
Building on What Exists: Demystifying National Prevention Strategies

Insights through a security sector governance and reform lens

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1. Introduction

In July 2023, United Nations (UN) Secretary-General António Guterres called for the development of national prevention strategies in his *New Agenda for Peace (NAfP)*—a call now reflected in the Pact for the Future adopted just last month. These strategies are an opportunity to make concrete progress on the UN prevention agenda. However, there are ongoing concerns about what those strategies mean in practice, as member states face fatigue from managing an ever-growing number of national planning frameworks. This policy brief explores how national prevention strategies can be made effective by building on what exists through examples drawn from the field of security sector governance and reform (SSG/R).

2. Making an Impact: National Prevention Strategies' Potential

First, as violence is inherently multicausal, national prevention strategies offer a comprehensive framework that moves beyond isolated initiatives that focus on single risk and protective factors.¹ By promoting systematic coordination of multiple efforts, national prevention strategies can address these factors holistically, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of relevant initiatives.²

Second, prevention strategies offer a response to common objections from member states about this policy agenda. Concerns about stigma and external intervention are addressed by emphasizing the universality of, and national ownership over, violence prevention strategies. All countries are at risk of some forms of violence, and thus prevention strategies are beneficial to low-, middle-, and high-income countries, including and particularly when levels of violence are low.

Third, these strategies help clarify what prevention means in practice within each national context. This ought to enable the UN and other international actors to align their programmatic support to nationally-driven priorities for prevention. This is why the call for national prevention strategies in the New Agenda for Peace and in the Pact for the Future is so important.

The idea of national prevention strategies is not new and was broadly outlined as early as 2002 for the prevention of crime,³ in 2003 in the context of the prevention of armed conflict,⁴ and in 2015 for the prevention of violent extremism.⁵ Similarly, the importance of supporting nationally led efforts to prevent violence was reflected in the 2011 New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States. What is new, though, is the momentum towards creating national prevention strategies that encompass 'all forms of violence' and thus allow for a universal approach to prevention.

This call for action has raised concerns among member states that such strategies will require new and burdensome templates. However, this does not need to be the case. This brief seeks to identify pragmatic approaches to bringing national prevention strategies into the fold through a method not burdensome for national actors and international partners by building on what exists. Particularly, it aims at providing concrete examples of how to link existing plans through a system of efforts to prevent violence, rather than start a new national strategy from scratch.

The brief illustrates this by exploring opportunities to link security sector governance and reform (SSG/R) to a broader national prevention strategy. Indeed, security sector actors have powerful tools at their disposal to prevent violence or to do the opposite. While the security sector may be at the heart of grievances in one country, or only play a limited role in fueling or mitigating grievances in another, it will still need to be examined in any meaningful exercise to identify risk and protective factors for violence. Moreover, SSG/R is a crucial element in advancing, among others, development; peacebuilding; crime prevention; and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, and is commonly reflected in all these related policy frameworks and action plans. Therefore, it provides a useful frame of reference for unpacking the linkages between different plans and prevention efforts. The insights gained from this analysis are not limited to SSG/R; they can also inform any other initiative or plan that seeks to address risk and protective factors for violence.

3. National Prevention Strategies: It's About the Function, Not the Label

3.1 Understanding and addressing risk and protective factors

A national prevention strategy is a system of efforts to address the causes of violence. Most countries have one, or at least parts of one. To understand what a prevention strategy is, one needs to understand how violence works. Violence does not break out without reason: Human beings have a natural aversion to killing, but circumstances may arise that outweigh this aversion. Those circumstances are called risk factors for violence.^{6,7} Such factors cut across all disciplines (e.g., macroeconomy, security, politics, psychosocial, legal, cultural, etc.); all levels (e.g., individual, family, community, societal, regional, and international); and all actors (e.g., citizens, states, companies). From this, violence prevention can be conceptualized as any effort to address risk and protective factors for violence.

