

Building on the Pathways for Peace: Towards a More Effective International Architecture for Prevention

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Summary Note

This year marks the Fifth Anniversary of the 2018 United Nations and World Bank [‘Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict’](#) report. The UN, the World Bank and their partners have identified a timely opportunity to gather reflections on its legacy and the continued relevance of the findings of this report in an evolving global landscape. Specifically, the anniversary presents an opportunity to highlight some recommendations for the next steps in strengthening the international architecture for prevention, with an emphasis on the development of data and evidence to inform more effective prevention programming. The key aspiration is that the Pathways report needs to continue to be updated and its power be re-invigorated through creative “policy entrepreneurship”.

It is also important to take stock of how the international architecture for prevention has evolved since the publication of the Pathways for Peace report. At the regional level in Africa, there is a rapid process of strengthening dedicated capacities for regional early warning and response¹. With new trends emerging in prevention discussions, existing data collection mechanisms have to adjust to, for example, the crisis of multilateralism and financial systems, surge in violence in middle income countries, new realities of climate change² and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic³, and new insights into the linkages between inequalities and violence⁴.

The discussion summarized below focused on the need for building the data and evidence base around the impact of prevention programming in a way that responds to local priorities and perspectives, reflecting the people-centred approach to prevention called for in the Pathways report.⁵

¹ GPPAC (2022). Building up Prevention at the National Level: A Case for an Expansion of Early Warning Systems: <https://www.gppac.net/resources/building-prevention-national-level-case-expansion-early-warning-systems>.

² Adelphi (2020). Climate and Security Handbook: <https://adelphi.de/en/publications/climate-change-and-security-the-handbook>.

³ IPI (2020). The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Peace and Conflict: <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2020/10/effects-of-covid-19-pandemic-on-peace-conflict/>.

⁴ Rosen, N. (2023). Pathways for Peace: Five Years On Five Years After Pathways: Evolving Research on Inequality, Grievance, and Inclusion: https://www.pathwaysforpeace.org/sites/pathways/files/2023-04/Noah%20Rosen_Five%20Years%20After%20Pathways_%20Evolving%20Research%20on%20Inequality%2C%20Grievance%20and%20Inclusion.pdf

⁵ Everyday Peace Indicators, (2021), Measuring Peace EPI Way: <https://www.everydaypeaceindicators.org/post/measuring-peace-the-epi-way>

UN-WB, (2018), Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/4c36fca6-c7e0-5927-b171-468b0b236b59>, pp. 277-78, 282.

The key takeaways:

There are a variety of action points that could be taken to move forward the prevention agenda, and the Pathways report offers some initial guidance, with [the policy briefs](#) developed for its anniversary providing insights on new developments. However, the main challenge remains the same as it was in 2018. The international community knows that stronger prevention action is required and there is a degree of clarity as to what data is needed to strengthen action; however, prevention continues to not be prioritized, is underfunded, and lacking political commitment. It is time to transform our approach to prevention.

Political commitments need to be rooted in financial commitments. Given the current polycrisis, global financial systems are increasingly shifting further towards crisis response⁶. Recently, an 80 percent spike in humanitarian assistance has further diverted funding from prevention, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to talk about prevention and the peace continuum. However, there cannot be effective humanitarian action and sustainable development without focusing on sustaining peace and applying conflict sensitivity across the board, including in data collection. The Pathways report established a very strong link between why the international community should invest in prevention, highlighting that \$1 USD of prevention translates to a \$16-\$17 USD return⁷. The World Bank demonstrates a good practice in continuous support of prevention action. It increased its dedicated financing for prevention through IDA and will continue to work in supporting countries facing fragility and violence, with a focus on long term prevention action. Such practices need to be scaled up and adopted by the donor community.

There is also a need to balance short and long-term predictions and action through investing and strengthening Early Warning and Early Response Mechanisms (EWER). Currently, most mechanisms can signal short-term possibilities for violence. A focus on long-term action requires action on underlying reasons for fragility and violence, strengthening social cohesion, and enabling healthy private sector development.

It is clear that prevention action cannot eliminate all threats to peace and security. Some attacks, like Russia's invasion of Ukraine, could be unlikely to be prevented. However, as most donors restrict funding towards specific countries and areas, the world sees more violence occurring in places where the investment in prevention is limited or non-existent. This includes Middle Income Countries and areas that did not benefit previously from "donor prioritization".

