and help donors develop tailored MEL processes to navigate the complexity of conflict prevention in fragile contexts. The discussion in this paper provides a starting point for such an update.

Despite these challenges, studies at varying levels of methodological rigour demonstrate the feasibility of evaluating peacebuilding and conflict prevention (Cramer, Goodhand and Morris, 2016<sup>[80]</sup>; Gaarder and Annan, 2013<sup>[75]</sup>). Several lessons from the evaluation of donor programming for prevention in South Sudan by Bennett et al. (2010, p. 148<sup>[74]</sup>) are still relevant to evaluations ten years later, particularly on the need for conflict analysis that is "referred to continually over the programming cycle" as well as the importance

of considering broader social, political, and conflict dynamics that extend beyond an individual programme or activity. Although these place an additional burden on MEL, they can also offer a more holistic perspective on interventions that can then inform country or regional strategies. Anderson et al. (2020<sup>[81]</sup>) offer perspectives on evaluating and scaling governance activities that are also relevant to prevention programming, given its political nature. They note potential misalignment between programme objectives and the tools used to measure outcomes. In part, this may reflect gaps in data availability. But the potential for misalignment also highlights the politics of evaluation, at both a country-specific and institutional level, that can impede the evaluation of programme outcomes in favour of measuring inputs and outputs.

Efforts are ongoing to improve the evidence base on the effectiveness of conflict prevention and peacebuilding in contexts affected by violent conflict and fragility, particularly using experimental and quasi-experimental techniques of evaluation (Box 2.1). Not all evaluations require experimental approaches, however (Brück and Ferguson, 2018<sup>[82]</sup>; Halkia et al., 2020<sup>[83]</sup>). The United Nations (UN) Peacebuilding Fund, which plays a central role in carrying out the UN's mandate for sustaining peace, has also made significant investments in evaluating its programming, as have various donors in this space.<sup>1</sup> Despite such notable improvements, “absolute evidence gaps” (Sonnenfeld et al., 2020, p. 39<sup>[84]</sup>) persist in certain sub-fields and for certain extremely fragile contexts such as the Central African Republic, Syria and Yemen. In particular, few studies evaluate the effects of complex or multidimensional interventions, despite an increasing reliance on such approaches (Sonnenfeld et al., 2020<sup>[84]</sup>). Such gaps present an opportunity to make the case for further investments in evaluation.

### Box 2.1. Emerging evidence on the effectiveness of interventions to prevent conflict and violence

The number of rigorous impact evaluations of peacebuilding, conflict prevention and violence reduction programming is increasing dramatically. In a recent review for the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, Sonnenfeld et al. (2020<sup>[84]</sup>) identify 195 completed and 47 ongoing impact evaluations of peacebuilding interventions (broadly defined), a 150% increase since 2015, as well as 29 completed systematic reviews of peacebuilding interventions, 14 of which are of a high quality.

The evidence base may be fragmented, with some programmes and places receiving more attention than others do. But these evaluations are contributing to a growing understanding of which strategies may be most effective in preventing violence and restoring stability following conflict (Nolan, Knox and Kenny, 2019<sup>[85]</sup>). Initiatives that seek to fill existing evidence gaps by funding new research are further strengthening the literature, among them the Crime and Violence Initiative of the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL); the Peace and Recovery Program of the Innovation for Poverty Action; and the Metaketa Initiative of the Evidence and Government and Politics network.

With evaluations in this space becoming more common, researchers are increasingly moving away from strict programme evaluation and are instead striving to test broader hypotheses about how programmes work (i.e. what key components drive changes in their outcomes of interest) and to generate insights into human behaviour (i.e. why individuals may be motivated to act in certain ways). These insights can be used to assemble programmes that are evidence-based, drawing on findings about what has worked previously and adapting those lessons to respond to the context at hand. In many cases, the most significant contribution of impact evaluations has not been to show the effectiveness of a specific intervention – the research suggests few interventions are ready for scale -- but rather to help policy makers and practitioners reframe how to understand the problem or identify potential new types of solutions.

Aprille Knox and Cillian Nolan (J-PAL, Crime, Violence, and Conflict) contributed this box.

### Assessing the evidence base to identify successes in preventing violent conflict

Much of what works is specific to the context, which is not a surprising finding given that preventing violent conflict, especially in fragile contexts, is a messy, complex and political endeavour with few quick fixes (Cheng, Goodhand and Meehan, 2018<sup>[86]</sup>). This reality runs counter to the short-termism of external intervention and the desire to scale interventions quickly. It also makes it harder to extrapolate broader lessons that apply across places and over time.

Peacebuilding and prevention are complex. It is therefore important to prioritise function over form – that is, to ensure that interventions are appropriate for the task at hand rather than simply adhere to best practices or broader international agendas (World Bank, 2017<sup>[59]</sup>; de Coning, 2016<sup>[87]</sup>). This complexity helps explain the limited evidence that any single area of intervention, in isolation or in parallel to others, will prevent violent conflict (Cramer, Goodhand and Morris, 2016<sup>[80]</sup>). Given that conflict and fragility are dynamic and multidimensional, prevention tools are most effective when deployed in concert and with complementarity (UN/World Bank, 2018<sup>[12]</sup>). For example, peacekeeping can prevent the escalation and spillover of violent conflict when it complements other activities such as mediation, humanitarian action and development assistance; this combination of activities have thus evolved as a “standard treatment for civil wars” (Gowan and Stedman, 2018, p. 171<sup>[88]</sup>). However, in isolation, peacekeeping can prolong or intensify violent conflict (UN/World Bank, 2018<sup>[12]</sup>). This finding highlights the need for complementary and

coherent approaches rather than isolated projects, as proposed in the DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus (OECD DAC, 2019<sup>[2]</sup>).

As important as discovering what works is identifying what does not work. Cramer, Goodhand and Morris (2016<sup>[80]</sup>) highlight the dangers of ignoring the political and social drivers of conflict when designing programmes. Doing so can reproduce structural obstacles to the resolution of conflict or have downstream effects that incentivize its resumption. There is also limited evidence that community-driven development (CDD) programmes are having the intended effect in reducing violence within communities (Cramer, Goodhand and Morris, 2016<sup>[80]</sup>; Nolan, Knox and Kenny, 2019<sup>[85]</sup>).

These findings underscore the continued importance of investing in analysis, early and often, to ensure conflict-sensitive and politically informed ways of working. Conducting such analysis can be burdensome for donors' MEL systems, but it pays off in the form of successful programmes that provide high value for money. Additionally, analytical tools such as the World Bank's Peacebuilding and Recovery Assessments or the OECD multidimensional fragility framework (Chapter 3) provide an opportunity for actors to conduct joint analysis, relieving the analytical burden on any single actor. Respondents to the INCAF Survey acknowledged such analyses are important, but also noted that they often remained disconnected from broader strategic approaches to peacebuilding and prevention. This once again highlights the need to close feedback loops that can enable learning to influence policy design and implementation.

