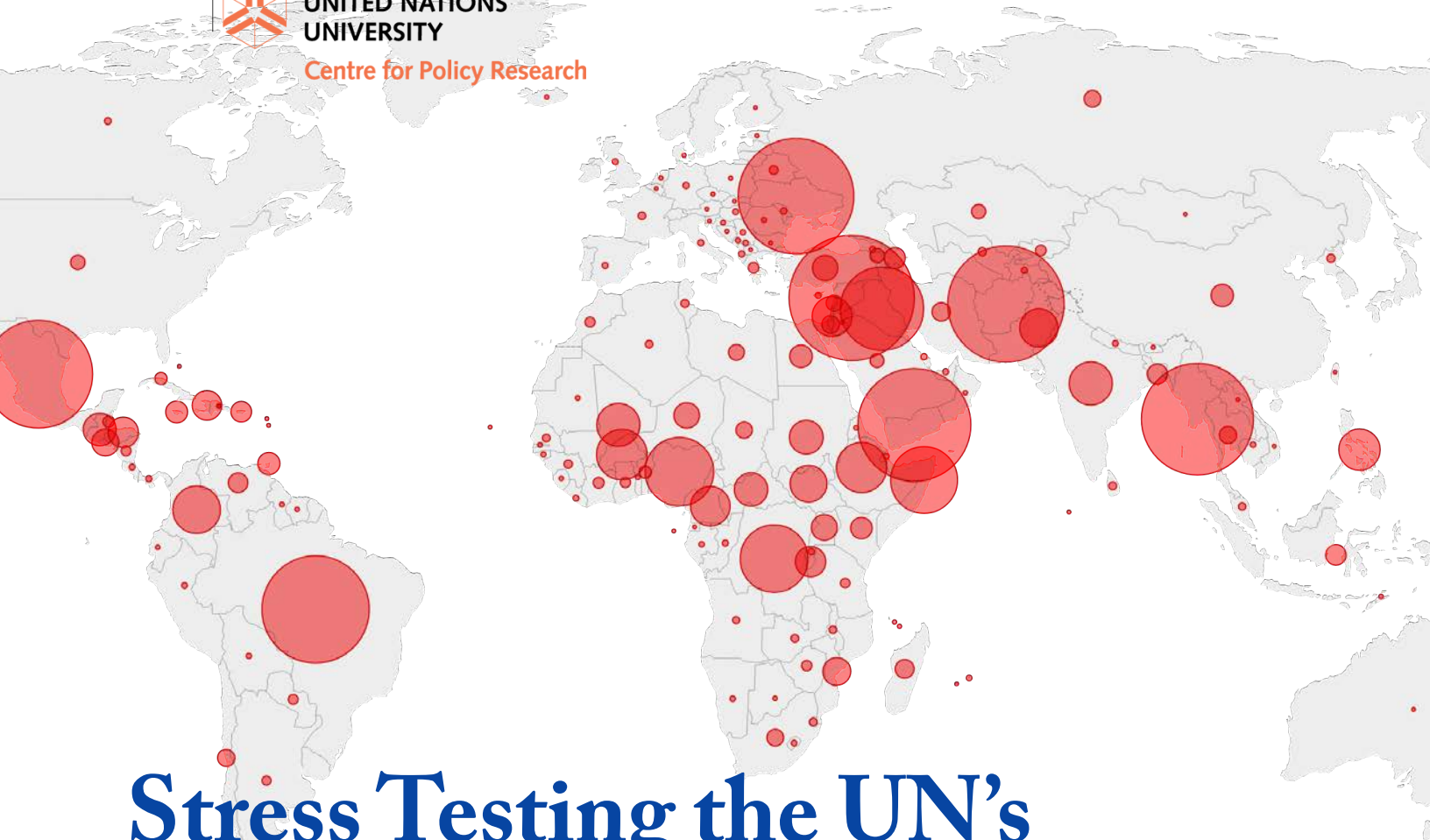




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# Stress Testing the UN's Regional Prevention Approaches

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**Cover:** Data visualization based on the number of organized violent events from 2021 up to 15 March 2022 by country from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).<sup>1</sup>

# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Methods and Report Structure .....	11
<b>What is Prevention? Toward a Working Definition for Regional Engagement .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Reform of the UN Development System at Regional Level: A New Prevention Capacity? .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>UN Prevention Actors at the Regional Level .....</b>	<b>17</b>
Political Offices and Envoys .....	17
Regional Economic Commissions .....	17
Regional Collaborative Platforms .....	18
<b>Regional Prevention – Three Cases .....</b>	<b>20</b>
The Sahel .....	20
The Horn of Africa .....	31
Latin America.....	37
<b>Lessons and Recommendations .....</b>	<b>49</b>
Lessons .....	49
Recommendations .....	55
<b>References .....</b>	<b>60</b>

## Executive Summary

The UN has increasingly become an organization focused on regional engagement. This trend is shown in the creation of new Regional Collaborative Platforms to advance the UN's development agenda,<sup>2</sup> new regional prevention strategies to address the risks of violent conflict,<sup>3</sup> the expansion of Regional Prevention Offices in some regions to provide more fixed capacities for engagement,<sup>4</sup> more consistent use of the Regional Monthly Review process in the Secretary-General's office, and deepened partnerships with regional entities like the African Union (AU), the League of Arab States, and others. Better understanding and responding to risks at the regional level was a key priority for the 2017 reform initiated by Secretary-General Guterres and is also a clear priority in the 2021 *Our Common Agenda*.<sup>5</sup>

This emphasis on regional engagement is a response to the evolution of today's risks, including the rise of transnational organized crime, globally oriented violent extremist groups, large-scale population movements across borders, and the growing impacts of climate change. Recognizing that the UN's regional assets are uniquely placed to counter these risks, the UN has developed a wide range of approaches for working at the regional level. What is lacking, however, is cross-regional understanding of how these investments by the UN at the regional level support prevention in very different contexts. It is not yet clear how the UN's regional approaches on humanitarian, development, and security tracks connect to each other, or indeed to national efforts.

This project aims to address this gap and is guided by the question: *How can the UN better integrate its regional prevention work to more effectively respond to major crises?*

This report provides a working definition of "prevention" and a brief overview of the evolution of regional prevention structures in the UN, and examines three regions where the UN has developed distinct regional approaches: the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and Latin America. Drawing from these cases, and from an expert roundtable consultation with the UN offices in the Great Lakes, Central Africa, Western Asia and Headquarters, this report offers cross-cutting lessons and recommendations for the UN's regional approaches going forward.

## Lessons

- 1. A political balancing act:** Some regional strategies (e.g. the Horn) are primarily political tools that do not attempt to drive programming. Others (e.g. the Sahel) have both a political and development track, while regional approaches like those in Latin America are predominantly development oriented. While the lighter, political strategies may confront fewer sovereignty barriers, they also carry less weight when it comes to delivering programmes. Having a clear understanding of which model fits a specific setting is therefore crucial.
- 2. Integration and its discontents:** The 2017 reforms represent the culmination of decades of efforts to improve integration across the UN system. And in many respects, this has been a success: the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (H-D-P) nexus is now the basis for a growing number of country cooperation frameworks, articulating joint goals and

metrics for the entire UN family in many settings. While there are clear benefits, this project surfaced several problems that could be considered the dark side of integration: (a) challenges of superficial coordination that paper over the reality of independent, siloed approaches by UN agencies; (b) the burden of too much coordination, where UN actors see little value in lengthy integrated planning processes; and (c) a tendency for integration to turn inwards to the UN and ignore the need to partner with national and regional actors.

- 3. A very stretched group of Resident Coordinators:** The expectations on Resident Coordinators (RCs) to perform the full range of prevention activities has led to many of them feeling burned out and overcommitted. This overstretch of RCs has several interrelated knock-on effects for regional strategies: (a) a disconnect between regional plans and national implementation, where RCs only have the bandwidth to focus on their own programming; (b) a resulting underprioritization of regional initiatives in UN national frameworks, and vice versa; and (c) a sense of competition between RCs and their respective regional offices in terms of attracting resources from donors.
- 4. The value of analysis:** The value of regional analysis was acknowledged across the various regions in this study and has also enabled a more sophisticated set of inputs into the Regional Monthly Review process at UN Headquarters. In particular, there was recognition of the importance of regional inputs to Common Country Analysis, the central value of Peace and Development Advisors at national and regional levels, and the growing relevance of regional lenses for issues like climate-driven risks and mobility. However, the project exposed unevenness in data availability and management across regions, with serious holes in the understanding of the UN's impact in key priority areas.
- 5. “Uniquely positioned” for cross-border interventions:** The growth in recent years of cross-border programming has been one of the most important successes of the UN. Thus far, cross-border work has helped to tackle important issues such as farmer-herder tensions, localized disputes over resources, and even some larger-scale issues such as the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam along the Nile. Given current climate, demographic, and conflict trends, cross-border dynamics are likely to become more volatile in the coming period, requiring even more dedicated analysis and response by the UN system and its partners and donors. However, this experience is not uniform, and some of the experiences in Latin America have underscored the limitations of regional structures to anticipate, prioritize, or direct cross-border prevention efforts.
- 6. Growing pains for the Regional Collaborative Platforms:** The Regional Collaborative Platforms (RCPs) initiative has enormous potential to align UN development activities and minimize duplication across large regions. By linking the UN's work to Issue-Based Coalitions (IBCs), the hope is for regional analysis to scale up quickly in anticipation of crises and ensure that the UN responds with the best constellation of actors for a given setting. Keeping in mind that these structures are still relatively new and have not had adequate time to mature and course correct, the report nevertheless finds that early stress tests of the RCPs/IBCs model has yet to demonstrate value added for those implementing prevention strategies in Latin America and in different parts of Africa. Recurrent challenges identified across regional offices include: (a) slow and conflicting

messages about the prevention responsibilities of the RCPs; (b) unclear utility of a single RCP for the continent of Africa; and (c) concern that the overriding development focus of the RCPs may limit its utility for some prevention offices. IBCs have found purchase in some regions, but particularly in the African context were not yet seen as central parts of the UN's prevention work. This may change but could also require a review of how RCPs and IBCs work in different contexts.

## Recommendations

Based on these lessons, the report also offers recommendations for the UN system and Member States to improve regional prevention approaches.

- 1. Take a hard, independent look at the Humanitarian-Development-Peacebuilding nexus:** Integrating approaches across humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors can have enormous benefits, aligning short-term interventions with the kind of deeper structural support that can help regions transition from decades of instability. But these benefits should not be taken as a given. If anything, this project surfaced a growing discontent with the burdens and downsides of implementing the H-D-P nexus, including the enormous time and effort required to produce documents that often do little to improve the effectiveness of programming. Indeed, one of the greatest downsides of the H-D-P work may have been to orient the UN almost entirely inwards in its strategic development, absorbing the bulk of leadership's energy on coordination across UN pillars with comparatively little investment in partnerships with other actors who may have far more leverage and relevance. This worrying finding points to the need for a serious, independent assessment of the H-D-P nexus approach, one that is open to the possibility that omnibus approaches to integration may not always be optimal.
- 2. Co-develop parts of a regional strategy with national and regional actors:** A striking commonality across many regional strategies was their development behind closed doors, amongst UN actors only, and often with only light inputs from national governments and regional organizations. While it may be necessary to keep a close hold on some sensitive aspects of a regional strategy, the downside of a fully internal one is too high. Lack of buy-in from the actors who matter most in a regional strategy spells its certain demise. Instead, the UN should develop strategies at least partially in direct and open collaboration with the national and regional actors who will form its most important partners.
- 3. Explore a spectrum – from framework to strategy:** This study has identified three different prevention models: (a) a cascading model in the Sahel, where regional strategies are meant to shape national plans; (b) a net model in the Horn, that aims to gather actors together in a very wide and permeable boundary, drawing them gradually closer together to achieve added coherence; and (c) an alliance model in Latin America built around coalitions that form on the basis of appeals to other RCs and regional actors for specific and specialist input and funding, taking into account locally-identified risks. This report argues that there is a place for each of these models, and others as well. For instance, in volatile settings with frequent leadership transitions, developing a lighter framework of UN priority areas may be more useful than a full-blown political strategy. The companion

“models” paper to this report offers an easy-to-use approach to deciding what models works best for a given setting.

- 4. Invest time and resources in partnerships:** Across the regions studied, the UN’s partnership with international financial institutions and the private sector was described as *ad hoc* and non-strategic. While there are emerging good practices – such as the growing use of joint UN and World Bank assessments in many countries – the UN still lacks deeper strategic partnerships with international financial institutions, regional banks, and private sector actors who often carry significant weight in fragile settings. Experts pointed out that the UN has had a series of reports from Brahimi to Prodi, from the High-level Panel on Peace Operations to the Common Agenda, all emphasizing partnership but with little actual progress to date in line with these recommendations (with the possible exception of the UN and AU partnership). The message from regional experts was clear: without a much more serious partnership with these actors, the UN will struggle to build leverage and offer meaningful responses in the face of emerging crises. This may well involve a greater share of resources going into partnerships than programming.
- 5. Triage to avoid Resident Coordinator burnout:** RCs are now the fulcrum of the UN’s prevention regime, responsible for bridging the H-D-P nexus, linking to regional organizations, responding to early warning signals, and developing national plans with sometimes difficult governments. As described above, this is an extraordinary burden that has left many RCs overstretched, needing to make difficult decisions about their use of scarce time and resources. The authors frequently heard RCs referring to “burnout” and the impossibility of the tasks facing them, including the onerous obligations of participating in regional initiatives that rarely offered them direct value added. While acknowledging the significant efforts of the Development Coordination Office to generate resources for Resident Coordinator Offices around the world, this research suggests that one of the most important future tasks may be to offer more triage support, finding ways to alleviate some of the reporting, planning, and coordinating burdens that fall on RCs to allow them to pursue their more impactful work. An external audit of the obligations currently being placed on RCs, driven by the goal of reducing their workload to the most effective lines of activity, might be helpful (though of course would impose yet another process on RCs). Another recommendation offered by some experts was the designation of Member State “champions” who can take on some of the broader resource mobilization and coordination work at the regional level, a particularly important role in middle-income countries that struggle to sustain donor attention to indicators of worsening fragility. This suggestion is slated for further review and refinement in a follow-up study.
- 6. Establish common starting points for the regional and national:** There is a significant difference between a regional strategy like the Sahel (which drives programming) and ones like Central Africa and the Horn, which largely align with existing national priorities. Without advocating for one approach over another, research undertaken for this study pointed to the importance of building a common analytic starting point for the UN’s regional and national leadership. Jointly developing a Common Country Analysis and/or cooperation framework is one such way to build a shared understanding of needs. The introduction of Regional Programme Specialists (sometimes colloquially referred to as ‘regional peace and development advisors’) alongside nationally-stationed Peace

and Development Advisors is a very positive development that could drive this common assessment process. Participants at the expert roundtable convened in the context of this study pointed to the need for more cross-regional dialogue that would allow UN personnel to learn from prevention approaches in other regions – they suggested that these opportunities were non-existent now.