The success of prevention similarly hinges upon our ability to prepare for major risks - economic crises, pandemics, climate, etc. Focusing on violence makes us react too late as we do not look at underlying factors that lead to violence. There is a need to adapt to the complexity of conflict. Therefore, there is a clear need to shift to more comprehensive awareness of risks and to be more creative in our approaches. This can be more effectively done through reliance on

⁶ Govan R., Ungar M. (2023). Regional Trends in Conflict and Prevention. Available at: <https://www.pathwaysforpeace.org/sites/pathways/files/2023-04/Richard%20Gown%20ICG%20Regional%20trends%20in%20conflict%20and%20prevention.pdf>

⁷ UN-WB, (2018), Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/4c36fca6-c7e0-5927-b171-468b0b236b59>, p.3.

comprehensive data and evidence tools for prevention. Recent research brings out new findings that support a more comprehensive focus for long-term predictions. Traditionally analysts tended to focus on the exclusion of specific ethnic groups from power and economic activity as a source of violence. It is increasingly clear that economic and generational factors are gaining importance.⁸ Social grievances are far weaker predictors of violence than economic or political issues.⁹ Other factors need to be connected to what people normally fight about, including political power and governance, land, water and extractives, basic services, and the lack of access to justice. Building national infrastructure may help to address generational and intergenerational challenges we face - as well as the global and local risks young people will inherit.

Data collection mechanisms should be participatory and accessible to more stakeholders. Prevention needs to be designed from the perspective of a social contract that requires heavy involvement of local and national actors. While prevention is a responsibility of national governments, national and intergovernmental partners should cooperate with civil society organizations because of their knowledge of the context and of stakeholders. However, it should be noted that the current complex data collection and technologies are often inaccessible for local partners and do not reflect their experiences. Inclusion of local indicators could support a more nuanced understanding – and prevention – of conflict at the local level. National prevention strategies can be a tool to localize prevention action at the local level.

Finally, all mechanisms to collect data for prevention need to be brought together. The international community of various experts should develop cohesive and coordinated responses based on joint priorities, share information with each other and build stronger regional and global partnerships.

Opportunities for action:

One opportunity presented by the recent policy landscape is the New Agenda for Peace, which could support Member States in providing some guidance on what effective prevention action could look like. The discussions and research collected for the 2023 Anniversary of the Pathways could inform the New Agenda for Peace further. While the New Agenda for Peace is being developed in a challenging environment, it is encouraging to see Member States agreeing on the need to focus on prevention.

The second opportunity is to capitalize on the adoption of the [2022 resolution on financing for peacebuilding](#) and the options presented in [the report of the Secretary-General on investing in prevention and peacebuilding](#). These resources highlight that domestic resources and commitments are critical for building national capacities for prevention and peacebuilding. Development actors along with international financial institutions and development finance

⁸ Govan R., Ungar M. (2023). Regional Trends in Conflict and Prevention. Available at: https://www.pathwaysforpeace.org/sites/pathways/files/2023-04/Richard%20Gown_ICG_Regional%20trends%20in%20conflict%20and%20prevention.pdf

⁹ Rosen, N. (2023). Pathways for Peace: Five Years On Five Years After Pathways: Evolving Research on Inequality, Grievance, and Inclusion: https://www.pathwaysforpeace.org/sites/pathways/files/2023-04/Noah%20Rosen_Five%20Years%20After%20Pathways_%20Evolving%20Research%20on%20Inequality%2C%20Grievance%20and%20Inclusion.pdf

institutions have a supporting role to play in this area. Financial resources need to be accompanied by strengthened human resources, including when it comes to research support, at the local, regional, national and international levels to work on prevention and peacebuilding.

The third opportunity is strengthening existing tools and improving coordination among them. Regional Monthly Reviews (RMRs), early warning systems, and risk assessments facilitate data-based discussions on countries and regions and help drive action at the country level. Further, more institutions need to align their programs with already existing institutions that collect data.

The fourth opportunity is to continue collecting the data and good practices on prevention. The most successful national prevention programs known to date focus on both short-term root causes of conflict and long-term issues related to strengthening institutions and addressing areas around exclusion.

The fifth opportunity is to strengthen EWER mechanisms and make them available globally. Two avenues to strengthen early warning include: 1) bringing a more comprehensive data collection approach and 2) recrafting of indicators to include new realities, such as climate change. Further, the key early warning institutions need to coordinate among themselves (i.e., the AU, IGAD, SADC, COMESA, etc.).