Lessons from the literature, as well as the INCAF Survey, point to three important areas of intervention for conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives: interrogating the politics of prevention, building resilience to shocks and strengthening social cohesion. These lessons underscore the value of prevention and resilience as strategies to reduce the risk of violent conflict and its consequences over the long-term.

### ***Interrogating the politics of prevention***

Given the primacy of politics in peacebuilding and prevention,<sup>2</sup> it is important for donors to consider how political settlements are ordered and shape incentives for or against violent conflict. Political settlements involve either implicit or explicit bargains between elites to manage the distribution of rights and entitlements across a population (Cheng, Goodhand and Meehan, 2018<sup>[86]</sup>). An exclusionary political settlement can create further incentives for violence (UN/World Bank, 2018<sup>[12]</sup>). The process of forming political settlements involves addressing grievances and perceptions of exclusion among vulnerable populations while at the same time ensuring the right level of elite accommodation to prevent a settlement from unravelling. It is a dynamic process of renegotiation and co-creation precisely because it involves actors with shifting political incentives and – importantly – changing perceptions at different levels of the state and society (McCullough, Lacroix and Hennessey, 2020<sup>[89]</sup>).

Thinking and working politically in the context of such settlements involves influencing the behaviour of political actors to create arrangements that are inclusive and flexible enough to allow for the non-violent resolution of conflict (Cheng, Goodhand and Meehan, 2018<sup>[86]</sup>). Such political settlement analysis moves beyond analysing the distribution of power within a particular system, which is the focus of political economy analysis, and towards interrogating the institutional rules of the game that form or preserve a tacit settlement in a fragile context (Kelsall, 2018<sup>[90]</sup>). More importantly, this analysis can help donors move beyond prescribing interventions that reflect their understanding of best practice and towards considering the role their interventions may play in maintaining a political settlement. Rather than relying on best practices or quick fixes, donors that pursue a political settlement analysis can use a problem-driven approach that involves a mix of best practice, existing practice, positive deviance and latent capacities to inform adaptive solutions (Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock, 2017<sup>[91]</sup>).

This focus on politics is especially important when considering the correlation between systematic exclusion from livelihoods or political governance and the heightened risk of violent conflict (Task Force on Justice, 2019<sup>[92]</sup>; Cingranelli et al., 2019<sup>[93]</sup>). Repression by state security forces, for example, is linked

to domestic terrorism and increased participation in violent groups (UN/World Bank, 2018<sup>[12]</sup>; Piazza, 2017<sup>[94]</sup>). The protection of human rights and physical integrity, as discussed in Chapter 1, is thus integral to sustaining peace (Limon and Montoya, 2018<sup>[68]</sup>). These relationships underscore the need for investments in justice, rule of law, and security sector reform to address perceptions of exclusion and grievances that lead to violent conflict. Such investments involve considering the role and governance of institutions that provide checks and balances to state authority, such as the police, judiciary, military and other state security forces, in the formation of political settlements (OASG, 2020<sup>[95]</sup>). However, official development assistance (ODA) to justice, including police, accounted for only 2% of total ODA on average despite the fact that over 2 billion people are living in countries that cannot afford even half the costs of basic justice services (Manuel, Manuel and Desai, 2018<sup>[96]</sup>). Development co-operation has an important role to play in strengthening security sector institutions in fragile contexts, particularly to help ensure that these institutions are accompanied by more effective security sector governance. DAC members' strategies for conflict and crisis prevention recognise the importance of justice and security for sustaining peace, such as in the case of Germany's thematic, interministerial strategies on transitional justice, rule of law, and security sector reform as part of the Federal Government of Germany's Guidelines on *Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, and Building Peace* (BMZ, 2018<sup>[97]</sup>).

INCAF Survey respondents acknowledged the importance of mitigating the political causes of violent conflict and cited programmes that targeted such objectives. One recent example is the Somali Stability Fund, a multi-donor fund for local governance in Somalia. As noted by Laws (2018<sup>[76]</sup>), among its other accomplishments, the Fund offered a politically smart and adaptive approach to navigating politics, including by investigating the power relations between and within clans in each region, by employing staff who were attuned to the political incentives of leadership, and by involving these staff in decision making at crucial times. The Fund also took a flexible approach that shifted resources based on changing realities and what was or was not working and that also allowed it to capitalise on emerging opportunities to affect political processes at the regional level (Laws, 2018<sup>[76]</sup>).

Another noteworthy example of interventions to address political causes of violent conflict is the support from a number of donors to the November 2019 referendum on Bougainville's future political status, which was part of the implementation of the 2001 Bougainville Peace Agreement. Despite concerns before the referendum about possible violence, the vote was considered peaceful (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2019<sup>[98]</sup>). In the lead-up, a consortium of international partners led by Australia, New Zealand, and the United Nations supported the conduct of the referendum through technical and electoral assistance to the Bougainville Referendum Commission (BRC). They also supported important actors before and after the referendum that contributed to the conduct of an inclusive and non-violent vote by offering technical expertise on various processes related to the referendum, helping foster productive discussion on the referendum and post-referendum issues, and involving regional actors to strengthen the legitimacy of the elections. These actors consisted of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, the National Research Institute, the Bougainville Referendum Regional Police Support Mission, various civil society and non-state actors, including and especially women's groups and ex-combatants, and the governments of Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. Such targeted assistance complemented long-standing bilateral support from external partners, including Australia and New Zealand, to strengthen service delivery, promote community cohesion and stability, and contribute to economic growth.

Such initiatives underscore the potential of targeted, politically attuned activities over the long term to bolster the capacity of relevant national actors. Lessons learned from these examples include:

- Identify and engage with political incentives at different levels and adapt programmes based on shifting incentives and realities on the ground. Such adaptation requires listening to various stakeholders, learning iteratively, and being willing to adjust programme design and objectives to reflect new political configurations.

- Support actors who are key to the formation of inclusive and legitimate political settlements, such as electoral bodies or political leaders, and work with them proactively over the long term.