- 7. Urgently clarify the prevention role and capacities of Regional Collaborative Platforms and their Issue-Based Coalitions:** This study documented consistent misunderstandings with respect to the role of the RCPs and IBCs and their role in supporting prevention activities. There would be great benefit in clarifying whether RCPs and IBCs have a consistent set of tools and resources that can be deployed in all regions to support prevention approaches and whether the IBCs should coalesce around emerging needs (and end once those needs have been addressed through a sunset clause) or exist in semi-permanence. Additionally, some attention should be given to tailoring the RCP offering to the specific regional prevention models identified in this study – an RCP may operate differently in the Sahel, where a cascading prevention model exists, and Latin America, where this study identified an alliance model. For larger UN entities, the regional level merely represents a back-up resource for country teams. It is clear that national teams do not consistently view the regional assets as a significant resource for the whole UN Country Teams or providing meaningful guidance on prevention approaches. There is specific room to improve how RCs interact with regional experts and the IBCs. In some cases, RCs should have unfettered access to regional experts, possibly through a light coordination with the regional Development Coordination Office Director who can reach out to the relevant experts and networks.
- 8. Differentiate between crisis response and the bigger prevention picture:** Across the strategies, there was a sense that much of prevention was focused on longer-term, structural drivers of conflict. While this is crucial and aligned with key initiatives like the joint World Bank and UN *Pathways for Peace* report, there was a sense that the strategies did not position the UN for crisis response, such as the coups in Guinea and Sudan, or the civil war in Ethiopia. Especially in volatile regions with frequent transitions in leadership, it may be necessary to differentiate between a multi-year approach geared at addressing structural issues, and a nimbler rapid response that allows the UN to act quickly in the face of fast-moving crises. As one UN expert noted: “you can’t expect a working group that meets six times a year to respond to a coup.” This need to work across structural prevention and crisis response simultaneously could be more thoroughly considered in the context of the Regional Monthly Review process in UN Headquarters as well.
- 9. From funding to financing:** Across the regional offices, investment in prevention remains largely centred on project-based funding, responding to the national priorities of major donors or instructions given by regional agency, fund, and programme directors. The result is heavily earmarked, short-term programme funding that is subject to intense competition across UN agencies. A set of interrelated shifts could help in this context: from short-term projects to longer-term programming, from earmarked funds to pooled resources around common objectives (e.g. the Peacebuilding Fund or Multi-Partner Trust Fund), and from measuring success based on fundraising and expenditure to a

much more serious effort at measuring impact. The report offers detailed proposals to support such a shift.

**10. Develop a concept of regional governance:** Much of the UN's work in fragile regions is focused on capacity development for national governments, helping them to improve rule of law, security, and delivery of basic services. As the Sahel and Latin America case studies illustrated, this work on governance is often the most underresourced, despite agreement that poor and/or inequitable governance is a root cause of instability. Moreover, the term "governance" typically refers exclusively to the national capacities of a State to provide stability within its borders. As the Horn of Africa experience over the past four years demonstrates, a lack of functioning regional governance institutions can be a major factor in conflict risks. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development's fragmentation has meant it is poorly positioned to partner with others in addressing new crises. Indeed, signs of fracture within Economic Community of West African States as it struggles to respond to a series of coups and destabilizing trends in West Africa are a worrying indication that it may be less able to prevent future conflicts. In Latin America, the challenge will remain resourcing prevention initiatives that address growing mistrust and a fraying social contract in the context of structured cooperation frameworks with governments that may not acknowledge the utility of such investments. Across other regions, such as the Great Lakes and Central Africa, underfunctioning regional organizations point to the need for greater investment and attention to the priority of regional governance.

**11. Invest in data:** The UN remains an extraordinarily activity-driven organization, often equating programmatic expenditure with impact. However, where regions have taken data seriously – such as the emerging work on the Sahel strategy – the UN has an evidence base to drive programming. By drawing on UN-generated data in the Sahel, the authors were able to point to mismatches between analysis and resources, but also to innovative ways the UN has gradually shifted approaches in response to new dynamics (e.g. transhumance). Across much of the UN, however, the system remains mired in outdated activity-based budgets, programming that is not based in a theory of change, and a poor sense of whether the UN is having any impact at all. While it is often difficult to establish the complex causal links between prevention activities and risk reduction,<sup>6</sup> the first step is to take data collection and analysis much more seriously. The Regional Economic Commissions hold significant data, but they are not a panacea. The UN Office of Internal Oversight Services and Joint Inspection Unit's reports have noted that, while Regional Economic Commissions are meant to provide effective and reliable support to Member States in connection with the 2030 Agenda, there was "insufficient capacity to address key statistical needs and the lack of resources to respond appropriately."<sup>7</sup>

## Introduction

The UN has increasingly become an organization focused on regional engagement. This trend is shown in the creation of new Regional Collaborative Platforms to advance the UN's development agenda,<sup>8</sup> new regional prevention strategies to address the risks of violent conflict,<sup>9</sup> the expansion of Regional Prevention Offices to provide more fixed capacities for engagement,<sup>10</sup> more systematic use of the Regional Monthly Review process in Headquarters, and deepened partnerships with regional entities like the African Union (AU), the League of Arab States, and others. Better understanding and responding to risks at the regional level was a key priority for the 2017 reform initiated by Secretary-General Guterres, which resulted in the creation of three new Assistant Secretary-General-led regional structures in the UN Secretariat, and is also a clear priority in the 2021 *Our Common Agenda*,<sup>11</sup> which highlights regional prevention as a central aspect of the New Agenda for Peace. While some of these regional capacities have been in place for decades, this attempt to orient all pillars of the UN's work around common regional approaches has accelerated in recent years.

The UN's growing emphasis on regional engagement is in large part a response to an evolving understanding of the interrelated risks facing the world today. The rise of transnational organized crime has created a global web of illicit flows of resources, weapons, and people that undermines stability in many regions. Today's most violent conflicts are sustained by the direct involvement of regional actors, often in strategic competition over resources and influence, while the growth of globally-oriented violent extremist groups poses serious challenges to nationally-driven prevention efforts.<sup>12</sup> Climate change is already generating deeply disruptive cross-border impacts, including desertification across the Sahel, large-scale crop failures in the Horn of Africa, loss of livelihoods in South Asia and Central America, and immediate existential risks for low-lying coastal regions globally.<sup>13</sup> Compounding these trends, deeply uneven development across different regions has meant that risks of instability and large-scale human suffering are increasingly driven by inequality, corruption, and marginalization.

Regional organizations can play an important role in addressing these risks, often forming the front line of effective prevention responses. Entities like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have achieved extraordinary results in terms of addressing political crises in West Africa, while organizations like the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) have built highly effective regional partnerships that provide crucial data collection, analysis, and policy coherence functions in Latin America, helping to address large-scale risks associated with underdevelopment. As the Secretary-General's *Our Common Agenda* notes: "regional actors are central to sustaining peace and preventing and responding to insecurity" and should be bolstered.

This proliferation of regional offices, envoys, and strategies has generated a diversity of approaches across different regions, without a clear understanding of the different models being implemented. This is a worrying knowledge gap given that some recent assessments have pointed to continuing siloes within the UN system, disjointed responses across regional actors, and often superficial engagement between the UN and regional players.<sup>14</sup> Importantly, it is not yet clear how the UN's regional approaches on development and security connect to each other, or indeed help to drive national level programming.

In this context, there is a risk that the UN's well-intentioned shift towards greater regional engagement may not result in more impactful interventions that help to reduce the interrelated risks of violent conflict, uneven development, and socioeconomic shocks. This report aims to improve our understanding of regional prevention approaches to support smarter investments in regional prevention approaches.

## Methods and Report Structure

This project was designed to advance the UN's understanding of regional approaches. It is guided by the overarching question: *How can the UN better integrate its regional prevention work to more effectively respond to major crises?*

This outcome report tells the story of regional prevention and draws lessons for policymakers and practitioners. It documents findings from three regions where the UN has developed notably different structures and approaches at the regional level: (1) the Sahel, (2) the Horn of Africa, and (3) Latin America. In each, the project examines the evolution of a regional approach by the UN over recent years, the relationships it has established with regional, national, and local actors, and the types of engagements it has implemented.

The report is structured in four sections. First, it addresses a crucial question: what is prevention? Given the wide range of engagements examined in this report, having a working definition of prevention that captures this objective is an important starting point. Second, it explores the most recent evolutions in the UN's regional architecture, including the creation of regional groupings in the Secretariat, the development of new regional strategies, and the reform of the UN Development System, especially the establishment of Regional Collaboration Platforms (RCPs) and Issue-Based Coalitions (IBCs). Third, the report presents three case studies on the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and Latin America, comparing how regional approaches play out in very different contexts. Finally, it makes broad recommendations for the UN system and its partners to develop more coherent, integrated, and effective regional approaches going forward. Ultimately, the report should be considered a direct attempt to further the call in *Our Common Agenda* to invest more and better in regional prevention.

The report draws on a range of interviews with UN experts, regional leaders, and those directly involved in programming in each region. The preliminary findings were presented at a roundtable event in which members of the prevention offices covering the Great Lakes, Central Africa, and Central Asia, joined with UN leaders at Headquarters and specialists responsible for Latin America, to contribute insights and compare their experiences against this report's preliminary findings.

## What is Prevention? Toward a Working Definition for Regional Engagement

The term “prevention” is employed across a wide range of settings and activities in the UN system.<sup>15</sup> The most visible and widely accepted definition concerns *conflict prevention*, captured by the call in the UN Charter for effective collective measures for the “prevention of threats to the peace.” Here, the emphasis is on political approaches to reducing risks of escalation into large-scale violent conflict, particularly preventive diplomacy, mediation, good offices, and confidence-building measures, but also “sharper” tools such as sanctions and the threat of use of force.<sup>16</sup> These activities are sometimes categorized as “operational prevention,” meaning they are deployed to address an imminent risk of violent conflict.<sup>17</sup>

However, prevention in the context of violent conflict is certainly not the only use of the term “prevention” in the UN system. Prevention of violent extremism (PVE), for example, describes a range of more systemic activities to reduce the risks of radicalization and recruitment into terrorist groups, including education, development programming, and capacity-building.<sup>18</sup> The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has developed a set of policies geared at prevention of human rights violations that include legal actions, investigations, public information, and capacity-building.<sup>19</sup> The health sector – where the term “prevention” likely originated – has a comprehensive set of models to prevent chronic disease and other forms of physical harm. Moreover, the arenas of humanitarian response and disaster risk reduction have both developed broad approaches termed “prevention” that dramatically expand the term beyond the narrower conflict prevention role envisaged in the UN Charter and the peace and security pillar of the UN. And in the environmental field, prevention encapsulates a wide array of activities to reduce carbon emissions and shape the trajectory of global warming.

The many different interpretations of the term complicate efforts to design institutions, platforms and responsibilities that effectively leverage the pooled resources of the UN system in support of this priority agenda. This holds true for communication with Member States, as many conflate upstream and downstream prevention efforts that can, in some circumstances, undermine support for the prevention agenda.<sup>20</sup> In reality, there are no bright lines between *operational prevention* – interventions to prevent an immediate escalation into violent conflict – and the *structural or systemic* forms of prevention – aimed at addressing root causes, inequalities, and other contextual factors that heighten conflict risks in the long term (sometimes also referred to as *upstream prevention*).<sup>21</sup>

In fact, a clear trend within the UN system has been to understand that mass human suffering results from deeply interconnected factors – issues of conflict, underdevelopment, inequality, and environmental shocks that create compound risks. The landmark UN-World Bank *Pathways for Peace* report, for example, acknowledges the direct links between political exclusion, inequality, and conflict risks, demanding that prevention be founded in a holistic understanding of root causes.<sup>22</sup> This aligns with the framing of the Sustaining Peace resolutions of 2016,<sup>23</sup> which demonstrate a common position across Member States, specifically, that poverty reduction and equitable development are crucial to the UN’s approach to conflict prevention.

For Secretary-General Guterres, the prevention and sustaining peace priorities entail both a focus on preventive diplomacy and effectively addressing underlying challenges to sustainable development.<sup>24</sup> These priorities are mutually reinforcing. As the Secretary-General articulated in his report on repositioning the United Nations Development System: “Sustainable development builds resilience and sustains peace, and sustained peace enables sustainable development.”<sup>25</sup>

These evolutions in our understanding of risks have meant the UN has pivoted toward more structural forms of prevention, working to direct development and peacebuilding support towards a reduction in the risks of violent conflict. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) articulate a holistic understanding of the steps needed for more resilient, peaceful societies. The Humanitarian-Development-Peacebuilding (H-D-P) nexus<sup>26</sup> recognizes that all aspects of the UN’s work need to be brought together to address risks of instability and prevent mass human suffering.

The need for large-scale crisis response as well as improved collaboration across the UN system on health, conflict, humanitarian, and development at the regional level is clear.<sup>27</sup> Unlike the fallout of the 2008 financial crisis, which led to a retrenchment of regionalism to national priority issues, the unprecedented health crisis sparked by the COVID-19 outbreak could have the opposite effect – hastening the focus on the prevention agenda centred on a push for deeper integration at regional level as part of recovery efforts. How this is currently working and how it can be improved through strengthened regional approaches are the core questions motivating this study.