Thus, effective preventive approaches require thorough analysis of those factors at multiple levels. For instance, while a risk assessment may identify lack of access to security in a certain region of the country as a risk factor for opportunistic violence, it is imperative to delve deeper into the underlying causes. Is it rooted in structural issues like socioeconomic inequality (e.g., absence of basic infrastructure like roads and water discouraging deployments) or ethnic exclusion (e.g., reluctance to deploy to regions inhabited by minority ethnic groups)? Or is it an institutional challenge, such as lack of vehicles, lack of appropriate strategic planning, or lack of effective oversight? And to what extent do individual risk factors, such as the perceptions of security actors about their personal safety or about their financial status, intersect with these other risk factors to contribute to individual decisions to refuse deployments?

This complexity underscores the importance of targeted interventions tailored to specific risk and protective factors. In the example above, simply advocating for the enhancement of good governance within the security sector is insufficient. Instead, it is imperative to precisely identify which aspects of governance require improvement to effectively mitigate the particular risk factors that are most likely

to fuel violence in a given context.⁸ Furthermore, it is important to recognize that risk factors are interrelated and cumulative. No one risk factor is responsible for violence.

National prevention strategies can thus provide a shared understanding of relevant risk and protective factors for violence, as well as the approaches that will be used to address them. Most countries already have a violence prevention strategy (e.g., crime prevention strategy, Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) action plan, infrastructure for peace, etc.) or at least elements of such a strategy, such as programs that strive to address specific risk and protective factors, even if they are not specifically labelled as prevention. The objective of the call for member states to develop ‘national prevention strategies’ should not be to create something new but to strengthen existing efforts to identify and address risk factors for violence.

3.2 Considering linkages between all forms of violence

While national prevention strategies are not new, the ambition to ensure these address ‘all forms of violence’—building on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 and the *New Agenda for Peace*—represents a significant shift. It can mean that national actors can develop or strengthen any form of violence prevention strategy—whether focused on gender-based violence (GBV), crime, conflict prevention, violent extremism, or other issues—depending on what is most relevant for the country. But it can also be an opportunity for national actors, and for international partners supporting them, to strategically connect different types of violence prevention strategies. This holistic approach would help enhance the coherence and impact of different streams of national prevention efforts.

Indeed, different types of violence—such as political, criminal, and intercommunal—often intersect and reinforce one another, creating a cycle that deepens instability and insecurity within societies. For example, gender-based violence (GBV), particularly when perpetuated by security actors, can drive both women and men to join armed groups seeking protection.⁹ For instance, in Nepal, a quarter of female combatants reportedly joined the Maoist People's Liberation Army (PLA) “because of sexual abuse and rape” by state security actors.¹⁰ Even when such abuses are not carried out by the security sector, GBV can still drive women, girls, and boys to enlist in armed groups.

We also know that there is a link between petty crime and terrorism, as marginalized individuals or those incarcerated are more likely to be radicalized.¹¹

Additionally, research shows that children who have experienced violence are at higher risk of becoming victims and perpetrators of violence themselves.¹²

Finally, different types of violence might coexist or change over time. Many risk and protective factors also overlap across various forms of violence, such as lack of trust in the state or weak social cohesion. For instance, a significant overlap exists between terrorism and armed conflicts, with 95 percent of deaths from terrorist attacks occurring in conflict zones.¹³

With all this in mind, a comprehensive vision can help address the complex interrelations between these different types of violence and allow countries to be more responsive to important shifts in underlying risk factors. Moreover, understanding the synergies between the prevention of different forms of violence is not only more efficient but also more cost-effective than separate approaches for each type of violence.

3.3 Building on existing prevention efforts

A national prevention strategy strengthens, connects, and complements existing efforts that address the causes of violence. Designing a prevention strategy does not mean creating a new framework, but rather identifying and building on existing prevention efforts.

Many countries already have some form of prevention programs but their capacity to actually prevent violence may vary. The growing emphasis on prevention has led some actors to rebrand their activities as such regardless of whether they address risk and protective factors. The problem is this perpetuates the notion that prevention does not work, when these activities fail to prevent violence since they were not originally designed with prevention in mind.¹⁴ Moreover, there is a risk that these ‘prevention’ strategies may inadvertently increase risk factors for violence.