### ***Building resilience to shocks***

Communities and other sources of public authority beyond the state play an important role in governing social and political relations in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, where the state is frequently absent or the state presence is complex or hybridised (Green, 2018<sup>[99]</sup>). For example, people often depend on informal institutions for basic services (UN/World Bank, 2018<sup>[12]</sup>). The important role of informal institutions has prompted a range of initiatives centred on CDD, especially for preventing the escalation of violence and building resilience within communities to shocks such as conflict (Wallenstein and Bosquet, 2019<sup>[100]</sup>). While there is robust evidence that CDD can improve access to services, there is comparatively little or limited evidence that such improved access is effective in reducing violent conflict (Myint and Pattison, 2018<sup>[101]</sup>; Nolan, Knox and Kenny, 2019<sup>[85]</sup>). Although not a reason to discard CDD entirely, these findings speak to the importance of interrogating donors' work in this area. Communities are not homogenous: they consist of diverse constellations of actors, each with its own incentives and contributions toward sustainable peace. The structures that exist within and that govern communities are not neutral constructs, but rather have historical, social and political roots that may be a source of contestation or compromise.

Preventing violent conflict and supporting resilience within communities in fragile and conflict-affected contexts is thus an iterative process that has implications for how donors design their CDD interventions. Resilience refers to communities' ability to absorb and adapt to multidimensional shocks, one of which is violent conflict (Midgley and Brethfeld, 2018<sup>[102]</sup>). Resilient communities are not always peaceful ones; for example, strengthening notions of justice and rule of law may contribute to resilience but lead to negative outcomes for marginalised groups if the laws – intentionally or not – are exclusionary. Just as it is important that donors identify and engage with leaders' political incentives, it is important when dealing with community structures that they adopt a problem-driven approach that builds on existing social foundations and dynamics rather than external, prescribed arrangements for engagement.

There are many examples of preventing violent conflict and building resilience within communities identified in the literature. They include working with faith-based leaders to prevent violent extremism in their communities; empowering women as mediators in so-called peace huts to resolve community disputes and support peacebuilding priorities outside of state structures; and developing networks of community actors to identify warning signs for conflict and report them to national-level bodies, as Niger demonstrated with its High Authority for Peacebuilding (UN/World Bank, 2018<sup>[12]</sup>). In these three examples, community resilience is linked to tangible outcomes for conflict prevention. Nonetheless, the relative success of each approach depended on the context-specific social dynamics and incentives at play and thus may not be easily replicable. For instance, the peace huts in Liberia, where women play an instrumental role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, built on the foundation of women peace activists who were important in the movement to end Liberia's latest civil war. Each of these success stories relies on its community's individual socio-historical roots, a reminder of the need to invest in analysis that can inform broader, strategic approaches to prevention at the context and regional level.

Respondents to the INCAF Survey emphasised the importance of building community resilience and identified several of their programmes to support community-led prevention. Among these are training community youth volunteers on conflict management and negotiation (such as in the case of Korea's support for peace and recovery in Darfur); surveying the needs of host communities and refugees in conflict-affected contexts to facilitate a government-led response that minimises tensions and disputes; and supporting community councils and traditional authorities to develop transparent, inclusive and accountable institutions from the bottom up.

Respondents also noted benefits of working with civil society organisations and actors, who not only have roots in communities but also maintain platforms nationally to bridge local and national conflict prevention

initiatives (Giessmann, 2016<sub>[103]</sub>). Finally, respondents emphasised the importance of engaging with communities to address norms around intra-household issues such as gender-based violence. These efforts can have transformative effects on violent conflict within communities but, as shown in the analysis in this chapter, do not replace the need for donors to continue interrogating the political, social and historical context of these actors and their incentives in preventing violent conflict (Carayannis, 2018<sub>[104]</sub>). For example, though civil society actors' importance to conflict prevention and resolution is well-documented, their contribution may not be uniformly positive if they represent narrow interests or reinforce patronage networks (UN/World Bank, 2018<sub>[12]</sub>). Similarly, while it is important to engage with traditional or customary structures to build community resilience, doing so in a way that entrenches exclusionary institutions may displace, rather than mitigate, incentives for conflict.

Inclusive processes do not necessarily result in inclusive outcomes (Rocha Menocal, 2020<sub>[105]</sub>). An understanding of institutional arrangements at the community level and how interventions may exacerbate contestation is a prerequisite to effective engagement. This logic informs the do no harm principle and reinforces the need for conflict sensitivity, both of which are critical to conflict prevention in the view of survey respondents. It further implies that prevention and resilience are co-created by and among different actors within a community. Thus, applying conflict sensitivity analysis too narrowly may miss or fail to capture fully the underlying societal dynamics that shape incentives for violent conflict.

### ***Strengthening social cohesion***

Social capital, which is a part of the broader concept of social cohesion, has three core functions: bonding, bridging and linking, with each having an important role as part of a unified framework for promoting resilience to cope with complex risks of violent conflict and fragility (OECD, 2018<sub>[106]</sub>). The formation of social cohesion and social capital plays a central role in preventing violent conflict. Greater cohesion is linked to better societal outcomes across various dimensions and fewer incentives at the individual level to resort to violence (UNDP, 2020<sub>[107]</sub>).

Initiatives to foster social cohesion take place at multiple levels and with various stakeholders beyond solely communities. Though these can focus on more than promoting dialogue, dialogue allows groups to express grievances and seek redress; compromise on shared roadmaps for peacebuilding and state building; and establish norms for protecting civilians and preserving human rights (UN/World Bank, 2018<sub>[12]</sub>). Day and Caus (2020<sub>[108]</sub>) note how mediation and dialogue in early 2019 built trust between the national government and civil society to prevent conflict in Burkina Faso. The United Nations Development Programme, in recent guidance on programming for social cohesion, describes how internal mediators in Yemen built trust within communities through activities such as conflict scans and dialogue to resolve disputes over access to services (UNDP, 2020<sub>[107]</sub>). These examples suggest that social cohesion can be strengthened in even the most fragile settings. The link between cohesion and reduction of armed conflict, however, is contested, and more work is needed to uncover whether and how investments in promoting social cohesion can lead to tangible reductions in violent conflict (Cramer, Goodhand and Morris, 2016<sub>[80]</sub>). It is particularly important to mainstream gender in assessments of social cohesion, especially as women and men experience violent conflict and its effects differently (UNDP, 2020<sub>[107]</sub>).

INCAF Survey respondents emphasised their work on social cohesion is integral to conflict prevention. As examples, they cited activities that promote inclusion in communities, including those discussed in the previous subsection on building resilience, as well as working with media and fostering reconciliation through dialogue. Initiatives to strengthen social cohesion also focus on promoting inclusivity and accountability in governance, particularly for under-represented or disadvantaged populations such as women, children and the elderly. They include mechanisms to involve local populations in the design and implementation of prevention programmes.