## Reform of the UN Development System at Regional Level: A New Prevention Capacity?

The reform of the UN Development System at the regional level has been described by the UN Deputy-Secretary-General as “one of the most complex endeavours of the reform effort” due to variations in governance mechanisms, data limitations, and deep differences across regions.<sup>28</sup> These reforms sought specifically to strengthen capacities at the regional level to support the realization of the SDGs.<sup>29</sup>

In 2017, the Secretary-General issued a full proposal for the reforms of the UN Development System in a report entitled *Repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: ensuring a better future for all*.<sup>30</sup> The repositioning strategy benefited from a broad stakeholder consultation, outside expert research (notably the 2017 Dalberg report and a 2017 Department of Economic and Social Affairs [DESA] analytical study),<sup>31</sup> and the inputs of a dedicated reference group.<sup>32</sup> Neither the 2017 Dalberg report nor the DESA analytical study addressed prevention efforts in the context of the UN Development System. Nevertheless, it was clear from the early days of the reform efforts that strengthened regional UN assets could play a significant role in addressing the root causes of conflict. While Member States were overwhelmingly in favour of the reforms, the proposals did have several detractors, and at least some of these misgivings had to do with the deeper integration of development and prevention activities.<sup>33</sup>

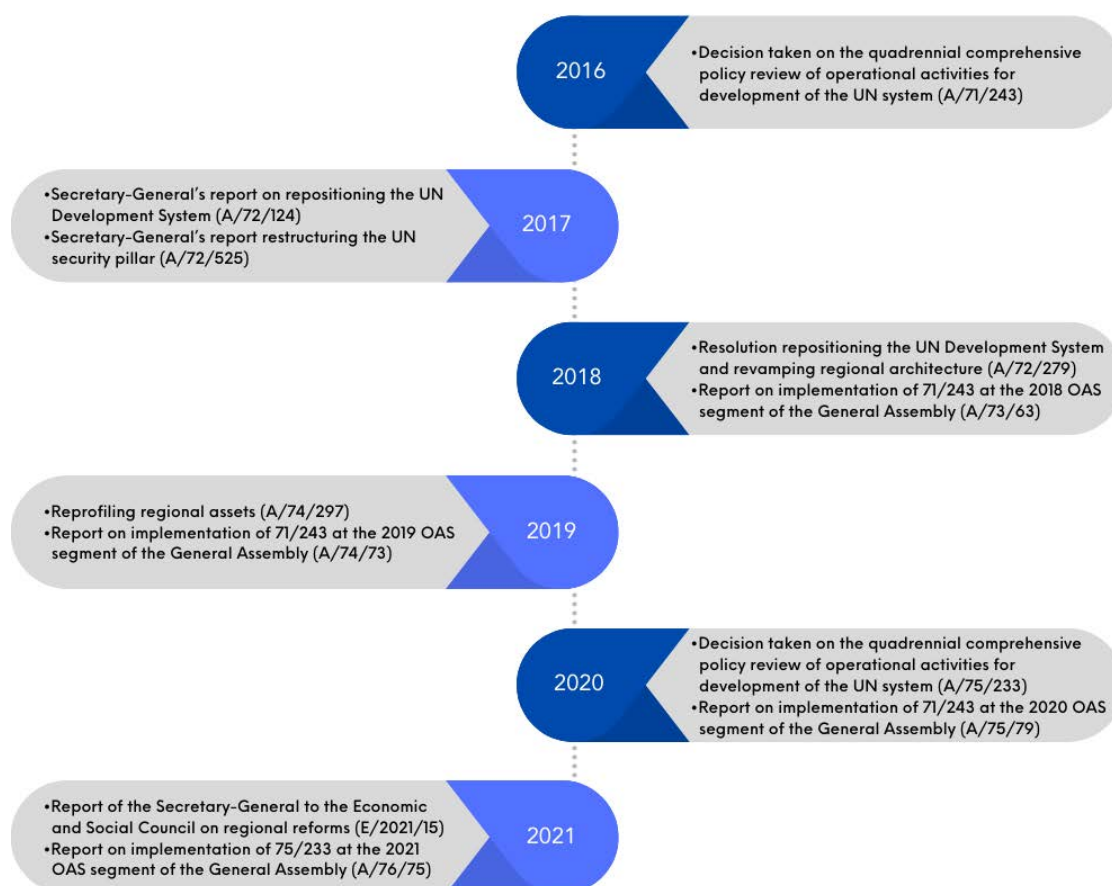
In addition to the five dedicated capacities created in Resident Coordinator Offices (RCOs), regional level capacities were to be bolstered through the addition of two additional staff for each regional office, under a new regional manager at the Director level – three new positions in total. Approximately 15 per cent of the funding increases sought for the reinvigorated development system were earmarked for upgrades at the regional level, with 80 per cent concentrated on improving capacities at national level.<sup>34</sup> Expenditures for regional capacities were to double from USD 5 million to USD 10 million.<sup>35</sup> These reforms at the regional level were meant to:<sup>36</sup>

- Achieve cost efficiencies by streamlining representation and capacities;
- Foster, through the regional commissions, a platform for the exchange of best practices;
- Strengthen research, data analysis – including regional and cross-border analysis and initiatives aligned with national development needs and priorities – and integrated and coordinated policy support to countries within regions;
- Translate, adapt, and contextualize global policy for regional, subregional, and cross-border application;
- Support UN country teams and Resident Coordinators to achieve the results set out in their Cooperation Framework;
- Help with upstreaming policy advocacy, including by taking up issues potentially too sensitive in a national context.

The potential impact of the regional reform is clear: improved analysis, on demand, could lead to improved response time and improved results on the ground. The headwinds were also clear early in the reforms: entrenched agency interests operating in a competitive funding environment

were unlikely to deliver a swift upgrade to the UN's regional assets and approaches and, at worst, could significantly delay the prevention pivot advocated by the Secretary-General.

**Figure 1: Key Moments in the Reform of the UN Development System**



The 2019 review of the regional reform process found a fragmented constellation of UN actors at the regional level, competition over funding, and lack of trust all holding back regional reforms and effectiveness.<sup>37</sup> The UN-commissioned Centro de Pensamiento Estratégico Internacional (Cepei) report, *A sustainable regional UN*, tabled at the 2019 Operational Activities Segment meeting, concluded that regional assets in the development system could deliver additional value, notably by addressing transboundary and politically-sensitive issues. However, the system of agencies that comprise the UN's regional system would need to communicate, coordinate, and calibrate their activities to a far greater extent than they currently did, and work to tackle trust deficits that permeated entities represented at the regional level.<sup>38</sup> Several years into the reform agenda, the starkest challenge still related to collaboration within the UN system.<sup>39</sup> Implicit in the 2019 operational activities for development segment (OAS) recommendations is the view that a reformed UN Development System at regional level could improve the effectiveness of agencies, funds and programmes, and better support the Resident Coordinators (RCs) in addressing multidimensional challenges, including the nexus of peace, humanitarian, and development challenges if the identified challenges could be overcome.

Cooperation and trust at the country level is helped by a notable increase in the availability of pooled funding, which make resources available to multiple UN entities at once with the

explicit aim of supporting joint programmes (e.g. Joint SDG Fund, Peacebuilding Fund [PBF], and the Central Emergency Response Fund [CERF]). The Joint SDG Fund is still scaling up to their USD 290 million per year financing target, and presently operates with less than a third of this amount, making available approximately USD 80-90 million per year for joint projects in the UN Development System. It is a unique pooled fund, insofar as donors do not earmark the funding provided to the Fund.

The emerging evidence on the effectiveness of joint pooled funding is encouraging. However, numerous UN officials interviewed pointed out that the limited size of pooled funds constrain the transformational potential of such funding. Officials in the UN Development System leadership acknowledged that the Joint SDG Fund remains too small when compared with its ambitions. The view on the ground is similar – the Fund has brought out the best of agencies, funds, and programmes in country teams, raising the quality of joint work and planning, opening collaboration possibilities, improving cross-agency linkages, and as one UN colleague stated, these funds: “support discovery through partnership.” This research has found that there is widespread recognition in all regions of the benefits of pooled funding for increased collaboration at the country level.<sup>40</sup> Regional structures are not eligible for many pooled funding mechanisms as of the publication of this report.

## UN Prevention Actors at the Regional Level

It is important to stress from the outset that the main prevention actors at the regional level are the Member States and the regional organizations they have created. Even in areas where the UN has a relatively strong presence (e.g. the Sahel), it acts in support of Member State-driven processes and institutions, and in collaboration with major donors, banks, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). While this section focuses on the UN's regional capacities, it should be clear that these are only a small fraction of the constellation of actors involved in prevention.

### Political Offices and Envoys

In regions like Central Africa, the Great Lakes, the Horn of Africa, and Central Asia, the UN has established regional prevention offices and/or envoys. These are politically-led offices with a mandate largely centred on the provision of good offices and coordination across other UN entities. As the Horn of Africa study below describes, these prevention offices do not direct UN programming, but instead help to align it behind common objectives based on shared analysis. In the Sahel, the UN's political office (the UN Office for West Africa – UNOWAS) now co-exists alongside an office mandated to implement the UN Development Strategy for the Sahel, meaning the political and development tracks are both headed at the Under-Secretary-General level. In Latin America and Asia, the UN's regional approach is entirely driven by the development system.

These field-based entities relate to UN Headquarters through different pathways. The political offices and special envoys are supported out of the UN's Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), whereas the Resident Coordinator-led institutions report to the Deputy Secretary-General through the Development Coordination Office (DCO). Within the Secretary-General's Office, a Regional Monthly Review process allows for executive decision-making based on direct interaction with the field presences.

Given that the newest changes in the UN system have taken place in the development arena, the following subsections provide more detail on the evolution of the UN's Regional Economic Commissions (RECs), and the creation of RCPs.

### Regional Economic Commissions

RECs play an especially important development and coordination role in the UN system.<sup>41</sup> The potential for greater development impact through improved collaboration between the RECs and the UN Development System was stressed in resolution 71/243, which recalled the 2016 statement of collaboration between the United Nations Development Group and the UN regional commissions on support to Member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>42</sup> In his positioning paper on the UN Development System reforms, the Secretary-General described the regional commissions as “the connective tissue between the global and local levels,” offering regional perspectives on global issues.<sup>43</sup> Their function is to serve as policy think tanks, providing data and analytical services and policy advice to address regional issues and promote regional norms, standards, and conventions. They might

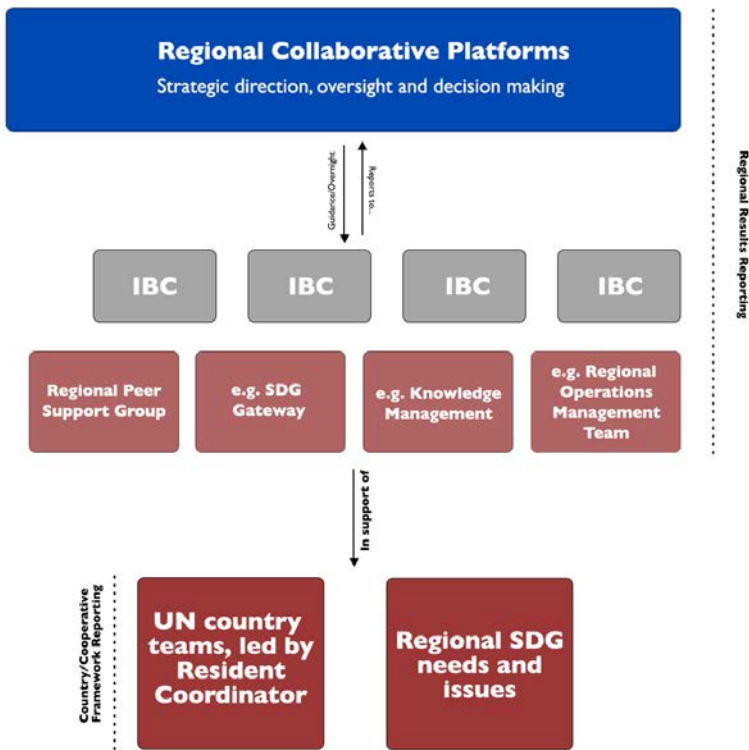
also be considered engagement platforms, as they promote interaction with governments and intergovernmental institutions, as well as intra- and interregional exchanges, extending development cooperation and regional partnership efforts.<sup>44</sup>

## Regional Collaborative Platforms

RCPs are the main internal UN-wide collaboration platform for sustainable development at the regional level, established to facilitate the inter-agency collaboration. This is set out in detail in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolution 2020/23 on progress in the implementation of the QCPR.

The Deputy-Secretary-General defines the role of RCPs as: “providing strategic direction and decision-making for regional activities in support of regional, subregional, transboundary or common issues and priorities.” At their inception, RCPs were also described as a strategic complement to the annual Regional Forums organized under the auspices of ECLAC, capable of “[translating] the outcomes of the Regional Sustainable Development Forums into concrete programmatic responses by regional entities.”<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the RCPs were thought to bookend the meetings of the Regional Forum, helping shape the agenda ahead of these meetings, and later facilitate implementation of the agreed priorities for the region. RCPs were not to implement operational activities, nor serve as platforms for intergovernmental negotiations.

Figure 2: Regional Collaborative Platform Architecture



Source: UN Sustainable Development Group<sup>46</sup>

RCPs do have a more specific prevention role. They are meant to work with the DPPA, Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs) and peace operations and Regional Humanitarian Coordinators, as well as humanitarian country teams to ensure full complementarity and contribution to resilience, prevention, and sustaining peace objectives.<sup>47</sup> This entails supporting linkages between humanitarian and development programming and in conflict and post-conflict settings, supporting the integration of the work of UN country teams with UN peace operations to fully contribute to building resilience, prevention, and sustaining peace.<sup>48</sup> RCPs are meant to achieve these objectives principally by serving as a consultation, coordination, and information-sharing platform through their communications, advocacy, and policy support functions, as well as through personnel oversight and strategic planning functions.

Finally, the RCPs are meant to facilitate connectivity, allowing the UN Development System to work effectively at the regional/global nexus, and at the regional/national nexus. The Secretary-General has described the purpose and added value of RECs in similar terms – it is therefore important to emphasize that the constituent entities of RCPs all play this function independently and are meant to do so jointly in RCPs.

There is a clear benefit to building up a regional capacity to address region-specific risks and root causes of fragility and crisis, especially in the context of cross-border challenges, such as climate security – a theme that does not have a natural institutional home within the UN system. The key mechanism created to do this is the IBC.

A major part of the RCPs' substantive activities is anchored in the work of time-bound, demand-driven, and results-oriented IBCs (see Figure 2).

The IBCs are guided by six principles. They are to:

1. Be agile, responsive to changing country needs, results-oriented, and demand-driven;
2. Ensure engagement of RCs in coordination with DCO;
3. Focus on multi-country/multi-agency initiatives. Build upon existing ones to maximize impact;
4. Avoid duplication between regional and national initiatives;
5. Ensure advocacy efforts focus on sensitive issues difficult to raise at the country level;
6. Integrate and coordinate responses among IBCs and the Partnerships and Communication Group.

The IBCs are addressed in the sections that follow because they have been framed as catalysts for the regional reform, i.e. one of the key mechanisms that will make the ambition of the reforms concrete.<sup>49</sup> As of 2021, all five regions of the UN have RCPs in place, as well as IBCs, and knowledge hub websites.

## Regional Prevention – Three Cases

The UN's regional engagement differs dramatically from region to region. Some regions, like the Sahel, have a well-established regional architecture, relatively strong regional partners, long-standing strategies, and significant international investment. Others, like the Horn of Africa, have a newer UN strategy, relatively weak regional partners, and a much less concerted investment by the international community. The UN in Latin America has not established an overall regional political strategy and instead has several dynamic subregional initiatives closely tied to cross-border challenges and have traditionally struggled to attract international investment for prevention owing to their middle-income status of many countries that make up the region. This section compares UN engagement across these three regions. It provides the basis for the cross-cutting recommendations that follow.

### The Sahel

From sub-Saharan Senegal to northern Ethiopia,<sup>50</sup> Sahelian countries are some of the most fragile in the world. While each country is unique, risks across the Sahel tend to be transnational and interdependent, driven by far-reaching criminal networks, violent extremist groups, large-scale population movements, poor cross-border and domestic governance capacities, highly unequal development, and some of the most acute impacts of climate change in the world.<sup>51</sup> These risks are also overwhelmingly socioeconomic. The 2018 *UN Support Plan for the Sahel* identifies root causes of fragility in terms of the lack of rule of law, perceptions of exclusion among marginalized groups, lack of natural resources management, poor livelihood options, demographic pressures, food insecurity, and lack of access to basic services, including energy.<sup>52</sup>

**Figure 3: The Sahel**



At the same time, the Sahel can be thought of as a “global public good,”<sup>53</sup> a region of extraordinary economic, natural, and social potential that could play a positive role across the continent. Transforming that potential, while addressing the persistent and deeply-rooted risks to the people of the Sahel, is one of the UN’s highest priorities.