The integration of former combatants into the armed forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in the 2000’s serves as a case in point. While a national program was designed with the aim of fostering peace and preventing the recurrence of violence, this effort inadvertently ended up fueling heightened violence and instability in the country. This outcome was partly attributed to insufficient vetting and training of integrated individuals, resulting in human rights abuses and impunity. Inadequate planning—notably regarding rank

harmonization—sparked frustrations among both new recruits and existing members of the armed forces. Additionally, inadequate salaries and living conditions, particularly for the families of ex-combatants integrated into the army, prompted desertions and alternative means of securing sustenance which often involved violence.¹⁵ Overall, treating integration primarily as a technical exercise, without adopting a conflict-sensitive approach, hindered its effectiveness in mitigating, let alone addressing, relevant drivers of violence. Framing activities as prevention, thus, is not enough to actually prevent violence. National prevention strategies should therefore be evaluated for their ability to explicitly identify and address risk and protective factors at different levels.

The opposite is also true: most countries will have programs that address causes of violence, but are not labeled as prevention. For instance, SSG/R programs that focus on enhancing the recruitment and training of underrepresented groups, if implemented effectively, can help address inequalities that may be a risk factor for violence. Similarly, strengthening ombuds institutions of the armed forces can contribute to prevention efforts by providing a mechanism for collecting and addressing grievances related to the conduct of security sector personnel.

The call to adopt a national prevention strategy can be an opportunity for countries to evaluate existing efforts to address all forms of violence, assess their effectiveness in managing risk and protective factors, and identify gaps in initiatives, regardless of their labels. This holistic approach fosters interconnectedness among various efforts, ensuring a cohesive system of prevention rather than isolated projects.

4. Yet Another Framework or Connecting What Exists? A Practical Approach to Developing a National Prevention Strategy

The secretary-general's call in his *New Agenda for Peace* regarding the development of national prevention strategies, now embodied in the Pact for the Future, has been widely embraced as a constructive step towards making progress on the prevention agenda. But a question that has emerged is how to align this to the proliferation of national planning instruments, spanning from national development plans and national peacebuilding strategies, to dedicated plans targeting WPS, small arms, PVE, crime and many others. Experience shows that this continued increase in different types of plans may lead to many of them left not implemented—whether due to a lack of funding or commitment, or from missed opportunities in terms of synergies.

But developing a national prevention strategy does not have to mean creating an entirely new plan from scratch. It can build on what exists and establish smart connections between existing plans and efforts that address risk and protective factors—irrespective of whether they are labeled as prevention.

The development of national prevention strategies can be conceptualized as three distinct stages: 1) identifying risk and protective factors; 2) mapping existing prevention plans and initiatives against these factors; and 3) connecting the puzzle pieces to ensure alignment towards a common goal.

4.1 Identifying risk and protective factors that contribute to all forms of violence at national and local levels

4.1.1 Adopting a holistic approach to the assessment of risk factors is essential, as they are interlinked and cumulative

As highlighted above, risk factors for violence are interlinked and cumulative. A narrow view of such factors can significantly skew our understanding of contexts

and lead to ineffective or even counterproductive strategies. For instance, if we focus on prevention solely through a security lens, we risk overlooking other crucial drivers of violence such as social, economic, and political factors, and vice versa. For example, national and regional instability can result in increased military spending to preempt potential security risks. While this might address immediate security concerns, excessive security spending can also exacerbate risk factors for violence elsewhere. It can contribute to social grievances by diverting funds away from essential services, undermining long-term stability and development. In Mali, for instance, increased security spending came at the expense of other basic services. This trade-off was cited as one of the major grievances fueling violent protests.¹⁶ When other risk factors are being neglected in favor of militarization, it can deepen resentment and contribute to the very instability that increased security spending seeks to prevent. Indeed, prioritizing the development of military capacities over well-governed security sectors capable of protecting the population is recognized to fuel intercommunal conflicts in the region.¹⁷

This shows the requirement for collaboration to develop national prevention strategies from different public sector institutions to conduct a comprehensive analysis of risk and protective factors. A narrow perspective of what constitutes a risk factor can shape our understanding of violence and conflict. Indeed: ‘someone looking for evidence of ethnic tensions, for example, is more likely to then understand the conflict as an “ethnic conflict,” perhaps to the exclusion of other equally or more plausible causes.’¹⁸ Bringing in different perspectives to the development process of a national prevention strategy is vital. However, experience shows that this is not systematic. For instance, a review of the role of the security sector in the prevention of violent extremism found that security and defense actors are not always included in the formulation of PVE policies.¹⁹ This limits their ability to align these with broader frameworks, such as national security policies, which could otherwise help support the implementation of PVE efforts.