### *Media as an amplifier of peace*

In 2018, DAC members gave USD 98 million for media support in fragile contexts. Survey respondents recognised the potential of media to get the message out about peace and develop trust and solidarity among groups. They highlighted initiatives such as working with radio stations to broadcast information about peace processes and developing media campaigns to prevent retributive violence against security forces. Media such as radio and television are cheap, accessible and widely used by the public. Donors can help local authorities influence a culture for peace by bolstering the media's resources and reach.

The potential of the media for promoting trust was identified by Cramer, Goodhand and Morris (2016<sup>[80]</sup>), and Betz (2018<sup>[109]</sup>) argues the media is important to peace, especially where there is an enabling environment for it. Idris (2020<sup>[110]</sup>) provides further evidence of media's contribution to social cohesion and peace in fragile contexts, with positive examples of peace journalism identified in Kenya and Nigeria. However, governments can also misuse media to solidify exclusions, which reinforces the need to develop clear theories of change on media engagement within certain contexts. Evidence suggests that media and communications are a contested space within which messages for peace compete with alternative messages from contrarian interest groups. Donors can do more to better understand the underlying dynamics of how prevention and peacebuilding are communicated and help shape the message in a way that supports infrastructures for peace (Nolan, Knox and Kenny, 2019<sup>[85]</sup>).

### *Reconciliation through dialogue*

INCAF Survey respondents cited several promising and successful initiatives in fragile contexts to facilitate dialogue among actors. Their goal is to prevent the violent escalation of conflicts by allowing parties to express grievances and reach mutual understandings in open fora. In each of these cases, DAC members supported the capacity of local institutions such as institutes, centres and human rights organisations for mediation. These initiatives aimed to equip these institutions to use mediation to change attitudes, foster cohesion and reduce incentives for violence in fragile contexts, both in the short term before potential conflicts erupt into violence and over the long term as standing mechanisms to deter the recurrence of violent conflict. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency provided financial support to the Initiative for a Cohesive Leadership to organise dialogue between armed groups and different segments of society including youth, women, and political and ethnic leaders. Armed groups were reported to have changed their behaviour towards each other following these dialogue processes (Sida, 2020<sup>[111]</sup>). In Guinea, Germany's Civil Peace Service (CPS), supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, partnered with human rights organisations to establish national conflict prevention networks that facilitated workshops for dialogue between youth and state security forces that allowed youth to express grievances in a non-violent manner.

## **Lessons from existing evidence and practices**

The lessons for DAC members discussed in this chapter are applicable to their strategic approach to prevention and to the monitoring and evaluation of their prevention programmes:

- Prevention is hard to measure. It involves intangible concepts such as trust, cohesion and community engagement. Donors need to be adaptable in their monitoring and evaluation. While the evidence base on what works for conflict prevention and peacebuilding is growing, sustained investments in evaluations are needed to fill evidence gaps.
- Prevention is not isolated. The effects of prevention programmes reverberate across societies in intangible ways. To determine if they are effective requires evaluations that look into the broader ecosystem of peace rather than assessments that focus on specific programmes. However,

funding for such evaluations is hard to sustain. There is an opportunity for donors to invest in these broader types of evaluations and build the body of evidence and learning on what works in prevention and peacebuilding. Building such a body of evidence involves considering broader strategic approaches rather than piecemeal projects.

- Prevention is varied. INCAF respondents classified a diverse range of activities as prevention. This complexity can lead to conceptual confusion and make it difficult for donors to work together on this issue. Chapter 3 presents a framework for members to navigate the complexity of prevention.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, select evaluations of the Peacebuilding Fund's programmes from 2017-19, at <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/fund/documents/evaluations>, and case studies published by the United Kingdom Department for International Development for its Elite Bargains and Political Deals project at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elite-bargains-and-political-deals>.

<sup>2</sup> For example, the focus of the first of the five Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals is "legitimate politics".

# 3 A strategic approach to conflict prevention

Violence is multidimensional, as is fragility. As Chapter 2 argues, preventing violent conflict, supporting resilience and promoting social cohesion all must take into account the complex societal and institutional systems in which donors and national actors operate. Donors need strategies to mitigate risks of violent conflict and an analytical framework to help implement a risk and resilience approach to conflict prevention. The OECD fragility framework offers at least three significant value propositions to inform broader and deeper conflict prevention approaches.

DAC members acknowledge the potential of prevention potential in their international commitments. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, the practice of prevention has met strategic, operational and tactical challenges. This chapter explores how the prevention agenda can be advanced. It looks at the typology of prevention, in particular the range of conceptual understandings of conflict prevention, to suggest avenues to overcome the challenges and inform better practices for prevention in fragile contexts. The chapter discusses the responses to the INCAF survey and draws on these to offer lessons for DAC members and outlines the advantages of the fragility framework to enhance risk and resilience approaches to prevention amid fragility.

Violent conflict is not spontaneous – it emerges from complex and non-linear dynamics that shape incentives for or against peace. Investing in analytical capacity that interrogates these dynamics can help donors navigate the politics of prevention and support resilience and social cohesion towards productive ends. An analytical framework can then also help donors implement a strategic approach towards conflict prevention, one that addresses the “multidimensionality of risk[s]” (UN/World Bank, 2018, p. 279<sub>[12]</sub>) contributing to violent conflict and fragility by reducing the likelihood of these risks materialising (prevention) and reducing the impact of risks that do materialise (resilience). The OECD multidimensional fragility framework can provide donors a blueprint for their strategic approaches that accommodate both prevention and resilience as risk reduction strategies to violent conflict in fragile contexts.

## Concepts of conflict prevention

There is no shared or universal understanding of conflict prevention. Nor does this paper propose one. Rather, a focus on risks and resilience, understood through the fragility framework, allows DAC members to adjust their definition of conflict prevention according to the time, context and level of engagement. This dual focus accommodates flexibility while still providing measurable indicators and boundaries for conflict, context and political economy analysis. At the same time, understanding the ways in which DAC members conceptualise conflict prevention can help paint a clearer picture of it in practice.

Conflict prevention does not fit neatly into existing categories of prevention. Three well-known categories are outlined in the literature: systemic prevention, which refers to actions to address international threats; structural prevention, or efforts to prevent structural drivers of violent conflict; and operational prevention, or initiatives aimed to prevent imminent escalation of specific crises (Ott and Lühe, 2018<sub>[112]</sub>). Other distinctions between the categories include time frames and actors. For example, operational prevention

is associated with short-term activities, whereas structural prevention refers to the activities over the long term (Cliffe and Steven, 2017<sup>[24]</sup>). Given the nature of activities, as conventionally understood, diplomats participate in operational prevention, while structural prevention tends to fall within the purview of development actors. However, these categories of prevention are fluid and non-exhaustive. Going beyond the association that operational prevention is short-term, Nathan (2019<sup>[113]</sup>), for example, identifies a strategy of institutionalised operational prevention to establish standing mechanisms (for example, peace committees and high-level panels) that engage in continuous preventive activities such as ongoing mediation to help implement peace deals. The Igarapé Institute (2018, p. 23<sup>[114]</sup>) proposes “transnational prevention” as a type of prevention that identifies and mitigates transnational conflict drivers such as crime, migration and climate change.