## **The UN Sahel Strategy – Structures and Partners**

The UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) was formalized via a Security Council resolution in 2013 and forms the centre of the multilateral response to the challenges facing the region, in particular those related to fragility and forced displacement.<sup>54</sup> The strategy aims to address the root causes of violent conflict by advancing three areas of support to national and regional institutions: (1) governance, (2) resilience, and (3) security (described in more detail below).

Structurally, UNISS constitutes a crucial aspect of the mandate for UNOWAS, a regional prevention office headed at the Under-Secretary-General level in Dakar. UNOWAS has the responsibility for preventive diplomacy and political/mediation efforts across the region, also coordinating international support to regional institutions in the areas of governance, rule of law, human rights, and gender mainstreaming. UNOWAS’ key external partners for this work include the AU, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS, which has its own conflict prevention framework),<sup>55</sup> the Mano River Union,<sup>56</sup> the Lake Chad Basin Commission,<sup>57</sup> the Gulf of Guinea Commission,<sup>58</sup> and the regional security arrangement referred to as the G-5 Sahel.

In 2018, UNISS was bolstered with the UN Sahel Support Plan (UNSP), a UN-wide development-focused approach over a 12-year period (2018-2030), designed to give common direction to the UN agencies, funds and programmes in the region.<sup>59</sup> Headed by an Under-Secretary-General, the UNSP is not a new plan per se, but is conceived as an “operational tool” to mobilize resources, prioritize investments, and give overall direction to UN programming.<sup>60</sup> As a senior UN official explained “Think of the UNSP as the development arm of UNISS. The support plan generates and aligns resources behind the overarching goals of UNISS.”

Many of the UN’s regional partners and initiatives stretch beyond UNISS’ mandated countries: the G5 Sahel, for example, includes Chad, a country that formally falls within the mandate of the UN Office for Central Africa (UNOCA). Similarly, the Lake Chad Basin Commission covers Central African Republic and Libya, both outside of UNOWAS’ mandated region.<sup>61</sup> “The Sahel Strategy is like a Venn diagram with a concentration of circles around Mali, Niger, Chad, and Burkina Faso, but lots of circles that also go beyond the Sahel out to other regions in North and Central Africa,” one expert described.<sup>62</sup> The largest of these circles is the newly formed RCP for Africa, a continent-wide coordination mechanism across all UN entities headed by the Deputy Secretary-General.<sup>63</sup>

The UN’s Sahel strategy coexists alongside roughly twenty other international and regional strategies and initiatives, including by the AU,<sup>64</sup> the World Bank,<sup>65</sup> the EU,<sup>66</sup> major Member States,<sup>67</sup> regional banks,<sup>68</sup> and regional groupings like the Sahel Alliance<sup>69</sup> and the Sahel Coalition.<sup>70</sup> Together, these actors drive massive investment into the Sahel, by some estimates more than USD 56 billion in the 2015-2019 period.<sup>71</sup> “Everyone has a Sahel strategy,” one

regional expert explained. “Some of them are nationally driven around issues like counter-terrorism, and some are focused on generating resources for particular programmes like green growth or addressing farmer-herder conflicts. But together, the money they spend dictates our outcomes.” How to give common direction and translate priorities into effective programming amid this cacophony of strategies and initiatives, is an overriding challenge for the UN in the Sahel.

## The UN’s Programming in the Sahel

To address the root causes of instability in the Sahel, UNISS is organized around three pillars of work: governance, resilience, and security. Twelve thematic areas are identified, with the majority under resilience and fewer than half under security and governance. Together, these pillars provide a theory of change for UNISS that can broadly be captured by the statement: “if the UN directs resources into priority programming under each pillar, it will help to address underlying causes of conflict/displacement and contribute to improved national and regional conflict prevention capacities across its partners.”<sup>72</sup>

**Table 1. UN Sahel Strategy**

Pillar	Priority Area	Thematic Areas
<b>Governance</b>  Inclusive and effective governance throughout the region is enhanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross-border and regional cooperation</li> <li>• Women and youth empowerment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforcement of the rule of law and access to justice</li> </ul>
<b>Security</b>  National and regional security mechanisms are capable of addressing cross-border threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preventing and resolving conflicts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peace consolidation and crisis prevention</li> <li>• Youth deradicalization against violent extremism</li> <li>• Reintegration of IDPs</li> <li>• Forced displacement border management and drug control</li> </ul>
<b>Resilience</b>  Humanitarian and development plans and integrations are integrated to build long-term resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive and equitable growth</li> <li>• Resilience to climate change</li> <li>• Access to renewable energy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate resilient agriculture and food security</li> <li>• Land restoration and ecosystem revitalization against climate change</li> <li>• Water conservation for pastoralists and agriculture schemes</li> <li>• Resilience wash services</li> <li>• Early childhood education</li> <li>• Women economic empowerment ventures</li> <li>• Youth entrepreneurial development and economic empowerment</li> </ul>

Priority is not allocated evenly across the three pillars, however. A 2021 rapid assessment of UNISS indicated that roughly 70 per cent of total funding is allocated to the resilience pillar, with 15 per cent allocated to governance and 15 per cent to security.<sup>73</sup> Within the resilience pillar, initiatives focused on women and youth empowerment, adaptation to climate change, and cross-border regional collaboration received the highest stated priority, while water conservation to address farmer-herder conflicts received far less. Within the security pillar, forced displacement and radicalization receive the least priority, while crisis prevention receives the most.

Uneven prioritization is not necessarily a bad thing; in fact, it may suggest that programming is tailored well to dynamics on the ground. The fact that roughly 40 per cent of the UNSP outcomes are channelled towards inclusive and equitable growth reflects the underlying analysis that uneven economic opportunities and lack of livelihoods are a key driver of fragility. The burgeoning cross-border programming too – for example in the Liptako-Gourma region in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger (see box) – indicates that the UN is increasingly able to respond to transnational trends like migration, forced displacement, farmer-herder dynamics, and the impacts of climate change.<sup>74</sup>

Burkina Faso offers one example of the UN's prevention approach playing out in-country. In 2018, the Secretary-General set Burkina Faso as one of seven countries that would be focused upon for the so-called New Way of Working across the development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding actors. UN offices in the field were tasked to develop "collective outcomes" jointly with the government, while a Joint Steering Committee to advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration was established under the Deputy Secretary-General to review the progress towards these outcomes. Early rollout of this approach generated the Common Country Analysis, revealing clear links among instability, vulnerability and exclusion. According to the RC in Ouagadougou, this joint analysis provided an important platform to lobby the government for a shift in its approach, from focusing its resources at the national level to more provincial and local engagement. Over 2019, the Executive Committee of the Secretary-General held three meetings on Burkina Faso, which included direct briefings by the RC on the needs of the UN in country. Upon the recommendation of the RC, five new offices were set up, all reporting to the UN Country Team, with more than 800 UN staff deployed in-country. Also on the instruction of the Executive Committee, a well-known mediator was sent by the UN Mediation Standby Team to Ouagadougou to assist with the establishment of an infrastructure for peace in the country as part of the Government's social cohesion strategy. While the situation in Burkina Faso remains extremely fragile, the ability of the UN system to generate common outcomes and take action on the basis of field-driven analysis is a positive development.

More broadly, in terms of allocation of resources, there appear to be some gaps between the analysis of risks and the response across the region. For example, while clearly identified as a priority for long-term stability, over the past several years women and youth empowerment has received far fewer resources than planned, and is considered "least prioritized" by recent assessments of funding streams.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, based on 2021 data and interviews with a range of experts on the Sahel, the lack of programming in the areas of natural resource management and access to land demonstrate a "mismatch" between conflict drivers and solutions. "UNOWAS has done in-depth research demonstrating the link between natural resource management and a host of security risks, but the programming has not caught up," one expert stated.

Importantly, this kind of 'gaps analysis' is enabled by a serious effort at data and knowledge management by UNISS, UNSP and its partners. The UN's Sahel Predictive Analytics project, for example, has helped to consolidate and analyse data from a wide range of sources, offering the

UN system a far more robust understanding of regional dynamics than it has elsewhere in the world.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, the monitoring and evaluation assessments commissioned under the UNSP have produced detailed and targeted understandings of the flows of resources, facilitating a clearer picture of shortfalls and areas of need.

One of the key challenges and priorities in implementing the UNISS and UNSP has been the unfinished process of aligning national programming with the regional priorities. A 2021 UNISS progress report noted that a combination of limited involvement by national partners, lack of cross-UN programme planning, and limited operational interaction between humanitarian and development agencies posed real challenges to translating the broad regional goals into national action.<sup>77</sup> There has been significant progress on this front, however, and as of early 2022, nearly all of the country cooperation frameworks in the Sahel had been broadly aligned with the UNISS and UNSP. And on the ground, the UNISS and UNSP team has taken forward a number of activities to help align national actors behind the regional priorities, including: building a regional network of national political and civil society leaders to help address farmer-herder conflicts; support to a national governors forum, bringing together leaders from the tri-state Liptako-Gourma subregion; support to the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Lake Chad Regional Stabilization Facility and its partners in addressing threats posed by Boko Haram.<sup>78</sup>

**Table 3: UNISS Pillar Breakdown**

UNISS Pillar	No. of Projects	Total Budget (USD)	Total Mobilized (USD)	Budget Gap (USD)	Implementing Agencies
Governance	13	379 M	133 M	246 M	UNDP, UNCDG, UNV, UNICEF, UN WOMEN, UNOCT, UNREC, UNICEF, UNHCR, OHCHR, ILO, UNESCO
Security	21	140 M	75 M	67 M	UNODC, IOM, CTD, UNIDO, UNICRI, UNDP, OHCHR
Resilience	11	5.5 B	3.85 B	1.546 B	UNICEF, WFP, ILO, FAO, UNFPA, UN WOMEN, UNIDO, UNESCO, UNHCR, OCHA, UNDP, OHCHR

Source: UN Sahel Strategy<sup>79</sup>

## Impact of Sahel Programming

A persistent challenge across the Sahel is to demonstrate the prevention impact of the various programmes and interventions, many of which are focused on immediate humanitarian relief or long-term capacity development. In some areas, a theory of impact is relatively easy to establish: the reintegration of 260 former Boko Haram members back into their communities can clearly be linked to a reduction in risk of insecurity.<sup>80</sup> In the Lake Chad region, the construction of six police stations, three courts, and provision of livelihood options for more than 5,000 individuals over the 2019-2020 period can also be considered evidence that the UN has helped to develop national prevention capacities and address root causes of instability. However, given the focus on regional engagement in this report, project-by-project analysis is less useful, whereas broader indicators of instability reduction are more important.

Instead, one way to broadly understand regional impact is to examine governance and fragility indicators across the UNISS countries, where improvements could be the partial result of UN and partner engagement. In terms of governance and fragility, the *Fragile States Index* indicates improvement in eight out of ten of the UNISS countries over the 2016-2020 period, with region-wide fragility improving by roughly 3 points on its 100-point scale.<sup>81</sup> Two countries, Mali and Cameroon, saw fairly small worsening of their fragility indicators according to this index. More recently, the 2019-2020 period witnessed an overall worsening in the fragility measures across the Sahel, perhaps reflecting the impact of COVID-19.

**Table 4: SDG Index Rankings**

Country	2020 SDG Index Score	2020 SDG Index Rank
Burkina Faso	55.22	137
Cameroon	56.54	133
Chad	43.75	164
The Gambia	57.86	129
Guinea	52.47	150
Mali	51.39	156
Mauritania	57.22	130
Niger	50.15	157
Nigeria	49.28	160
Senegal	58.27	127

Source: Sustainable Development Report<sup>82</sup>

In terms of governance, the World Justice Project's *Rule of Law Index* indicates a very modest improvement in aggregate rule of law capacities across the Sahel, with Cameroon, The Gambia, and Mali seeing a decline.<sup>83</sup> The World Bank's Governance Indicators for the same period saw a modest improvement in governance across the Sahel, driven in large part by significant improvements along coastal regions where UN programming is actually less prevalent (e.g. The Gambia saw a 27-point increase in its governance indicators, while Senegal increased by nearly 15 points).<sup>84</sup> In contrast, the mid-Sahel region (where much of the most intense conflict is taking place and large-scale UN programming is implemented) witnessed a nearly eight-point decline in governance effectiveness over recent years. In terms of security, the Sahel region as a whole worsened over the 2015-2020 period, though three countries (Guinea, The Gambia, and Niger) saw slight improvements.<sup>85</sup>

These findings offer some evidence of the interlinkages among governance, fragility, and security, with declines in security largely paralleling areas where governance indicators have also worsened. This is to be expected, and indeed can be broadened into the development arena: all Sahelian countries are experiencing extreme challenges in meeting most of the SDGs, paralleling the challenges they face in terms of governance and combating insecurity.<sup>86</sup>

However, the UN has not systematically gathered information on the impact of its programming in terms of preventing risks of violence or other forms of instability, a task made extraordinarily difficult due to the interrelated nature of risk factors across the Sahel. Based on available data

and a range of expert opinions from the Sahel region, the following section instead describes good practice and emerging trends across programming in the Sahel, helping to identify those approaches most likely to effectively deliver the kind of preventive impact at the heart of UNISS and UNSP.

## Emerging Practice from the Sahel

Over the past ten years, the Sahel has been a testing ground for much of the UN's prevention work. UNOWAS represents the most well-resourced UN prevention office globally, while the establishment of the UNSP is the most ambitious and well-articulated UN development plan to accompany a regional strategy to date. Sahelian countries have been the focus of regional reports to the Security Council,<sup>87</sup> prioritized for rolling out the UN's H-D-P nexus,<sup>88</sup> and the locus of dozens of new peacebuilding initiatives.<sup>89</sup> As one UN expert described: "the Sahel is everyone's priority, it's where every new idea is tried out first." As such, emerging practice in the implementation of the UNISS offers important lessons for the rest of the UN system.