To this end, adopting a holistic and multisectoral approach to violence prevention is essential. This approach should encompass political, security, economic, psychological, social, and other factors for violence, fostering discussions about synergies and aligning efforts across different sectors. By integrating perspectives from different fields, we can ensure that prevention strategies are comprehensive and do not inadvertently create new grievances or exacerbate existing ones.

4.1.2 Identifying risk and protective factors based on an evidence-based approach

Identifying risk and protective factors can be challenging due to the often-limited availability of evidence and the need for extensive analysis. To effectively pinpoint these factors, a systematic and evidence-based approach is essential. Without reliable data, policies may inadvertently focus on irrelevant or misdiagnosed issues. For instance, while it may be assumed that inadequate accountability mechanisms for security personnel significantly contribute to violent abuses in a region, evidence might show that poor salary practices foster an environment where security personnel are more likely to engage in such abuses due to low morale, financial desperation, and unresolved grievances.

This process begins with gathering data from multiple sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of the context. For instance, identifying risk and protective factors related to the security sector may require mapping how the security sector contributes to grievances and violence. This may involve reviewing administrative data, media coverage, and relevant surveys (e.g., on corruption, crime, and justice), as well as gathering feedback from local communities and civil society. A detailed assessment of the individual components of the security sector—such as police, defense, corrections, and intelligence—is also necessary to understand their specific roles in creating or mitigating risks. This involves examining governance deficits related to accountability, effectiveness, and inclusiveness, which underpin these risks.²⁰ Additionally, reviewing budgets and expenditures can shed light on resource allocation and identify potential imbalances that may fuel discontent. Finally, incorporating insights from international assessments (e.g., World Bank risk and resilience assessments) can offer additional perspectives on potential risk and protective factors.

4.1.3 Identifying both local and national risk factors

Understanding the linkages between local and national risk factors is also important. Different local contexts will have different risk and protective factors. For instance, experiences from Liberia to Colombia to Burkina Faso underscore that disparities in the delivery of security within a country can foster feelings of inequality and exclusion which fuels grievances; and this is especially true where gaps in security delivery outside population centers lead to security vacuums and create openings for opportunistic violence.²¹

Similarly, addressing a risk in one region of the country but not in the other can undermine broader prevention efforts. A recent study on the cost of violence in

Switzerland underlines the need to ensure that improved responses to organized crime and human trafficking are rolled out across the entire country, with specialized and adequately financed structures in place in all cantons.²² Therefore, while national strategies are vital, it is imperative to understand specific risks at the local level, and ensure that local strategies can be integrated and supported by a national strategy. This includes fostering communication channels between local and national entities to identify and address gaps without replacing existing efforts.

4.2 Mapping and connecting existing prevention plans and initiatives to comprehensively address risk and protective factors

4.2.1 Identifying existing strategies and plans and the connections between them

Addressing one form of violence in isolation may lead to incomplete solutions and perpetuate instability. Therefore, adopting a comprehensive approach that considers “all forms of violence” is thus more effective and can save resources by avoiding duplication of efforts. To implement this, it is essential to identify existing national strategies and plans for violence prevention, such as those addressing violence against children, crime, PVE, GBV, and infrastructures for peace, and analyze their connections to leverage synergies and avoid duplication of efforts. For instance, as highlighted above, by effectively addressing sexual abuse and rape, GBV strategies can play an important role in broader efforts to prevent recruitment to armed groups which are known to fuel other types of violence.

In the area of security sector reform (SSR), it is important to consider the security sector’s intersection with other relevant policy frameworks that are part of a broader prevention ecosystem, such as national security policies, national anti-corruption strategies, human rights action plans, crime reduction plans, national action plans on small arms, and counter-terrorism plans. Experience shows that there are missed opportunities to make these linkages across plans. For instance, while security actors are expected to support the implementation of PVE plans, PVE is not systematically integrated into defense and security policies. Exceptions, such as Burkina Faso’s National Security Policy of 2021, which recognizes the national PVE strategy as vital to its implementation, demonstrate the potential benefits of a more integrated approach.²³ Similarly, in Latin America, experience

shows that policy efforts to control small arms may fall short in preventing violence unless they are aligned with SSR initiatives—such as those aimed at strengthening the regulation and oversight of their use by private security actors.²⁴

4.2.2 Assessing how risk factors are addressed in existing plans and identifying the gaps

National prevention strategies should be considered iterative processes that can be formalized and refined over time. For this reason, it is important to regularly take stock on growing evidence on risk and protective factors in a national context, and to examine to what extent these are addressed in existing plans. This should begin with a comprehensive review of each plan's objectives and priorities to determine whether they explicitly recognize and target relevant risk and protective factors.