This paper demonstrates how a risk and resilience approach to prevention can inform different priorities at different times and in different settings and ways of working. Although this approach implies a focus on structural prevention, operational and transnational approaches can also be sources of prevention and resilience, especially if they help build political momentum for long-term approaches (UN/World Bank, 2018<sup>[12]</sup>). However, conventional prevention categories are not always helpful for understanding either the actors involved or the actions they are taking to prevent conflict. They place actors in silos rather than acknowledging the ecosystem in which they interact. They also presuppose prescribed ways of working rather than an adaptive approach that acknowledges different, shifting sources of vulnerability and resilience in fragile contexts (Ingram and Papoulidis, 2018<sup>[115]</sup>). These typologies thus tend to complicate rather than clarify how DAC members can support prevention.

All actors in fragile contexts have a stake in prevention. This is true whether the actor is the diplomat negotiating a peaceful settlement, the education specialist developing a skills training programme for at-risk youth, the peacebuilder supporting community leaders to resolve sources of grievance, or the United Nations (UN) peacekeeper supporting local police capacity to de-escalate tensions and the recurrence of violence. An approach that prioritises both prevention and resilience recognises this ecosystem of actors and provides a common framework for them to work together in reducing the risk of violent conflict and strengthening coping capacities to mitigate it.

Not all development co-operation contributes to the prevention of violent conflict. When it is taken for granted that investments in development will also automatically reduce the risk of violent conflict, donors also are let off the hook for the trickier task of addressing the drivers of violence, which are complex, multi-causal and constantly changing. The call for complementarity among humanitarian, development and peace actors according to their comparative advantages is meant to guard against the conceptual confusion of equating development with peace (OECD DAC, 2019<sup>[2]</sup>).

In a similar vein, conflict sensitivity features in many strategies for engagement in fragile contexts (OECD, 2012<sup>[79]</sup>). Being conflict-sensitive means minimising ways of working that, intentionally or not, can do harm. This is typically accomplished through conflict analysis. While necessary, conflict analyses alone are not sufficient for prevention and they may not be appropriate in all contexts. When it is assumed that conflict sensitivity programmes will inevitably address the drivers of conflict, conflict prevention becomes a mere checkbox exercise. It also presupposes that donors are linking conflict analyses coherently to their country and regional portfolios – an issue that INCAF Survey respondents highlighted as a potential challenge to applying conflict sensitivity beyond individual projects.

An approach that focuses on both prevention and resilience can enable development instruments to support sustained, inclusive and targeted initiatives to address the root causes and drivers of violent conflict. Sustained prevention addresses both short-term crises and long-term needs. It is adaptive to changing risks and coping capacities to violent conflict. Inclusive prevention addresses the needs of society at large, rather than just elites, to ensure that no one is left behind because of violence. This includes focusing especially on how violence affects women and girls. Inclusive prevention also puts people at the centre by including them in the design of conflict prevention programming. Targeted prevention focuses

on the drivers of conflict across arenas of contestation. It ensures that development co-operation is addressing root causes and not symptoms of violence. These concepts are not new, appearing in the literature even since publication of the UN and World Bank *Pathways for Peace* report in 2018 (Arthur and Monnier, 2018<sup>[116]</sup>). However, contextualising them using the language of risks and resilience reinforces the importance of strengthening both prevention and resilience to sustain peace and provides a framework to guide DAC members' work on conflict prevention in fragile contexts. It bridges concept and strategic practice.

Though still broad, the principles of sustained, inclusive and targeted prevention provide signposts for donors to assess the prevention value added of their development, humanitarian, and peace efforts. The principles affect the theories of change that donors develop to address violence in fragile contexts. Better theories of change contribute to better evaluations of effects (Chapter 2) and create virtuous cycles of programming, monitoring, evaluation and learning. For example, through improved theories of change, donors can learn from best practices and failures and build better business cases for prevention.

## Integrating conflict prevention into existing strategies and frameworks

Conflict prevention is prominent in but not aligned across DAC members' strategies of engagement in fragile contexts. Some respondents to the INCAF Survey reported they have standalone prevention strategies that inform global programming as well as guidelines on aspects such as stabilisation, preventing violent extremism, promoting security sector reform and rule of law, and sustaining peace. Other respondents reported prevention is part of broader policy frameworks on development co-operation and humanitarian assistance and cited measures to support resilience, dialogue, mediation and tackling the root causes of crises as part of a broader theory of change. Respondents also referenced the humanitarian-development-peace nexus as a guiding principle that shapes their thinking on prevention and peacebuilding and ensures coherence with other parts of their assistance.

DAC members recognise that conflict is multidimensional and requires cross-sectoral approaches. Policy making can involve several stakeholders. Survey respondents referenced whole-of-government approaches where the ministry of foreign affairs (or its equivalent) leads on overseas assistance with support from ministries of defence, economic co-operation and justice and from agencies focused specifically on peace and security. Respondents also reported they use cross-government funds, for example the United Kingdom's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund that involves a combination of official development assistance (ODA) and non-ODA activities, to complement other departments' work. Many respondents identified their national security council as an overarching institution that co-ordinates and aligns different departments' activities on prevention. Such councils involve senior political actors (namely the president or prime minister) and ensure collective cabinet-level decision making. Co-ordination can also be ad hoc and bilateral or involve crisis- and theme-specific working groups or committees.

This paper does not assess the effectiveness of these structures. However, these examples show that DAC members have devoted significant attention to designing policy structures and frameworks for their engagement in fragile contexts, specifically on peace, security and prevention. They also suggest there is room to integrate additional cross-sectoral tools, such as the OECD fragility framework, and conceptual approaches on risk and resilience to complement existing guidance. Perhaps the clearest signal of this momentum is the DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, which highlights the need to recognise and complement the work of peace actors – who work on prevention – with everything else that members are doing. Some respondents referenced the ongoing development of conflict- and prevention-specific guidance that builds on the DAC Recommendation. This paper could inform such policy formulation.