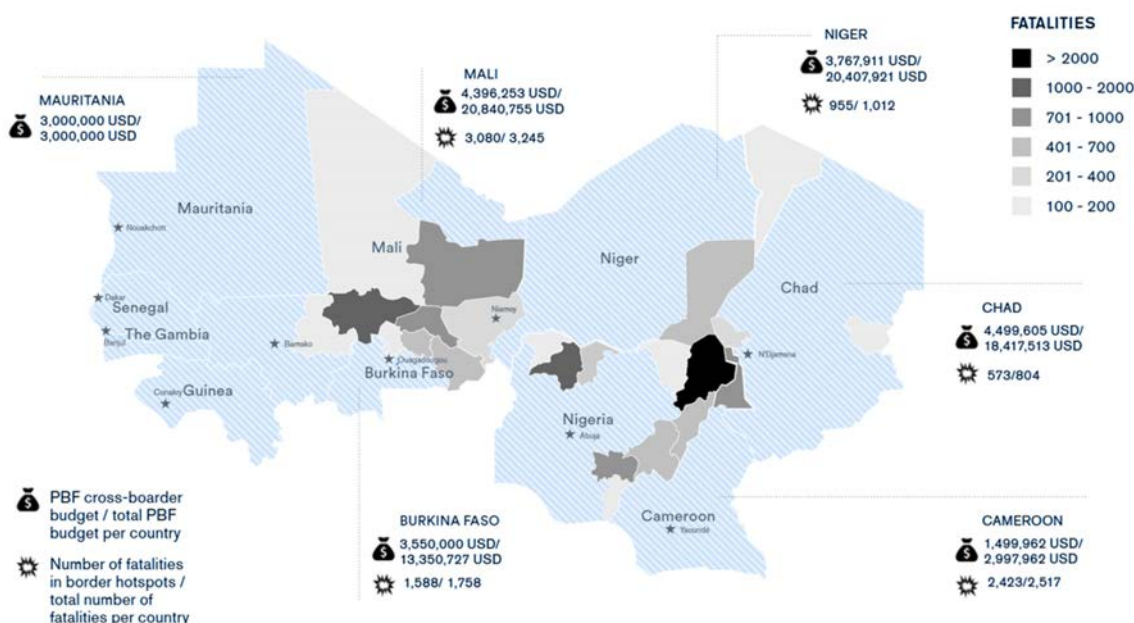
- 1. Politics and programming:** The above analysis has focused on the UNSP and the programming generated under it. However, it is important to re-emphasize that UNOWAS has a well-established political network and a history of successful preventive diplomacy interventions in West Africa.<sup>90</sup> While there have been some advances in cross-pollinating across UNOWAS and the team supporting the UNSP, the two offices and workstreams remain largely distinct. "There are two Under-Secretaries-General, one for the UNSP and one for the political office, and they do their own thing," was a theme repeated by several experts in the region. Indeed, based on the above, a separation of duties may be an important aspect of working together in a region with a staggering number of initiatives, donor events, elections, and interrelated crises. Where the two offices tend to come together – most notably in the arenas of farmer-herder conflicts and climate-driven risks – they are increasingly able to generate common analysis and aligned responses. A longer-term question remains concerning how to link UNOWAS' engagements in areas like elections disputes and other forms of political instability with the UNSP's governance programming (some recommendations are offered in the final section).
- 2. Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus:** The H-D-P nexus is a UN-wide attempt to bring together three major pillars of the UN's work into a single set of common goals, agreed plans, and integrated use of resources.<sup>91</sup> In implementing the Sahel strategy, the H-D-P nexus has progressed significantly, now driving country-level plans in nearly all Sahelian countries. According to several experts, however, "the H-D part of the nexus is much better understood and articulated than the P," meaning the political and security aspects of regional plans are often seen as separate, or even competing with, humanitarian and development goals. In particular, concerns persist across the humanitarian community that their programming will be subordinated to or conflated with hard security approaches, especially counter-terrorism.<sup>92</sup> A recent UNISS report underscored "concerns regarding a possible loss of impartiality ... due to a risk of politicization of humanitarian action" by developing joint overarching H-D-P approaches. And one expert concisely noted: "peacebuilding means development to UN Development Programme, mediation to DPPA, counter-terrorism to

the Office of Counter-Terrorism, and food to the World Food Programme ... it doesn't help us actually reach common ground."

- 3. Towards a common language:** The H-D-P challenge points to a potential downside of UN-wide holistic plans at the regional level. In order to reach consensus on key organizational priorities, it appears necessary to adopt quite general language that may not help drive meaningful action across different actors. In interviews with a range of experts in the Sahel, there was widely differing views on key terms, such as "resilience," "protection," and "governance." One RC, for example, recalled: "when I talk about resilience with the government, they are thinking almost exclusively of financial stability, not the kind of society-level engagements and governance work of the UN Development Programme." Indeed, perhaps the most difficult term in the Sahel is "prevention," which can mean anything from stopping food shortages to kinetic actions against terrorist groups. These language challenges are likely to continue, as nearly every assessment of the Sahel to date has recommended even greater levels of integration and linkage across the H-D-P nexus. While broadly in agreement with this push for integration, it is the authors' assessment that more attention should be paid to the potential negative aspects of highly integrated planning when, in reality, agencies and their partners may have quite different priorities and perceptions. Of course, there are clear upsides as well: experts involved in UNSP and UNISS have noted that the processes to develop joint plans across the UN system have helped to build better common terminology and has gradually advanced improved understanding. "When you have to create a country cooperation framework where the goal is resilience and the indicators have to be spelled out, it forces us to agree on some baseline definitions," one expert noted. As the recommendations section below suggests, this incremental progress towards a common language for the Sahel strategy could be accelerated.
- 4. The link to national programming:** The UNISS and UNSP are broad regional plans, meant to provide an umbrella for national-level programming. "UNISS doesn't dictate what the UN does within each country, it gives a general sense of what the priorities should be," a UN expert explained. Here, the authors found a significant and helpful overlap between the UN country frameworks and the thematic areas laid out in the UNISS and UNSP. According to a 2021 assessment, more than half of national programming by the UN was directed towards first-level root causes identified in the UNISS, while more than 20 per cent was directed towards second-level root causes (e.g. food insecurity, land degradation).<sup>93</sup> While certainly not a finished process, the gradual alignment of programming with the analysis of root causes of instability is an extremely important trend, demonstrating the utility of the UNSP as a tool to operationalize and prioritize regional level plans into national action. The work by DCO to support RC-led updates of the country cooperation frameworks across the Sahel is crucial in this regard, building meaningful connectivity between the UNISS, UNSP, and national programming.
- 5. Cross-border successes:** The Sahel offers some of the best examples of integrated cross-border programming in the UN system. The joint programme in the Liptako-Gourma region is being implemented across three countries (Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso), by eight UN entities (UNICEF, UN Development Programme - UNDP, UN Women, UN Office for Project Services - UNOPS, UN Capital Development Fund - UNCDF, UN Office on Drugs and Crime

- UNODC, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization - UNESCO, and the UN Economic Commission for Africa - ECA) with the regional Liptako-Gourma Authority as the main beneficiary. The eight agencies work towards common triple-nexus goals, across six priorities laid out in the UNSP, and has effective joint planning and monitoring systems in place. The USD 8 million programme has reached 3,000 livelihood recipients, including 2,000 women. Other cross-border programming is increasingly demonstrating the potential for the UN in some settings to translate regional analysis into effective responses across national borders.<sup>94</sup> Importantly, as the map indicates, cross-border programming is often well-aligned with the areas experiencing increases in violent conflict and instability.<sup>95</sup>

**Figure 4: Cross-border Programming in the Sahel**



Source: Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel<sup>96</sup>

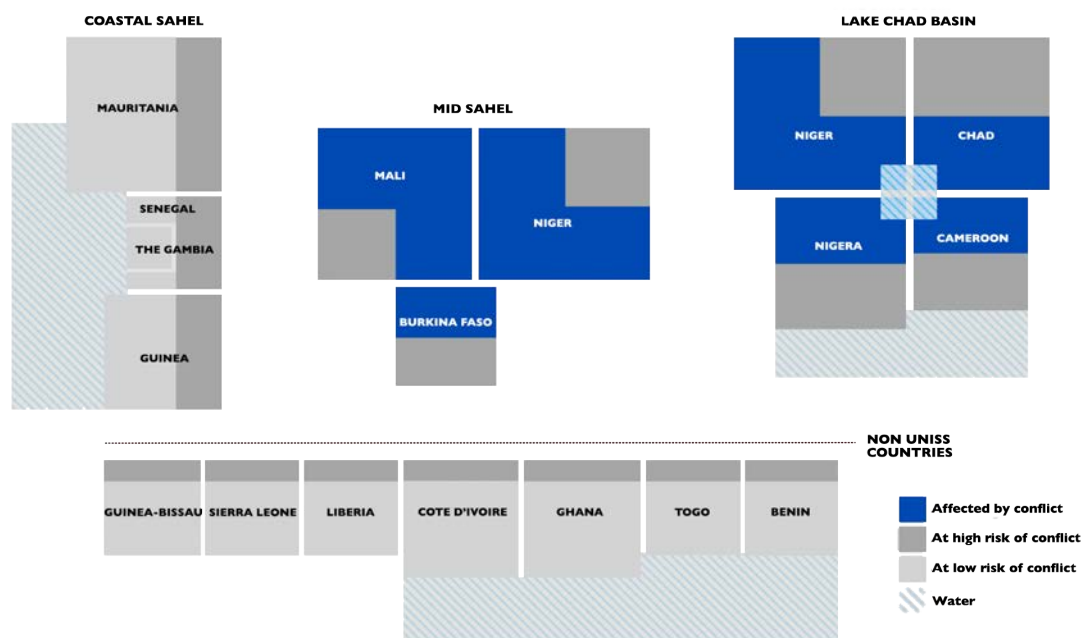
**6. Risk-driven approaches:** How the Sahel is divided up matters a great deal in terms of priorities and responses. As several experts pointed out, the Sahel is not at all a cohesive or uniform region, and risks manifest very differently at subregional, national, and local levels. A 2021 UNISS White Paper notes that no regional theory of change yet exists for the UN, and suggests that four subregions can helpfully organize analysis and response, separating out: (1) coastal, (2) mid-Sahel, (3) Lake Chad Basin, and (4) non-UNISS countries.<sup>97</sup> As the graphic below demonstrates, this geographic division of the Sahel usefully allows for an analysis of the most conflict-affected areas, which could further help in aligning programming with the most immediate short-term risks, while also helping to incentivize longer-term investments. Indeed, there is yet another benefit of this approach: it allows for a transnational understanding of risks of instability. For example, violent conflict in northern Cameroon drives hundreds of thousands of people into neighbouring countries, creating vulnerable populations, stressing the capacities of receiving States, and possibly contributing to tensions through the area identified as “affected by conflict” in the below

schematic. Organizing analysis by risks, rather than national boundaries, enables this kind of analysis and response.

- 7. Populations on the move:** Over recent years, forced displacement, internal displacement, and migration have created increasingly large vulnerable populations across the Sahel.<sup>98</sup> This has catalysed a partial shift in programming in UNISS countries, which now direct more than ten per cent of project resources to internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, and migrants.<sup>99</sup> This is a positive development that appears to be reinforced by a greater focus on cross-border programming by the PBF and others.<sup>100</sup> However, as UNOWAS' analysis has indicated, farmer-herder conflicts constitute a major factor driving instability across many parts of the Sahel.<sup>101</sup> As of 2021, only 5 per cent of total projects in the ten Sahelian countries were directed at pastoralist groups, potentially pointing to the need for greater prioritization for these groups in the coming period. "We need to get out of just thinking of mobility as refugees and IDPs," one expert noted. "It is a deeper issue that affects livelihoods, political decisions, and allocation of resources ... our programming should reflect how important it is."
- 8. Short versus long-term responses:** The UNISS and UNSP place significant emphasis on addressing long-term root causes of conflict, which is reflected in the 2016 country-level plans across the Sahel. As of 2021, there appears to have been a shift from that initial planning, with larger shares of funding now directed towards conflict response and short-term programming. This is of course understandable: major shocks to livelihoods have generated acute malnutrition; conflict-driven displacement has required immediate responses to vulnerable communities; and the rise of violent extremism across the region has driven a concerted security response. The tendency to focus on short-term needs is only increasing as the impacts of COVID-19 create new humanitarian stresses and tax the ability to national governments to respond effectively. On one hand, this points to the continuing challenges of zero-sum approaches to the Sahel: with limited donor support, agencies will naturally compete for attention, with those showing most immediate or acute needs often winning out. One of the significant potential benefits of the UNISS and UNSP approach is that it should offer a way out of this zero-sum mindset, demonstrating over time the linkages between the longer-term governance and resilience programming and more direct prevention goals. As of today, however, little evidence generated by the UNISS and UNSP assessments shows the impact of these programmes, and UNISS' own assessments acknowledge that there is often a conflation of cause and effect.<sup>102</sup> "If we could show directly that better livelihoods and resilience to food shocks stopped conflict, we'd have a much better case for calling these root cause prevention interventions," one Sahel expert noted.
- 9. Security winning out?** A similar worrying trend has appeared over recent years. Despite clear agreement across the UNISS and national planning frameworks (or UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks - UNSDCFs) that socioeconomic factors are root causes of instability in the Sahel, the UN's project implementation has witnessed a relative decrease in programming on socioeconomic issues and a rise in security-related programming. A recent review of 400 UN Country Team projects in the Sahel found that security-related projects received three times as much coverage as those addressing root causes, with clear shortfalls in resourcing for women and youth empowerment.<sup>103</sup> On one

hand, this emphasis on security reflects the reality that terrorism, poor governance, and transnational criminality are major threats to stability across the region, but it may point to a lack of sustainability of effort and the need to re-evaluate the balance of programming going forward.

**Figure 5: Risks of Conflict in the Sahel**



Source: Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel<sup>104</sup>

**10. The governance gap:** While consistently described as a crucial factor in the Sahel's stability, investments in good governance appear to be falling well short of the UN's targets, and is the most underresourced within the UN's regional plans. Good governance cuts across a range of risk factors in the Sahel and could help address underlying causes of farmer-herder conflicts, youth recruitment into armed groups, the impact of transnational criminal networks, and political unrest, among others. Governance also offers an important locus for cooperation within the H-D-P nexus, though to date has received far too little funding to show scaled results. Going forward, greater priority could be given to governance (taking into account that a range of actors beyond the State are involved in good governance), with positive impacts on results. The overriding focus of the governance pillar is on rule of law and security matters, whereas improved governance of land, natural resources, and the agricultural sector would have a lasting impact and could address many of the root causes of instability in the Sahel.

**11. Data matters:** The UNSP and UNISS has one of the best UN-led regional data collection and analysis capacities in the UN system. The Sahel Predictive Analytics initiative represents a serious and impactful approach to gathering data from across the UN, and leadership in UNISS and UNSP are using it to inform improved programming. However, as a 2021 assessment of UNISS noted, the absence of a centralized, harmonized system to store, share, and analyse data across the Sahel remains a problem. Moreover, the lack of involvement

by national and local actors in generating and benefiting from data means that the UN's data approach remains largely disconnected from the most important populations of the Sahel.<sup>105</sup> This shortfall has a serious knock-on effect: without trusted, acknowledged data on the impact of UN programming, the rationale for investment (particularly in longer-term interventions) lacks a strong evidentiary basis. As one expert noted: "We can't ask donors for long-term financing without proof that we're having an impact ... and that proof so far doesn't really exist."