Identifying and addressing the gaps across these strategies is equally important. For instance, a review of relevant strategies across The Sahel found that the issue of criminality—including transnational criminal networks, domestic criminality, and the effects of a war economy— was often neglected, despite being an important risk factor for conflict in the region.²⁵ In this context, many programs target terrorism rather than criminality which can be both a manifestation of violence as well as a root source of violence that makes young people more susceptible to radicalization narratives in the first place.²⁶ This example also underscores the importance of establishing connections between prevention strategies that target PVE and counter-terrorism in a violence-sensitive manner, to effectively tackle both immediate terrorist threats and the underlying factors driving radicalization.

4.3 Connecting the different pieces of the puzzle together to ensure alignment towards a common goal

4.3.1 Linking national prevention strategies to an overarching plan?

The fact that a national prevention strategy should consider multiple sectors, types of violence, and levels does not imply that the strategy must delve deeply into approaches for addressing each risk factor—this is best handled by specialized strategies, policies and plans for issues such as gender-based violence, preventing violent extremism, and others. But there does need to be an overarching reflection on how different risk and protective factors interconnect.

In line with the strong calls for “one vision, one plan,”²⁷ there is a need to identify whether the prevention strategy ought to be integrated in a broader plan or exist as a standalone initiative. Integrating the prevention strategy, or its key tenets, into a broader plan, and linking it to a coordinating body, can help enhance coherence and leverage synergies across different sectors. Ideally, the priorities for prevention should be reflected in whichever plan is connected to the budget process and most likely to steer nationally-driven policy adjustments.

Some countries use national development plans as their vehicle for amalgamating all sectoral strategies and plans. By integrating various sectoral priorities into a cohesive framework, national development plans facilitate effective coordination, resource allocation, and implementation of development interventions across different sectors. South Africa provides an illustration of how different plans can be linked to one another. For example, South Africa's 2016 *White Paper on Safety and Security* underscores that its vision is aligned to the South African National Development Plan, and that it is complementary to the *White Paper on Police*. Additionally, it advocates for a comprehensive approach to safety, addressing all factors that contribute to risk or bolster resilience, and not solely focusing on crime.²⁸

There is also a need to reflect on whether those efforts should be institutionalized, and if so, what methods are needed to institutionalize them such as through legislation and policy frameworks. For instance, this may entail legal adjustments (e.g., The National Commission which works to combat and prevent violent extremism in Tunisia was created through a law).²⁹ But in some contexts, institutionalization has actually threatened sustainability by increasing the costs and bureaucratizing efforts.³⁰ Consequently, the objective is the sustainability and the coherence of the strategy: in some contexts, institutionalization can be an effective approach to that effect, but not in others.

4.3.2 Ensuring there are clear coordination, implementation, and funding modalities

Coordination extends beyond the development of plans; it also encompasses their implementation and requires clarity on roles and responsibilities. To expand on the example of integration of ex-combatants in the DRC, one of the challenges identified during the implementation process was the failure to recognize that poor conditions for the families of ex-combatants integrating into the security sector were a risk factor for violence.³¹ In this instance, the issue stemmed from ambiguity surrounding roles and responsibilities. While the humanitarian

community provided assistance for vulnerable populations overall, it neglected the specific category of military dependents. Conversely, from a SSR perspective, it was assumed that addressing family needs fell under the purview of the humanitarian community.³² Fostering effective prevention strategies therefore demands a cohesive, cross-sectoral approach that acknowledges and bridges gaps and responsibilities.