While there is no ideal structure or policy framework for prevention, insights from the INCAF Survey offer lessons in three areas for DAC members:

- **Co-ordination, coherence and complimentary:** Prevention involves many actors. Each actor has different mandates, political incentives and governance structures. Actors may even have different ideas of what prevention is in practice, which affects how they approach and analyse issues. This diversity raises the transaction costs of co-ordination, not only within members' governments, but also across members working within a fragile context. One way to navigate this complexity is to develop strategic frameworks that allow actors to “sing from the same hymn sheet” (Rose, 2019, p. 23<sup>[117]</sup>).
- **Politics:** Prevention competes with many political priorities. This is especially true for long-term preventive work, where results take a long time to materialise and may not coincide with election cycles. Donors must build momentum for both prevention and resilience by capitalising on short-term opportunities and keeping an eye on the longer-term picture. Sustained focus on prevention relies on raising the importance of prevention to political leaders as high up as the head of state and building a broad coalition of champions across different departments and levels of government who continue to sell the benefits of prevention.
- **Funding:** The most direct way to prioritise prevention is to fund it. Often, funding comes too late (Mueller, 2017<sup>[66]</sup>) or it is not focused enough on activities that bolster prevention (Day and Caus, 2020<sup>[108]</sup>). Such funding also tends to prioritise small-scale programmes or large initiatives, rather than the mid-sized ones that are needed but for which it is harder to secure funding (UN, 2020<sup>[3]</sup>). The various departments involved in prevention can secure funding for it by earmarking it early or enabling flexibility in their programming to allow funds to shift towards prevention based on evolving circumstances.

A risk and resilience model can inform donors' strategic approaches to conflict prevention. Fragility emerges from exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacities to mitigate those risks (OECD, 2018<sup>[106]</sup>). Identifying the root causes and structural drivers of these risks, and the associated coping capacities that counterweigh them, is important to inform specific strategies that can reduce fragility and its effects. This understanding can also apply to conflict prevention. Using this perspective, DAC members and fragile contexts can analyse together the root causes of violent conflict and fragility to support national strategies that reinforce long-term capacities to reduce the socio-economic vulnerabilities to violent conflict as well as address the drivers and triggers of violent conflict.

Donors are already moving towards paradigms of risk and resilience in their development co-operation. For example, the European Union established a policy framework for a “strategic approach to resilience” that recognises the primacy of politics, the globalisation of risks and the need to support resilience at all levels of the international system (European Commission, 2017<sup>[118]</sup>). The Journey to Self-Reliance, a recent strategy of the United States Agency for International Development, aims to foster stable, resilient and prosperous countries that are more self-reliant through the use of more holistic interventions that identify and address structural challenges to sustainable development (USAID, 2019<sup>[119]</sup>). The DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus calls for joint risk-informed, gender-sensitive analysis of the “root causes and structural drivers of conflict, as well as positive factors of resilience” (OECD DAC, 2019<sup>[2]</sup>). The next step is to translate these high-level policy commitments into strategic approaches within fragile contexts.

Building on the conceptual foundation of conflict prevention through a risk and resilience approach, this paper proposes the OECD fragility framework as a means to help donors interpret and analyse sources of risk and resilience in fragile contexts. As it looks at both risks and sources of resilience across a range of indicators and dimensions, this framework can guide DAC members' thinking and action on conflict prevention.

## Applying the OECD fragility framework to conflict prevention

The OECD fragility framework analyses fragility across its economic, environmental, political, security-related and societal dimensions, and it can be a foundation for country and regional-level assessments of fragility and violent conflict. While it is not the first framework to examine risk, resilience and fragility, it is the first to analyse the linkages between all three concepts (Bosetti, Ivanovic and Munshey, 2016<sup>[120]</sup>). And while other tools focus primarily on risks rather than counterbalancing coping capacities, the OECD framework provides perspectives on both risks and sources of resilience that can then inform strategic priorities. At the same time, the framework is not predictive or programmatic. Nor is it a tactical tool – challenges with data and methods can limit its use for project-level monitoring, evaluation and learning and for forecasting. The OECD fragility framework is not a substitute for existing mechanisms that inform strategic approaches to conflict prevention such as conflict and risk assessments and political economy analyses, and this paper does not propose replacing existing mechanisms that work for members. That said, however, the fragility framework has certain advantages as a risk and resilience model for conflict prevention. This section discusses three value propositions for applying the framework in this manner:

- It enables a mixed-methods analysis of the multidimensional causes of violent conflict and fragility.
- It provides a common language to facilitate joint analysis across the nexus.
- It shifts the focus to capacities at the national level, providing a roadmap to support co-creation between national actors and international partners.

### ***Value proposition #1: Identifying multidimensional risks and coping capacities***

The fragility framework provides quantifiable indicators to measure risks and coping capacities within and between dimensions of fragility and violent conflict. The framework has already been used in this way. For example, Denmark is piloting the fragility framework as one of the inputs for its Fragility and Resilience Assessment Tool. Belgium is also using the fragility framework to assist its identification and evaluation of risks in fragile contexts through its Fragility Resilience Assessment Management Exercise (Vervisch, 2019<sup>[121]</sup>). The UN Office for Project Services also applies the fragility framework to elaborate on the links between infrastructure and peace (UN, 2020<sup>[122]</sup>). However, using the framework to identify multidimensional risks and coping capacities for conflict prevention, as proposed here, would be a fresh application in the following ways:

- **It is comparable** over time and across countries, sectors and dimensions of fragility. This comparability allows members to identify contexts that are especially vulnerable to conflict at any time and revise their strategic planning accordingly. It also enables an analysis of trends and underlying vulnerabilities to detect risks early on. Finally, using the framework avoids a piecemeal analysis of fragility that ignores the broader ecosystem, context and dynamics contributing to violent conflict.
- **It is an empirical starting point.** The indicators in the framework provide a quantitative foundation for analyses of fragility. Not everything is quantifiable – for example, absent models, it is difficult to measure the intersections of dimensions of risk (UN/World Bank, 2018<sup>[12]</sup>). However, in this case, the framework still offers a high-level starting point to support qualitative analysis of such intersections. It supplements the conflict, context and political economy analyses that members are already using in fragile contexts.
- **It is malleable.** Multidimensionality is an abstract concept. In practice, certain risks and coping capacities may be of greater importance in one particular context than in others. The framework allows members to focus on specific issues while remaining aware of the broader context and drivers at various geographic levels. This advantage strengthens targeted and sustained

approaches to prevention. It also helps members look beyond the state to causes of violent conflict that affect livelihoods.