**12. The climate reality:** As of 2021, programmes focused on climate resilience constituted roughly 15 per cent of the UN's activity in the Sahel.<sup>106</sup> This focus on agriculture and food security maps well onto the growing body of evidence that climatic factors are driving instability across the region and aligns well with the recognition across the UN Development System that the triple planetary crisis is a priority for national engagement.<sup>107</sup> However, nearly half of this programming relates to food insecurity, whereas less than 10 per cent appear targeted on the deeper questions of climate-resilient agriculture and structural adaptation to climate change. Given the clear links between electrification and growth, for example, greater emphasis on off-grid renewable energy could have an outsized impact in the Sahel.<sup>108</sup>

**13. From funding to financing:** Despite the efforts to build coherent regional plans and priorities, investment in the Sahel remains largely project and programme based and driven by the national priorities of large donor States. This means that funds are mainly short term, heavily earmarked, and subject to intense competition across UN agencies that ostensibly share the common objectives of UNISS and UNSP. Instead, two related shifts are required: (1) the UN should move from a project-driven approach to a portfolio one, offering 4-5-year objectives shared across many agencies; this would enable (2) a shift from project-based funding on a one to two-year timeframe, to unearmarked financing by the donor community, broadly aligned with the portfolios and shared objectives. The key is to move away from short-term deliverables where success is measured by expenditure, towards longer-term impact-based programming. This does not mean the UN should abandon short-term goals – indeed portfolios could have a range of indicators that would allow for iterative programming within them based on evidence of impact – but the overall financing structures for the Sahel should not continue on in the current zero-sum, project-based manner.<sup>109</sup>

**14. The Regional Collaborative Platform:** There is one RCP for Africa, which held its first meeting in March 2021,<sup>110</sup> has supported the creation of an Africa-wide data portal for information-sharing.<sup>111</sup> However, based on interviews with a range of UN staff involved in the Sahel strategy, the Africa RCP has little relevance for its work thus far. "The RCP is too general to help us," one UN expert described. "It is a good place to highlight what we are doing, but we can't rely on it to help us get what we need." As outlined in the final section, this shortcoming of the RCP appears in other regions as well and points to the need for a re-examination of its role in Africa.

## The Horn of Africa

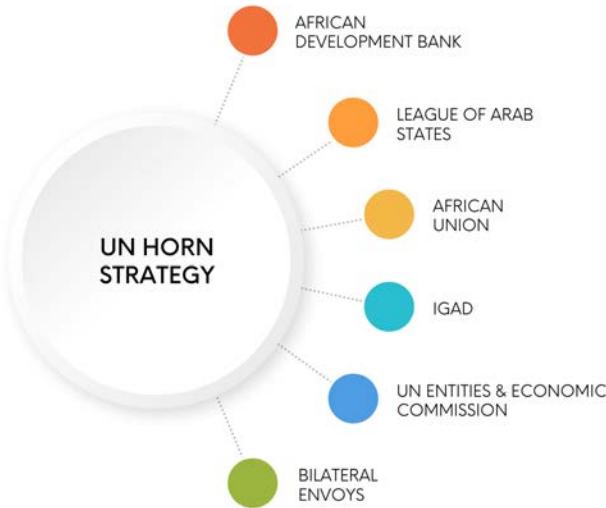
Historically one of the most volatile regions in Africa, in 2018 the Horn of Africa<sup>112</sup> had some reason for optimism. Political reforms in Ethiopia had opened the door to greater levels of

regional cooperation, including a détente among Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia. A revitalized peace process in South Sudan raised hopes that the world’s newest country might break out of its patterns of civil war. And consistent economic growth – coupled with recent discoveries of natural gas and oil – pointed to the possibility that the region might overcome longstanding legacies of instability. In this context, the 2018 appointment of a new UN Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa and development of a regional prevention strategy for the UN signalled a concerted effort to take advantage of the opportunity for greater regional engagement.

By early 2022, much of the earlier optimism had evaporated amid a large-scale civil war in Ethiopia, heightened tensions along the border of Sudan and Ethiopia, and regional fragmentation around Somalia and South Sudan. Indeed, the past four years have demonstrated that the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) – nominally the organization tasked with coordinating regional actors to avoid conflict – is at best a loose umbrella organization unable to bring deeply antagonistic countries together around a common agenda.<sup>113</sup> Efforts to build coherence appear constantly frustrated by the region’s multiple affiliations and respective national priorities, with three countries also members of the League of Arab States (LAS), divisions with the East African Community (EAC), and an AU that is spread very thinly across crises in Ethiopia, Sudan, the Sahel, Libya, and Central Africa. As the UN’s regional strategy itself recognizes: “the Horn of Africa is the least integrated region in Africa.”<sup>114</sup>

Broadly, the UN’s approach to the Horn aims to promote common, UN-wide approaches to the risks facing the region. The strategy itself is clear that it does not envisage creating new frameworks or programming where such already exist, and it emphasizes throughout that the UN aims to be complementary to the work of regional and subregional actors (operating under the principle of subsidiarity). In some respects, therefore, the strategy is relatively unambitious, focused mainly on political engagements with the key actors and improving the coherence of existing programming. “We will know the strategy is working if we can get the countries to sit in the same room and agree on how they will meet a crisis together,” one senior UN official said. As such – and in contrast to the Sahel strategy that is underpinned by a development plan – the Horn strategy is overwhelmingly a political document focused on finding entry points with the political leadership of the region.

**Figure 6: UN Horn of Africa Strategy Partners**



Importantly, the Horn strategy is the central aspect of a broader mandate of the Special Envoy. Prior to 2018, there had been a Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan, a role that had required in-country presence in both Juba and Khartoum. From 2018, those resources and the role of supporting the AU and the parties to resolve outstanding issues from their 2005-2011 peace process were folded into the Horn's Special Envoy's mandate. Other capacity development roles, such as supporting the IGAD countries update their Regional Action Plans for women, are also part of the Horn of Africa Envoy's work but not specified in the strategy.

## Implementing the Horn of Africa Strategy

The Horn strategy is composed of two interrelated aspects: (1) the work of the Envoy's office in helping to align and deconflict the UN's programming across the region, and (2) the political engagement of the Envoy with a range of actors and leaders. Together, these lines of work converge on a common goal: to reduce the risks of instability and maximize the potential for cross-regional collaboration.

The Horn strategy is organized around four pillars: (1) regional peace and security; (2) resilience and socioeconomic development; (3) inclusive and responsive governance; and (4) sustainable natural resources management and climate adaptability. These four pillars do not stand in isolation but are meant to align with the regional strategies of both the AU and IGAD (the latter of which is not yet completed). Each pillar has been designated a rapporteur (a representative from one of the dominant UN agencies in that field) and holds regular meetings at senior and working levels. Twice a year, the heads of UN agencies in the region are convened by the Special Envoy to take stock of progress and agree strategic direction. The Envoy's Office produces an annual progress report that is submitted to the Executive Committee of the Secretary-General for review.<sup>115</sup>

While not driving new programming per se, the working groups under the four pillars have generated several cross-cutting analyses, supported new transborder initiatives, and coordinated capacity-building programming in the Horn, an illustrative list of which includes:<sup>116</sup>

- 1. Early Warning:** The UN produced joint regional analysis beginning in February 2021 and updated every four months that provides a common understanding across the UN of the main risks, trends, and early warning indicators. This resulted in area-specific conflict analysis, such as in the Karamoja cross-border area to inform prevention responses. Pillar 2 also provides constantly updated information on food security, locusts, and other shocks to agricultural production as part of the regional early warning analysis.
- 2. Collaboration against transnational crime and violent extremism:** The UN developed a Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment that identifies links between illicit networks and violent extremist groups. This was coupled with capacity-building support to Kenya to build a Joint Operations Centre dedicated to interdicting illicit materials, and staffing support to the RC in Somalia to bolster the UN's anti-corruption work. The UN also supported the design and implementation of regional and national preventing and countering violent extremism strategies and action plans with governments of the region.

- 3. Cross-border programming:** The UN supported development of a cross-border strategy linked to specific programming to address risks in the Mendera Triangle between Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia. Importantly, this work was linked directly to the programmatic activities of the RCOs in each country.
- 4. Address human mobility dynamics:** The UN finalized a multi-partner 2021-2024 Regional Migrant Response Plan for the Horn of Africa and Yemen,<sup>117</sup> a migrant-centred humanitarian and development strategy and resource mobilization for vulnerable migrants. In parallel, it advanced the African migration agenda through the first-ever *Africa Migration Report* (AMR),<sup>118</sup> launched by International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the AU Commission with collective contributions from across the UN system.
- 5. Support for regional integration:** The UN has conducted several mapping exercises of countries' engagements and challenges in the Horn on adopting and implementing domestic policies to support the African Continental Free Trade Agreement and UN support to the domestication of policies.
- 6. Support for climate-sensitive programming:** The UN conducted analysis of transboundary water issues and links to potential conflict risks. This helped to identify climate-adaptive livelihoods programming (the so-called "blue economy" approach).
- 7. Addressing root causes:** The UN conducted a series of analyses on land-related tensions and support to programming to address land governance and reform.

This list illustrates the kind of work under the four pillars of the implementation matrix, though dozens of other initiatives have also been coordinated under this strategy. Unfortunately, there are few indicators available to suggest the potential impact of this programming, in part because many initiatives are ongoing, but also due to the absence of Horn-specific data. Unlike the UN's approach in the Sahel, which has had more time to develop consolidated data under its Development Plan, the Horn's nascent matrix has yet to produce detailed assessments of the impact of its various programmes. This is made more complicated by the successive shocks that have occurred over recent years, resulting in negative trends across security, governance, transparency, and stability indicators.<sup>119</sup>

## Political Engagement by the Horn of Africa Special Envoy

The political role of the Horn Special Envoy was described by senior UN experts as: "being the eyes and ears of the region, helping to provide the early warning needed for a quick response and then supporting that response from behind." In a region noted for being "allergic to international intervention," the Special Envoy is rarely able to play the central or leading role, but has found ways to influence processes from behind the scenes.

An example of this kind of supportive work can be seen during the early outbreak of the conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia in late 2020. The AU, playing the leading role in the international response, appointed former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo as its envoy. "The sovereignty barriers in Ethiopia are too high for the UN," one expert noted. "There was simply no way the UN could have done the kind of shuttle diplomacy the AU envoy was able

to do.” Lacking funds and logistical resources, Obasanjo’s office relied significantly on the UN for a range of support, including transport into remote regions of Ethiopia, resources for his delegation to travel throughout the region, and staffing and analytic support. By providing that support, the UN team in the Horn was also able to influence the process, making proposals for the negotiations, helping to design dialogues with several of the groups, and eventually succeeding in a push for a national dialogue process.

The extreme fluidity of dynamics in the Horn represents both a challenge and an opportunity for the UN to strengthen its preventive role. Following the April 2019 coup in Sudan, for example, the UN aligned itself very much behind Prime Minister Hamdok, who was seen as the best hope for a smooth transition to civilian rule. “The UN put all its eggs in the Hamdok basket,” one expert described, noting that the UN provided staff, helped to organize donor conferences, and issued strongly supportive public statements in favour of the new Sudanese Government.<sup>120</sup> When the second coup occurred in October 2021, the UN had to quickly shift gears, supporting the AU-led mediation efforts while also working across the region to help consolidate a common position across IGAD members. This shift from a largely government-support role to a regional mediation one underscores the need for a flexible political strategy for the Horn, one that can fill in gaps at the regional level and augment the on the ground efforts of UN leaders in-country.

## Emerging Practice from the Horn of Africa

A major challenge to the Horn strategy has been the rapid deterioration of the region from its relative high point in 2018. Whereas four years ago there was a sense of positive momentum, back-to-back coups in Sudan, a civil war in Ethiopia, and growing tensions among major powers in IGAD have combined to undercut many of the larger aspirations of the UN and its partners. Indeed, several senior UN officials suggested that the overall framing of the Horn strategy may have been overly optimistic, not sufficiently cognizant of the high likelihood of instability in Sudan in particular. One UN official noted: “The Horn of Africa has represented the ultimate stress test for the UN, where a small office with essentially no resources is confronted with a series of shocks that it can’t possibly stop.” As laid out in DPPA’s three-year strategy, however, the UN’s preventive role is not necessarily to stop all forms of conflict or instability, but rather to reduce the risks of greater escalation and connect short-term interventions with longer-term prevention capacities.<sup>121</sup>

The following attempts to capture key lessons from the past four years of the UN’s attempts to reduce risks in the Horn, including how future iterations of the strategy could be improved.

- 1. The pros and cons of a “purely political strategy”:** Repeatedly, UN and other experts stressed that the Horn strategy was a politically-driven one, focused on bringing the leadership of countries in the Horn together around common goals. The benefit of a predominantly political approach in a region as allergic to intervention as the Horn is that the UN is rarely seen as a threat to sovereignty concerns. “We are constantly positioning ourselves in support of the AU, or IGAD, or a Member State, we are never trying to take over, as in some other parts of Africa,” one UN expert noted. One downside of a light, essentially political presence is that the UN comes with little leverage or incentives for antagonistic countries to cooperate. In contrast to regions with large peacekeeping operations (e.g. the Democratic Republic of the Congo) or with significant investment

baked into the approach (e.g. the Sahel), the challenge for the Horn Special Envoy's office has been to find leverage with few entry points or resources. A possible innovation here mentioned by several interlocutors could be to build future strategies more around economic incentives, helping to operationalize what one UN expert described as a "mini-Schengen for the Horn," where countries would see greater benefits in economic cooperation as the basis for reducing friction. Greater connectivity among economic commissions and regional banks would be essential to such a strategy.

- 2. A flexible framework plus a concrete matrix:** Unlike the Sahel, the Horn strategy is not accompanied with a development plan. Instead, the strategy is meant to act as a broad, flexible framework, aligning work generally under four pillars. This means the Horn strategy is largely not about driving programmes. "We don't have any specific 'Horn strategy programmes,'" one UN staff member described. However, over time, the use of the above-described implementation matrix has gradually helped to align programming behind common goals, opening channels for greater resources to flow to cross-border programmes. At the same time, it is not always clear to agencies what the value added of a regional implementation matrix is to their work. "Humanitarian and development agencies have their country programmes, and they will implement them regardless of whether they are in the Horn matrix," another expert noted. Indeed, while the implementation matrix does appear to be especially useful for issues like cross-border programming and climate-driven risks that span national boundaries, it seems to have less ability to shape more country-specific programming such as governance capacity-building and humanitarian response.
- 3. Cross-cutting analysis:** Some of the most important contributions under the Horn strategy have been analytic. From the daily reporting that accompanied the outbreak of civil war in Ethiopia, to the regional analysis of criminal networks, to the science-driven assessments of climate-security risks, each pillar of the UN's work has developed important cross-cutting analysis of use beyond a single agency. "Our biggest and clearest product for the system is our analysis," a UN expert noted. "It is what feeds into the decision-making of the UN from the Secretary-General on down."
- 4. People on the move:** Human mobility was highlighted across the regional offices as a critical issue that cuts across all areas of the UN's work. Whether conflict-driven displacement, large-scale population movements responding to climate change, the shifting patterns of pastoralists, or other forms of migration, the lack of a coherent approach to human mobility represents a major gap for the multilateral system. Indeed, the UN's responses to displacement and migration often surface some of the most intense "turf battles" across agencies, at times undermining the role of RCs in leading the UN's response together with national governments. This appears a common dynamic across other regions as well (e.g. Latin America).
- 5. "Holes in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus":** The H-D-P nexus represents the logical end point of decades of efforts to integrate the UN's efforts into multi-agency, multi-pillar approaches. While admirable in principle and certainly the goal of the implementation matrix for the Horn, many interlocutors stressed that the practice in the Horn remained very siloed, particularly regarding humanitarian space. "Humanitarians

don't want to be involved in the Horn strategy at all," one expert noted, highlighting that the ability of humanitarian actors to access sensitive areas (e.g. the Tigray region) largely depended upon visible distance from other UN actors in particular. As described in the recommendations section of this report, a review of how the H-D-P nexus may need to be adapted in different settings could help to address a problem that is not unique to the Horn.