Effective strategies also require involvement from stakeholders with the capacity to address the identified risk and protective factors effectively, as well as a sustainable source of funding to implement these. The South African integrated crime and violence prevention strategy serves as an illustrative example. This strategy emphasizes the importance of coordination mechanisms, linking implementation at the national, provincial, and local levels, establishment of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plans and the allocation of resources from line function department budgets.³³

In sum, a national prevention strategy can be described as a system of efforts at multiple levels and stakeholders to address a comprehensive set of risk and protective factors for all forms of violence. Such systems tend to be more effective when they are:

1. Anchored in political and social commitment (rather than a mere technical exercise);
2. Evidence-based;
3. Considerate of local and group-specific dynamics;
4. Sustainable and adequately resourced to address long-term risk factors;
5. Flexible to adapt to change of circumstances, particularly external shocks, and
6. Incorporating mechanisms to ensure that all public policies are violence sensitive.³⁴

5. Supporting National Prevention Strategies: What Can International Actors Do?

While national actors must lead the development of national prevention strategies to ensure that these are tailored to local contexts and needs, in some contexts, international actors may have an important role to play in providing support to these strategies. In preparation for the UN Security Council Open Debate on peacebuilding and sustaining peace of August 21, 2024, it was acknowledged that the UN is well-positioned to assist member states in overcoming key obstacles that impede progress on national prevention strategies. These challenges include 1) insufficient awareness of the advantages of nationally led prevention efforts, 2) a lack of technical expertise required to manage the complexities of establishing such systems, and 3) inadequate funding to support the development of comprehensive strategies.³⁵ To this effect, international actors can:

5.1 Raise awareness on the importance of national prevention strategies, and what they may look like in practice

Given the sensitivities surrounding the UN prevention agenda, member states must take the lead in promoting the development of national prevention strategies. Member states can use the UN system to raise awareness about the importance of national prevention strategies. During the above-mentioned Open Debate, they emphasized the critical role of these strategies and related efforts.

At the same time, member states can leverage the UN system as a vital platform for discussing diverse approaches to national prevention. For instance, during the Peacebuilding Commission meeting on March 22, 2024, Timor-Leste presented a series of prevention and sustaining peace efforts, Norway its strategy on countering violent extremism, and Kenya its comprehensive review of its peacebuilding architecture. Such exchanges can alleviate member states' concerns about a one-size-fits-all template being imposed upon them, while also encouraging them to reflect on their own unique strategies. Particularly, member states can present how

they have been able to connect effectively different national plans towards a broader prevention agenda.

Given the lack of clarity on conditions for effective national prevention strategies, the United Nations can also support discussions on best practices. To begin, the UN can facilitate a broader understanding on conditions for effectiveness for prevention strategies that may be relevant across countries (e.g., sustainability, flexibility, coordination, etc.). In this regard, the Peacebuilding Support Office's Impact Hub could be leveraged to effectively collect, analyze and share evidence on lessons from the implementation of these strategies, and particularly how to connect effectively existing plans.

Building on this exercise, member states can discuss how the UN can support more effectively their national prevention strategies. Particularly, the upcoming Peacebuilding Architecture Review in 2025 offers an important opportunity to normalize prevention by insisting on its universal relevance and identify parameters for effective national prevention strategies and reflect on how the UN system can use those to provide more effective support for national actors, upon request.

5.2 Support national actors in developing holistic and effective national prevention strategies

The UN and other international actors can support national actors in developing their prevention strategies by providing targeted technical assistance, upon request. National prevention strategies must start with a comprehensive identification of risk and protective factors. While support for data collection and analysis is often undervalued, it is crucial for the development of effective national prevention strategies. The United Nations, the World Bank, and bilateral donors can play an important role in supporting—upon request—national actors in building their data collection and analysis systems. For example, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) provides support to countries to improve quality and availability of crime data, including victimization surveys and corruption surveys, which can provide important information for unpacking risk factors.