### ***Value proposition #2: A common language for joint analysis***

INCAF Survey respondents noted there are challenges to multilateral analyses of violent conflict due to its breadth and complexity. These challenges happen at multiple levels and between various actors who may have different understandings of conflict prevention. The fragility framework can help navigate these issues by providing a vocabulary to interpret fragility and conflict. This can be a starting point for reducing the transaction costs to multilateral analyses. DAC members already use the fragility framework to guide their efforts in fragile contexts; using the framework for prevention is a different application, but the concept is familiar to them. The fragility framework thus provides a common language for multilateral action on prevention and a conceptual basis that actors already know. It can also complement existing tools, such as the UN's Common Country Analyses and the World Bank's Prevention and Peacebuilding Assessments, which are specific to the issue of conflict prevention.

### ***Value proposition #3: Co-creation for sustaining peace***

The fragility framework provides a roadmap for national actors and international partners to work together in strengthening national capacities to prevent conflict, an advantage that is closely related to the other two value propositions. DAC members cannot take the lead; prevention is nationally owned (Chapter 4). The framework positions members to co-create prevention strategies with national actors and subsequently target risks and capacities that align with those strategies. These context-specific strategies can thus highlight the importance of assistance for prevention and resilience, ensure this assistance is coherent with other types of support and enable the appropriate resourcing of these activities. Chapter 4 elaborates on the importance of national ownership for conflict prevention and the role of DAC members to support national capacities.

# 4 The centrality of national ownership

National ownership is at the heart of sustaining peace. National actors have primary responsibility for prevention, with support from international actors including DAC members, regional organisations such as the African Union and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and multilateral institutions including international financial institutions. The international architecture for prevention follows the principle of subsidiarity, starting with the United Nations Security Council as an overarching institution to address threats to international peace and security and flowing down to the regional, country and local level (ECCAS; Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2017<sup>[123]</sup>). The role of these external actors is to support national capacities and strategies for prevention.

This chapter discusses the important role DAC members should play in fostering national ownership of prevention and peacebuilding through support of country platforms and inclusive structures. It concludes with a call to action for DAC members to support national capacities and suggests the OECD fragility framework as a mechanism to guide the co-creation of prevention strategies in a way that supports national ownership.

## National ownership: Concepts and practices

National ownership is rooted in the social contract between the state and its citizens. This social contract involves a “dynamic agreement between state and society on their mutual roles and responsibilities” (OECD, 2009, p. 17<sup>[124]</sup>). At its heart are notions of trust, inclusion and legitimacy that allow different groups in society to resolve conflict without it becoming violent. These elements do not emerge out of thin air, nor are they given or implemented externally: they come from within, particularly through the interplay between actors, institutions and structural factors in a society over time (UN/World Bank, 2018<sup>[12]</sup>). The challenge is how to channel this dynamic interplay, and any contestation that arises from it, into societies that are just, peaceful and inclusive in the long term. This is why national ownership is important: it is a process of putting the state in the lead to identify priorities, direct resources and manage relationships so that peace is sustainable and the social contract is long-lasting.

External action affects the social contract. For example, it can shape the legitimacy of the state to its citizens as well as attitudes of trust between groups in society and the underlying political settlements that mediate disputes (Cheng, Goodhand and Meehan, 2018<sup>[86]</sup>). Specific to prevention, a range of external tools and activities can influence state-society relations and affect the preventive capacity of the state. The role of official development assistance is especially pertinent given the DAC mandate, though the diverse range of available tools to prevent violent conflict suggests the need to integrate members’ development, security and diplomacy activities.

National ownership is not limited to the government’s mandate. Inclusivity goes hand in hand with ownership to ensure that national plans account for diverse perspectives and have buy-in from a broad segment of society. This is important not only because violence affects women and disadvantaged groups disproportionately, but also because these groups’ experiences and roles in society give them unique perspectives on the drivers of violent conflict (Roland and Kremin, 2020<sup>[125]</sup>). Without inclusive approaches, initiatives targeting the root causes and drivers of violent conflict risk missing the mark and reproducing exclusions. This prospect reinforces the need to include women and underrepresented or disadvantaged

groups in national prevention processes. It also underscores the importance of human rights to the conflict prevention agenda (Limon and Montoya, 2018<sup>[68]</sup>). Codifying human rights protections in national peacebuilding plans signals a government's commitment to peace; on the other hand, failing to do so can compromise the prevention agenda, as particular segments of society become excluded from political settlements and are incentivised to pursue violence. However, the governments of United Nations (UN) member countries have expressed concerns about politicising human rights by tying them to prevention or delaying peace processes by introducing the issue of human rights protection (Arthur and Monnier, 2018<sup>[116]</sup>).

Governments of fragile contexts, particularly in post-conflict situations, have adopted various approaches to target risks and strengthen their resilience against violent conflict. For example, after the 2016 elections, the Gambia government reformed the security sector, supported transitional justice by establishing human rights and truth and reconciliation commissions, and provided employment opportunities to at-risk youth (Arthur and Monnier, 2018<sup>[116]</sup>). These targeted measures partly explain improvements in Gambia's performance on various dimensions of fragility (Desai and Forsberg, 2020<sup>[5]</sup>). More broadly, the experience of Gambia suggests that governments have the potential to mitigate drivers of violent conflict if they assess risks at critical junctures (i.e. after transitions of power in elections) and act early and decisively to build national capacities (UN/World Bank, 2018<sup>[12]</sup>). Burkina Faso, Burundi and Côte d'Ivoire offer other examples of national approaches to preventing risk and building resilience to violence (Arthur and Monnier, 2018<sup>[116]</sup>; Day and Caus, 2020<sup>[108]</sup>). These countries are developing, or have developed, national strategies that delineate priorities for prevention and peacebuilding. Shared lessons from these examples include the importance of targeting risks to violent conflict and promoting resilience across the various dimensions of violent conflict and fragility.

National plans for prevention and peacebuilding are the backbone of national ownership. These types of plans signal a whole-of-government approach to prevention based on consensus between the government and its partners, taking into account the needs of the local population. They reinforce the government's role in identifying needs and setting priorities with support from technical partners. National plans also outline how funding partners can support national capacities for prevention in a coherent, targeted and strategic way. The process of devising these plans offers the government and its partners an opportunity to reset the parameters of their engagement and jointly develop objectives that reflect the evolving context. By enabling such a process of joint identification of priorities and co-creation between governments and international partners, national plans for prevention and peacebuilding can allow governments to unlock new lines of funding specific to conflict prevention, in the same way that humanitarian response plans unlock humanitarian funding for countries in crisis.