- 6. Technical/logistical support as a political tool:** Some of the most important work under the Horn strategy has been the support it has offered to the AU and IGAD, including capacity development and logistical support to AU leaders like its envoy Obasanjo. This has value in itself, enabling resource-stretched organizations like the AU to reach difficult locations, host important events, and staff up teams in urgent situations. Technical support also gets the UN in a door that might otherwise be closed to it, giving UN leaders an entry point for offering substantive proposals and engage in discussions with political actors who are often reticent to engage directly with the UN. The efforts to support the AU's crisis response to both the Ethiopian civil war and the latest coup in Sudan offer evidence of this link between support and political entry point.
- 7. The limits of an Africa Regional Collaborative Platform:** While the creation of an RCP for Africa may have built an important knowledge-sharing space for the continent, it has yet to demonstrate utility for the Horn strategy. "The Horn strategy is about politics, and the RCP is about programmes," one UN expert noted. And while there could be future use for the RCP in helping to identify partners for implementing the Horn strategy, there was little appetite within the UN family in the Horn to have it play a leading role in the immediate term.

In conclusion, the 2018 Horn strategy represents a significantly different model to the Sahel: whereas the Sahel is a public, programmatically-driven document, the Horn strategy is kept confidential, mostly focused on political support along with a light touch in helping to align programming across the UN family. Regional approaches to prevention in Latin America highlight yet another approach, contrasting with approaches in the Sahel and the Horn, while replicating some of the key challenges with prevention activities designed or carried out by regional actors.

## Latin America

The conflict challenges in Latin America contrast in important ways with those outlined in the preceding Sahel and Horn case studies. Latin America has only one country on the Security Council agenda and no settings characterized as being in a state of ongoing acute armed conflict.<sup>122</sup> The prevention approaches are, consequently, somewhat different and rely more heavily on development actors to address long-term structural challenges.

Latin America is a comparatively prosperous and stable middle-income region. State institutions are generally strong and capable of designing and deploying sophisticated policy solutions to mitigate crises where there is sufficient political will.<sup>123</sup> Regional-level policymaking in Latin America is also among the most developed, integrated, and dynamic globally, featuring overlapping, deeply institutionalized relationships between countries. This history of cross-

regional collaboration creates space for policy innovation, but it can also lead to friction – the result of overcrowding (too many actors) and competition (lack of funding). As a result of these differences, the UN’s framing of “prevention” in Latin America is far more focused on development outcomes and less about risks of violent conflict.

While the region’s conflict characteristics set it apart from other regions, prevention activities in Latin America nevertheless share some common prevention ambitions with other regions in that they aim at tackling disproportionate harm to women, youth, and other vulnerable groups, such as migrants and indigenous communities. And as elsewhere, prevention actors in Latin America struggle with the multidimensional root causes of conflict.

Regional policy coordination in Latin America today covers a broad range of themes (e.g. economic integration, women’s rights, youth criminality), catalysed through an assortment of platforms and coordination structures that are, for the most part, decades old. While ECLAC serves as the preeminent intergovernmental regional coordination body, it sits alongside many other regional intergovernmental coordination mechanisms that have pushed regional cooperation well beyond market integration.<sup>124</sup> As a direct consequence of this latticework of intergovernmental structures, governments in the region are more open to and, at times, more reliant on intergovernmental bodies for policy guidance.

A shared language and culture facilitate communication, cooperation, and alliance-building across the political spectrum in Latin America – from the far left to far right. However, due to the widespread differences in political ideology, the region has had significant challenges reaching a consensus on development approaches. This is most apparent in divisions that exist on the question of natural resources commodification.<sup>125</sup> This matters for upstream prevention efforts, as some development trajectories (e.g. renewed investments in social protection) will delay and prevent crises, while others (e.g. underregulated mining and logging) will exacerbate root causes of conflict and heighten tensions.

A key part of the UN’s activities in the region focuses on generating the necessary political will to support both upstream and downstream prevention efforts, as well as strengthening capacities to operationalize data analysis into prevention strategies. These efforts are helped significantly by the reform of the RC system. As one regional UN official remarked: “the empowerment of the RCs and the reforms came at the exact right moment because the continent is shaking [from crises].” Several cross-border subregional strategies are the direct result of empowered RCs launching new prevention initiatives in the region. The clarification of the RC’s role has made it easier to create neutral prevention sandboxes in which country and regional agency assets come together constructively to tackle emerging crises. The same agility and operational capacity are lacking at the regional level in Latin America, where one official described: “persistent agency jealousies inhibiting collaboration beyond the sharing of and exchange of basic political analysis.” The following sections consider the major prevention challenges in Latin America, the UN’s response, and emerging practice.

## **Prevention Challenges in Latin America**

This region contends with highly variable prevention challenges – both acute localized violent conflict and generalized fragility owing to slow economic growth, high unemployment, a loss

of trust in public institutions, corruption, criminality, and mass migration. While crises do spill over borders, their roots are in the region’s countries.

The UN has identified regional challenges currently undermining stability, peace, and prosperity in Latin America.<sup>126</sup> Just prior to the pandemic, the region was experiencing a six-year run of weak growth, which halted abruptly with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>127</sup> One reason for slowed growth is a lack of diversification of regional economies, with some countries moving rapidly to concentrate production capacities in a few limited sectors. This environment of low growth has limited public spending capacity and, combined with high rates of corruption, has fuelled a perception of low government effectiveness in political systems that largely benefit elites. High rates of inequality aggravate this sense of unfairness. While the region does not lack wealth, it is unevenly shared, with the wealthiest 10 per cent in the region capturing 54 per cent of national income.<sup>128</sup>

There are also concerns that efforts to jumpstart sluggish regional economies will deepen dependence on extractive industries, bringing States into even greater conflict with afro-indigenous populations defending both their land rights and the environment. Latin America is already described by the UN’s human rights chief, Michelle Bachelet, as one of the most dangerous regions in the world for environmental and land defenders. The link between development and conflict is evident in this context – one development pathway will almost certainly deepen mistrust of the State, ignite violent conflict, and dissolve what remains of a rapidly decaying social contract.<sup>129</sup> This is a growing concern for all prevention actors in the region.

**Figure 7: Indigenous Population and Percentage of General Population of Latin America**



Source: US Congressional Research Service<sup>130</sup>

Efforts to mobilize government policymaking machinery have gradually moved to the streets in many capitals, with a corrosive effect on democratic norms. Authoritarian regimes concentrated power during the COVID-19 pandemic, sometimes by hastily passing measures to respond to general discontent, simultaneously appeasing protesters and enhancing their popularity.<sup>131</sup> This weakens State institutions, concentrates political authority, and closes civic space to democratic challengers. One UN expert described an “ebbing of the democratic pulse” in the region. In other cases, the relationship between dissatisfied citizens and their political representatives is mediated by violence and repression.

Against a backdrop of macroeconomic fragility, one finds an epidemic of localized violence – the region boasts 30 per cent of global homicides but only 9 per cent of global population.<sup>132</sup>

**Figure 8: Social Conflict in Select Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (1990-2017)**

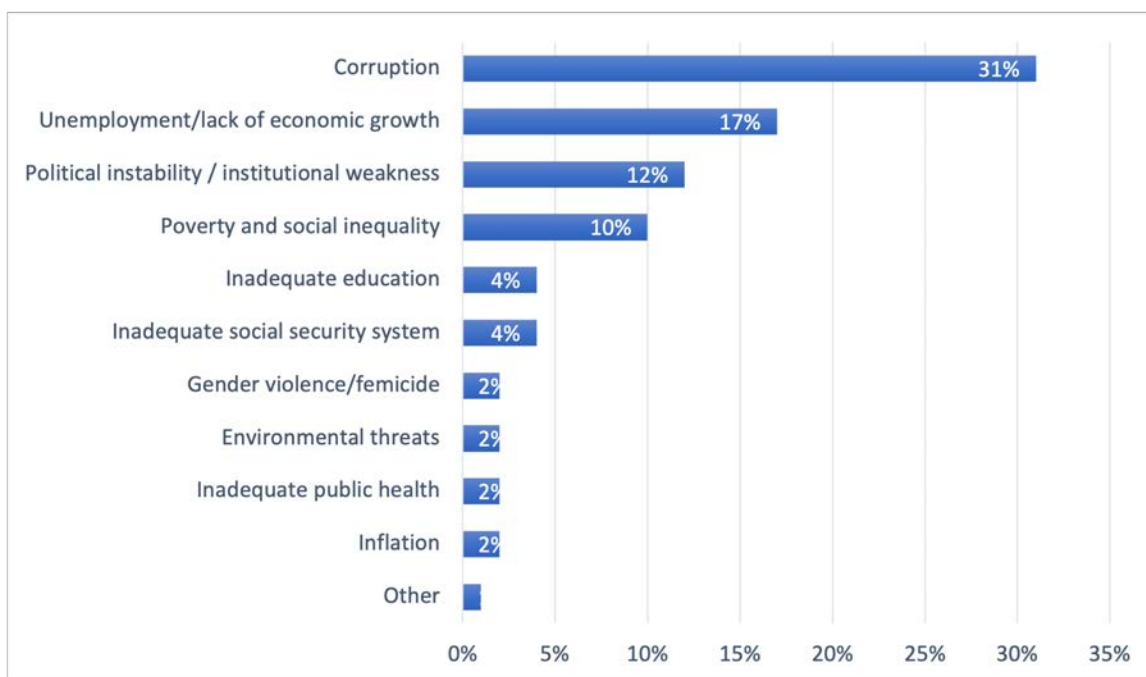


Source: Social Conflict Analysis Database<sup>133</sup>

A longstanding source of fragility in Latin America relates to youth violence. Numerous initiatives over several decades have sought to address youth violence and criminality. While there remains a lack of credible long-term studies that provide an evidence base for trends in youth violence in Latin America, a recent study observed that “six of the top ten most violent countries in the world are in Latin America and the Caribbean, with most of the victims being young males under 30 years of age.”<sup>134</sup> It went on to note a one in 50 chance that those living in low income settings will be killed before they reach their 31st birthday.<sup>135</sup> A recent joint report by the World Health Organization and the Pan-American Health Organization noted the need for “strengthen[ed] regional or subregional dialogue across countries and partners in order to boost learning on what works to prevent and respond to violence against children.”<sup>136</sup> With so much focus given over to the pandemic response, there were fewer resources over the past several years to address various forms of violence through public services. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) recently estimated the cost of crime and violence to the region at USD 261 billion annually.

Tensions arising from violence, environmental degradation, corruption, and weak social safety nets are influencing migration within and beyond the region. Migration flows in the region are linked to chronic poverty, high levels of crime and violence, and limited economic opportunities. In recent years, increases in population movement have also been attributed to extreme weather events and political turmoil in several countries, notably Venezuela.<sup>137</sup>

**Figure 9: Most Important Problems Affecting Latin American Countries, According to Opinion Leaders and Journalists in 2019**



Source: Statista<sup>138</sup>

These mass migrations affect numerous countries at once, sometimes in synchronized fashion. Migrants and asylum seekers from Venezuela wind through Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile, forcing rapid policy decisions in attempt to balance the interests of citizens and migrants. Due to the speed of this movement and differences in domestic politics, policy responses are inconsistent and uncoordinated in the region. They have ranged from severe crackdowns, including the deprivation of basic rights, to regularization regimes and novel visa and accommodation programmes. The Executive Secretary of ECLAC, Alicia Barcena, called specific attention to the nexus of humanitarian need, development, and migration, noting that this is one of several regional crises that would specifically benefit from a regional response.<sup>139</sup>

The UN has a critical role to play in ensuring buy-in for prevention efforts – both upstream and downstream. This role has become significantly more difficult in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The slow erosion of faith in multilateralism at the global level and resurgent nationalism in countries in the region have complicated the political environment in which the UN is trying to advance prevention solutions.<sup>140</sup> Some regional approaches are viewed with suspicion, thought to reflect national priorities of one country in the guise of prevention and development. Alicia Barcena recently warned that current trends and the weakening of the international system and its regulations would end up unbalancing development ambitions by favouring the strongest actors in the region.<sup>141</sup>

## Initiatives, Structures, and Approaches

In interviews carried out for this report, respondents widely agreed that the reform of the

UN regional structures holds great promise for prevention efforts, but also called attention to persistent headwinds (see Emerging Practice, later in this case study). The key question, therefore, is not whether regional coordination and structures should be kept in place, but rather what form they should take and what operating modalities should govern their activities to ensure appropriate support for the UN's prevention agenda.

The 2017 reforms gave rise to two regional platforms in Latin America, and each plays its role in upstream prevention, notably by improving coordination and connection points between governments and UN prevention actors: the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development and the RCP in Latin America.

Established in 2016, the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development is still a young coordination mechanism. It operates under the auspices of ECLAC to follow up and review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development among other plans and frameworks. Considered a platform for mutual learning and exchange of experiences and good practices, it has focused on the structural challenges that lead to crisis in the region. Importantly, it brings together Member States and the full UN system at the regional level, and thus represents a potentially useful mechanism to align strategies and priorities. Inclusion of the full UN system in the meetings of the Regional Forum for Sustainable Development is a concrete example of improved coordination at the regional level in Latin America that helps break down division and duplication.