International actors can also facilitate the connection between different prevention plans. To support this process, the UN could support the mapping of all national and local efforts and strategies already in place that address risk and protective

factors for violence and integrate these in its Common Country Analysis (CCA). This would provide the foundation for informed discussions with national actors on how to support this system of efforts coherently through the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). In that regard, it is critical that UN entities, and particularly entities such as UNOCT that are not part of the CCA/UNSDCF efforts, coordinate their efforts through these mechanisms.³⁶

To ensure effective support for comprehensive national prevention strategies, international actors must promote a coherent approach to all forms of violence. Historically, UN support to national prevention efforts have often been compartmentalized, with separate strategies and frameworks addressing different types of violence such as conflict prevention, violent extremism, mass atrocities, and interpersonal crime. This fragmentation has at times, led the UN to encourage countries to adopt multiple violence prevention frameworks, without a clear understanding on how they connect. Such disjointed efforts can result in inefficiencies, missed opportunities for synergy, and increased costs for national actors. Member states should encourage the UN to clarify its different prevention architectures and ensure a coherent support to national actors.

5.3 Support the implementation of national prevention strategies through effective funding

Greater clarity on national prevention priorities will enable national actors to articulate their specific support needs, making it essential for international actors to tailor their assistance to initiatives that directly address the core risk and protective factors for violence, rather than simply rebranding existing approaches as prevention. Moreover, a clear understanding of risk factors can help the UN to determine which entities within the broader system are best placed to support national actors in addressing a specific risk and protective factor, even when these factors are not traditionally categorized as prevention.

This starts first and foremost with ensuring that there is adequate funding for national priorities that are in line with national prevention strategies. The UN Peacebuilding Fund is an important vehicle for funding prevention priorities, albeit with a limited budget, and can create incentives for collaboration across different parts of the UN system. In the same vein, the World Bank through its Prevention and Resilience Allocation framework—which requires a country to have in place a strategy or plan to reduce the risk of conflict or violence³⁷—can encourage the

adoption of evidence-based national prevention strategies, and to connect prevention efforts.

However, experience shows that not all vital priorities from a prevention perspective receive adequate funding. For instance, the World Bank's mid-term review of its Fragility, Conflict and Violence (FCV) strategy recognizes that while strengthening institutions is a core focus of the World Bank Group's efforts in prevention, investment in governance-related projects has not kept pace with the overall financing directed toward fragile and conflict-affected states. The review recognizes that despite valuable lessons from reports like the *2011 World Development Report* and *Pathways for Peace*, the World Bank's involvement in key governance areas remains limited in fragile and conflict settings.³⁸ This is particularly evident in security sector governance and reform, which from the outset is not systematically included in the World Bank's analytics and operational engagement, "despite the FCV Strategy's commitments to prioritize justice and the rule of law and the security sector..."³⁹ Mapping and addressing these funding gaps will be essential to supporting effective prevention strategies.

Conclusion

The emerging calls for national prevention strategies present a promising opportunity to advance the global agenda for peace and security. The objective is not necessarily to adopt a new document called "national violence prevention strategy," but to build upon existing initiatives within countries that address risk and protective factors for violence. Such strategies should be considered iterative processes that can be formalized and refined over time.

To conceptualize a national prevention strategy, it is crucial to:

- 1) Identify risk and protective factors that contribute to all forms of violence within a country;
- 2) Map existing prevention plans and initiatives, assess their capacity to address these risk and protective factors, and pinpoint the gaps which need to be filled; and
- 3) Connect the different pieces of the puzzle together to ensure that all relevant sectors and stakeholders are aligned and working towards common goals.

In sum, advancing national prevention strategies requires a paradigm shift from creating new frameworks to enhancing and integrating existing ones. By building on what already exists and refining these efforts through a coordinated and

iterative process, countries can more effectively address the underlying causes of violence and promote lasting peace and security. This approach not only has the potential to maximize the use of available resources but also to ensure a more sustainable and impactful response to the complex challenge of violence prevention.

Endnotes

¹ **Risk factors** are characteristics or circumstances at the individual, family, community, societal, and international levels that precede violence and increase the likelihood that it will occur. Examples may include specific types of inequality, shocks in food prices, and domestic violence against children. In contrast, **protective factors** counteract the adverse effects of risk factors and reduce the likelihood of violence. Examples may include positive family environments and effective conflict resolution mechanisms. See more at Céline Monnier and Joanne Richards, "Strengthening Violence Prevention at the UN: 11 Overlooked Facts," *NYU Center on International Cooperation*, May 28, 2024, <https://cic.nyu.edu/resources/strengthening-violence-prevention-at-the-un>.

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