These plans can also provide a basis for realigning existing or forthcoming government strategies, such as national development plans, to improve coherence within the government and among funding partners. However, the process of designing national prevention plans and aligning them with other strategic frameworks can be time- and cost-intensive, especially for governments with limited resources. Technical partners can help but may not have enough resources to sustain engagement over longer periods. Carrying out these plans after they are in effect also implies a high degree of political will on the part of the government and partners. While sustaining such political will is possible, it is also the case that shifting priorities – due to the multidimensional nature of risks and the ever-changing complex environments in fragile contexts – can affect political momentum and appetite for conflict prevention. Box 4.1 provides further context in the case of Burkina Faso, a pilot country for the UN's sustaining peace initiative (Lara and Delsol, 2020<sup>[126]</sup>). COVID-19 offers an example of black swan events that can draw attention away from prevention and peacebuilding priorities, although the potential effects of COVID-19 on political violence and violent conflict in fact require a focus on conflict prevention (Monnier and Mayar, 2020<sup>[127]</sup>).

#### Box 4.1. Case study: The Burkina Faso Priority Action Plan for prevention and peacebuilding

In response to deteriorating conditions in the country, the government of Burkina Faso initiated an Emergency Programme for the Sahel in Burkina Faso followed by one of the first-ever Prevention and Peacebuilding Assessment to secure partners' support for a comprehensive strategy to prevent violence (Lara and Delsol, 2020<sup>[126]</sup>). As part of the assessment, the government prioritised activities that targeted vulnerable populations, had a short time frame for implementation, offered transformative potential and were relevant to the situation at hand. The resulting Priority Action Plan, or *Matrice d'actions prioritaires* (MAP), focuses on the administrative areas most exposed to terrorism and emphasises the importance of a multidimensional response to the crisis. This response involves four thematic priorities: strengthening rule of law and security; consolidating the state's presence; addressing basic needs for populations in crisis; and improving social cohesion and resilience. The MAP provides a detailed budget that clarifies funding needs for donors and facilitates co-ordination among technical and funding partners. It sets the stage for a New Partnership for Prevention and Peacebuilding and what Day and Caus (2020, p. 19<sup>[108]</sup>) term a "common vision between the government and the [United Nations] about the risks facing Burkina Faso". Three important lessons emerge from Burkina Faso's experience with the MAP that can inform international partners' approaches to supporting national prevention and peacebuilding plans:

- **Financing:** The government-led process of identifying priorities and mapping them to funding needs calls for a more coherent, strategic and targeted use of funding partners' resources. This is in contrast to the existing situation in which the donor response "remains 'scattered' and not aligned with the agreed collective outcomes ... and is insufficiently flexible to be channelled to the peacebuilding needs that have been identified" (Day and Caus, 2020, p. 22<sup>[108]</sup>). The list of activities detailed in the annex of the MAP by the government can allow funding partners to deploy their resources in a coherent and complementary manner in response to national priorities. The Peacebuilding Fund has a particular role to play in such financing relative to other sources. In Burkina Faso, its activities have been largely aligned with the priorities established by the government and funding partners; additionally, it catalysed an additional USD 11.4 million in funding from donors (Lara and Delsol, 2020<sup>[126]</sup>).
- **Integrating whole-of-government strategies:** The MAP was initiated soon after the country's first-ever national security policy, which will be followed by the forthcoming 2021-25 national development plan. The government has an opportunity to align and integrate these strategies and reinforce a whole-of-government commitment to prevention and peacebuilding. A standalone prevention strategy is a significant accomplishment but by including it in the country's national development plan, the government can mobilise donor funding in a way that is coherent across a broader set of development priorities. The government can also elevate the importance of prevention and peacebuilding to the country's medium- to long-term development.
- **The evolving situation:** Burkina Faso is being termed the "world's fastest-growing humanitarian and protection crisis", with one million people being displaced as of August 2020, a sharp increase from 87 000 displaced people recorded in January 2019 (UN, 2020<sup>[128]</sup>; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2020<sup>[129]</sup>). Risks arising from violence, COVID-19 restrictions, and heavy rainfall have compounded to contribute to such records levels of displacement as well as food insecurity. The evolving situation in Burkina Faso underscores the importance of flexible and adaptive mechanisms to respond to crises as they evolve, which includes both the ability to redefine priorities and the means to fund such reprioritisation in a coherent and integrated manner.

Developing national approaches to prevention is a political, negotiated process of identifying objectives, codifying priorities and, most importantly, mobilising the resources needed. Collective action problems emerge during this process as well as throughout the implementation of the plans. In the context of mobilising resources, these problems can lead to fragmented and uncoordinated funding that is misaligned with national priorities.

Country platforms offer a tentative solution. Such platforms are not a new concept, but there is newfound enthusiasm for them in fragile contexts, particularly related to peacebuilding and prevention (Rose, 2019<sup>[117]</sup>; G20 Eminent Persons Group, 2020<sup>[130]</sup>). Though they are not a silver bullet, country platforms can help address problems of fragmented analysis and a lack of political attention that impede national approaches to prevention (Papoulidis, Graff and Beckelman, 2020<sup>[46]</sup>). These platforms involve high-level actors including top government officials, funding partners and civil society representatives, as well as sector-level experts to provide technical inputs and a secretariat that co-ordinates the involvement of others. Though the structure of platforms may vary, the involvement of these key actors adds political weight and enables coherent approaches. This model also provides a forum where the government can adapt its priorities to changing circumstances and, most importantly, mobilise resources from its partners to meet these new priorities in a co-ordinated manner. In this way, country platforms facilitate a process of co-creation between the government and its partners that strengthens national leadership and is adaptive, proactive and integrated. Country platforms can shift the national conversation from response to prevention. Thus, these platforms can be important enablers of the risk and resilience approach to conflict prevention in a way that involves actors across the HDP nexus. In addition, the OECD fragility framework can serve as a technical, independent and data-driven input to inform discussions among actors and provide the secretariat and sector groups with key insights and analysis.

## The role of DAC members

In conclusion, preventing violent conflict amid fragility calls for action by DAC members. The role of members in sustaining peace is to support national capacities for prevention. Most importantly, this support involves funding national priorities in a coherent, targeted and strategic way, specifically to incentivise and support a more profound pivot to prevention and risk-informed prioritisation of interventions. If such initiatives are disconnected from national actors' priorities, or if they fail to build capacities that address context-specific root causes of violence, they risk missing the target and, at worst, reproducing or exacerbating violence. The key is to position national actors to build peace from within, with support from donors in a process of co-creation.

Prevention is cost-effective and it works. The costs of violence have never been higher or more global. Now is the time to reorder the international system from one of crisis management and response to a structure for prevention rooted in identifying, targeting and addressing the multidimensional risks – and associated coping capacities – that give rise to violence and fragility. Making this change is pivotal to putting the sustaining peace agenda into practice.

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