The RCP for Latin America and the Caribbean was established in November 2020, the result of an overhaul of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Regional Coordination Mechanism. The RCP brings together all entities with regional activities to support sustainable development in the region. It is chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General and includes two Vice-Chairs: the Executive Secretary of ECLAC, and the Regional Director of UNDP for Latin America and the Caribbean. Its Joint Secretariat comprises ECLAC, UNDP and the DCO. The RCP Latin America receives UN Country Results Reports on the performance of Cooperation Frameworks in support of national priorities and the 2030 Agenda and, working through its Issue-Based Coalitions, has recently launched a series of inter-agency initiatives to support COVID-19 recovery and subregional priorities, such as human mobility in the region.<sup>142</sup>

After a year of mass social protest in 2019, RCs signalled strong interest in receiving from regional counterparts, additional support to build up multidimensional conflict analysis capacities to better assist governments in identifying and addressing nascent crises.<sup>143</sup> The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs supports UN Country Teams with capacity building for conflict prevention analysis. However, capacities and funding for this type of support at the regional level are seriously constrained and rely on the collaboration and engagement of the UN's Peace and Security pillar which has traditionally led on the UN's prevention mandate. As one senior UN official at regional level observed: "most agencies [in Latin America and the Caribbean] are working on upstream prevention, but with limited budgets, and limited operational capacity." Unlike in the Sahel, where there are considerable resources at the regional level, in Latin America there is frequently more capacity and resources at the national and subregional levels, where the prevention responses become much more operational and where RCs are more likely to retain the interest and cooperation of different agencies and their

donors. This is a notable feature of prevention dynamics in Latin America: prevention support from the regional level comes down to individuals, typically the regional directors of agencies, funds, and programmes, who can encourage their national staff to invest in national and cross-border prevention issues, setting the tone for collaborative cross-pillar approaches at the national level. While the RCs can create the political and operational space for collaboration, regional agency directors provide the necessary additional incentive and encouragement to invest resources in initiatives that take shape in these spaces.

An enduring challenge for prevention activities in the region relates to the limitations on UN assets and resources. Faced with a shortage of expert capacity, regional representatives in Latin America are often forced to choose between an investment in downstream prevention to manage an ongoing crisis or investment in upstream prevention, replicating a pattern documented in the preceding Sahel case study. In the Latin America region, where fragile economic successes have been registered, calls for support to address new crises are often not prioritized because countries seem ‘stable enough’. This was described by one UN expert as a: “classic good student dilemma: when you spot a negative trend, you ask for help, but because you are doing well overall, you never get any support, because others are doing worse.” The consequence is a regional system catering to crisis response, more than systematic prevention. This was confirmed by a regional expert who stated that: “areas of higher risk, areas of concern, where surge support is requested...sometimes it has been given, sometimes it hasn’t. If it’s in a country that’s doing not so badly, then regional bodies need to make an assessment, from a resource management perspective and a political perspective.” Firewalled resources and capacities dedicated to addressing the beginnings of crises, five to ten years before they break out, are lacking. One senior UN official working at country level noted: “The regional level should help those countries that are doing relatively well too, to keep them doing relatively well, to really do prevention and prevent outbreak of crisis.”

This has led to a certain entrepreneurialism from UN country teams, and especially RCs. Taking the initiative to coordinate among themselves at the subregional level, UN country teams and RCs have ranged out beyond country borders and carried out a number of fact-finding and awareness-raising missions. These missions are important in the middle-income country context, as they draw attention to crises that might otherwise escape donor and agency or UN Headquarters interest. While not the sole reason for such missions, it is certainly the case that funding for prevention is much more difficult to secure absent such entrepreneurialism. A history of unsuccessful proposals to secure prevention funding has accelerated this tendency to self-organize at the subregional level to address upstream, emerging crises. One expert observed: “If RCs and country teams bring up common issues in a middle-income setting, their chances to draw attention to their issues are higher. It helps address a clear gap in financing for prevention and protection in middle-income countries.”

This helps explain the rise in dynamic subregional prevention initiatives and networks. Unlike the Sahel and the Horn, Latin America does not host a regional prevention office, nor does it have a dedicated regional prevention strategy or framework. However, like both the Sahel and the Horn, there are significant cross-border prevention activities operating at the subregional level. Subregional prevention strategies include: the Action Plan Amazon Triple Border (Colombia, Brazil, and Peru); the Gran Chaco Initiative (Argentina, Bolivia, and Paraguay); the Comprehensive Development Plan (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and south and south-

east Mexico); the Regional Inter–Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela; and the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework. These activities are not shaped nor directed by a single UN regional representative or entity, as is the case in the Sahel and the Horn regions. It is also notable that of the six regional plans listed above, more than half focus explicitly on challenges relating to human mobility.

A new prevention asset – an individual, not an entity – is the joint UNDP-DPPA Peace and Development Advisor (PDA). The number of PDAs working at the country level across the region has steadily increased, with a total of fifteen active as of 2022. The new Regional Programme Specialist capacity provides support to countries that do not have a PDA. This new regional capacity has already been used in a variety of ways. Specifically, the Regional Programme Specialist has provided additional cross-pillar multidimensional risk analysis capabilities for UN country teams working closely with DPPA, UNDP, DCO and OHCHR at the regional level. This analysis is translating into joint priorities in Common Country Analyses and cooperation frameworks at the national level, which carries a two-way benefit, as the process of developing Common Country Analyses and cooperation frameworks creates natural pathways for multidimensional regional analysis. These new frameworks create space for emerging thematic issues that do not have a natural home like climate security. Joint UNDP-DPPA prevent assets have supported long-term prevention efforts, through structural prevention, truth and reconciliation, mediation, and local dialogue processes, and support RCs who work in politically charged contexts.

In addition to the benefits of strengthened RC roles, officials interviewed for this report call attention to two additional ways the 2017 reforms are supporting prevention efforts in the Latin America region. First, delinking the RC function from UNDP has led to an atmosphere of greater openness and a greater willingness to work in truly inter-agency fashion. Without a single agency lead, prevention analysis now evolves from a more neutral starting point. Second, the strengthened capacities in RCOs are providing opportunities to better connect regional assets with local knowledge and needs. The PDAs have found it especially useful to have human rights advisors and economists embedded in RCOs advancing cross-pillar prevention approaches, as so many of the upstream prevention efforts in Latin America can be traced to basic rights and macroeconomic challenges, such as the rise in the cost of basic goods. Concretely, the strengthened RCOs provide new landing points for multidimensional prevention analysis spearheaded by the PDAs.

The work of the Regional Programme Specialist demonstrates the value of analytical capabilities at the regional level and corrects deficiencies called attention to in prior assessments of the UN's regional assets. The 2017 Dalberg report first called attention to data and analytical deficiencies at the regional level, noting that new investments were required to enhance expertise in data and statistics and that improved advocacy would be required to achieve the SDGs. Resolution 71/243 also spotlighted the need for improved access to and use of data for development. The resolution calls on the UN Development System to improve its capabilities to generate, retain, use, and share knowledge, and move towards a system-wide open data collaborative approach for a common and accessible knowledge base.<sup>144</sup>

Beyond the expansion of the PDAs through the UNDP-DPPA Joint Programme, a few other notable milestones have been achieved. A new data and statistics group was established at the regional level, which has already carried a mapping exercise of the expertise and technical

skills offered by UN entities in terms of data and statistics, making the information accessible to Member States through the new SDG Gateway, a platform maintained by 22 agencies, funds and programs of the UN system in the region.<sup>145</sup> The launch of the COVID-19 observatory is another example of regional coordination between the economic commission (ECLAC) and the UN Development System to improve data availability and analysis. The data collected in the Observatory includes reference data and analysis of the economic and social impacts of the pandemic. The Observatory is a joint effort between United Nations entities, in particular UN-Women, DCO, and RCs.<sup>146</sup> There are many additional examples of regional guidance and joint studies with UN entities and ECLAC at the regional level that help consolidate expertise. For example, regional UNFPA and UN Women presences co-lead an initiative, in close collaboration with ECLAC and its Regional Statistical Coordination Group for the 2030 Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean, to produce a series of knowledge-sharing dialogues including on violence indicators.<sup>147</sup>

Communications at the regional level have also improved, as greater efforts have been made to issue joint advocacy statements on topics of pan-regional importance, such as a statement on the human rights of vulnerable populations during the pandemic, and another on the rights of migrants in the region,<sup>148</sup> calling for improved humanitarian and protection responses.<sup>149</sup> The Response for Venezuelans Platform (R4V) has underlined the importance of sustained regional communications campaigns, observing that they played a key role in fostering peaceful coexistence and integration between refugees, migrants and host communities, reducing or preventing the rise of xenophobia.<sup>150</sup>

The 2019 CEPEI report on the UN's regional assets argued that sensitive issues were more easily discussed at the regional level. The ability of the UN's regional actors to communicate coherent positions on regional crises is an achievement of the 2017 reforms. Alignment ensures that UN messaging breaks out of siloed interests of any one agency and reflects a common position on ongoing, new, or emerging crises. As one official noted: "The risk is that when you have political tensions that escalate very quickly, and where you have specific kinds of violations, certain entities have a very specific response to the issues that don't align with the other agencies, funds, and programmes and these were harder to bridge in the past." Joint advocacy messages have made a concrete difference in certain cases: joint regional statements have addressed "anti-gender" positions advanced by some governments in the region and efforts to limit access to vaccinations for refugees. In both cases, joint regional statements empowered RCs and UN country teams to advance UN objectives and values at the national level.

## Emerging Practice from Latin America

- 1. Funding:** The funding architecture for prevention is poorly suited to tackling multidimensional risks in Latin America. The prevention needs and corresponding activities do not fit neatly in humanitarian, conflict, or development categories, stranding proposals in a prevention financing no-man's land. There are some encouraging signs of change. A greater openness to non-traditional prevention efforts is resulting in access to new funding streams. The PBF does not exclude applications from middle-income countries, for example, and is especially interested in cross-border activities. While the PBF is likely to fund upstream prevention efforts less frequently than downstream prevention – as it concentrates principally on addressing the nexus of violent conflict

and political action, supporting interventions in the early moments when conflict actors start to demonstrate an interest in reconciling positions – it is credited nevertheless with working well in middle-income countries and does emphasize linkages between the development and the traditional conflict prevention agenda. One regional observer indicated that the PBF: “takes risks, and recognizes problems that aren’t traditional.” A PBF representative elaborated: “We want good governance that can manage conflict in ways that are productive for societies.” The PBF does place a heavy analytical burden on country and cross-border teams and this feature of its design may ultimately limit the amount of funding supplied for regional upstream prevention activities in Latin America. A pre-requisite of PBF funding is a detailed and robust conflict analysis. The need for a detailed conflict analysis may tilt the balance of funding toward downstream conflict prevention activities where a link to conflict prevention is easier to illustrate.

Competition for resources remains an important obstacle for the 2017 reforms and the UN’s broader prevention ambitions. The General Assembly resolution launching the reform process over four years ago called attention to this risk in the face of declining unearmarked funds, concerned by the competition this generates. Resolution 71/243 notes that “non-core resources pose their own challenges by potentially increasing transaction costs, fragmentation, unproductive competition and overlap among entities and/or providing disincentives for pursuing system-wide priorities, strategic positioning, and coherence.”<sup>151</sup> The added emphasis on stabilizing funding for the UN Development System is leading to a perception of heightened competition at the regional level in Latin America. Parts of ECLAC, which is experiencing serious liquidity challenges, have indicated that decisions made regarding funding arrangements within the framework of the reform of the UN Development System could exacerbate funding pressures in their operating environment.<sup>152</sup>

While donor funding continues to flow principally at the national level, there are concerted efforts to draw in new funding for regional activities. There is significant scepticism that this will lead to improved prevention outcomes. Most experts interviewed for this study argue that funding targeting regional structures is detrimental to the needs at national and subregional levels where operational capacity is greatest, but where funding for prevention is still lacking.

2. **Data:** While significant efforts have been made to deploy platforms and databases that capture real-time data from across UN entities at a regional level, experts leading flagship data analytics initiatives report that data is still seen as an individual asset leveraged to demonstrate leadership by an entity in a specific programme area, rather than a collective asset.<sup>153</sup> This will ultimately undermine reporting on progress at a regional level, as data will be siloed within specific agencies. Moreover, this will limit the capacity of the UN Development System to present insights from data collected to government officials, and the UN’s ability to get those same officials to engage with the evidence base in support of prevention efforts.
3. **Regional Collaborative Platform:** Previous assessments of the UN’s regional approaches underscored the shortcomings in cooperation and deliverables on the ground following the reforms, and suggested that the reform process had received more attention than

implementation and outcomes.<sup>154</sup> One ambition of RCPs was that it would address duplication of effort and expertise at the regional level between the regional commission and other UN regional actors.<sup>155</sup> However, experts spoken to for this study indicate that: “while the RCP could really open up the RECs to the UN system and make visible the resources and assets that could be applied to common challenges, the RECs are still rather opaque.”<sup>156</sup>

The RCP itself suffers from overly formalized structures and procedures. These procedures undermine the original ambition of an agile and responsive platform. The formality of the RCP is in part a function of the seniority of its members, which was thought to be required to effectively bridge diverging interests of the membership. However, these formal structures undermine the agility required for effective prevention in practice. Some regional agency representatives indicate that the current RCP structure prevents easy, rapid, and responsive access to UN country teams and RCs, undermining the ability of regional experts to shape strategic initiatives in-country and share the latest analysis from global and regional levels – a key objective of the RCP. A chain of communication dependent on specific signoffs is responsible for this lag time. These nested approval requirements slow regional responses in this regional support mechanism. This is especially noticeable in the work of the IBCs and their way of connecting with country teams. This tension plays out in reverse as well. RCs have expressed frustration with the inability of the regional leaders to convene RCs on emerging and pressing issues and they have, as a result, self-organized on multiple occasions.

This is leading to fragmentation and parallel structures. One official observed that: “the real joint work and coordination is happening outside the regional meeting, between clusters of agencies.” The risk is that the RCP fossilizes into yet another information-sharing platform with little strategic added value. One respondent noted that this outcome may be hard to prevent because, absent any operational capacity at the regional level: “there is no easy joint purpose to come together beyond issues of institutional turf.” This is in part driven by the formality of the structures, but also the limited time available to strategize and coordinate.

- 4. Issue-Based Coalitions:** IBCs are meant to be responsive mechanisms, sensitive to changes on the ground and serving as live data and analysis ecosystems. Because there is little space to achieve strategic outcomes at the RCPs, regional experts and RCs turn to the IBCs, noting all the while that even though “IBC’s have more time, [...] they don’t have the political level necessary for a prevention agenda to be supported.” Another RC pushed back on the idea that IBCs were merely help desks for RCs, clarifying that: “their value lies also in pre-empting crisis and early warning.” In addition to this early warning function, alerting country teams to regional trends that can impact their work at the country level, IBCs are also meant to offer surge capacity in specific areas. The authors found that this surge function is unlikely to materialize within the RCP structures without additional support for regional expertise.

There is some evidence to support the view that IBCs are at least partially working as intended. In October 2021, the RCs of Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Panama sent a joint request for urgent support to the regional

Latin America IBC on Human Mobility, the first such request from RCs to IBCs in Latin America. The request articulated seven areas for support including, *inter alia*, shared periodic analysis of human mobility flows across the eight countries, including verifiable and comparable figures; common messages and coordinated strategic communication that would reinforce the coherence of UN positions on issues linked to the protection of migrants and refugees in the eight countries and; support in the elaboration of contingency plans and assistance facilitating coordination between teams working at borders.<sup>157</sup> The type of support requested by RCs align with the stated reform objectives and the anticipated new capacities of the UN's repositioned regional assets. The results were mixed. The most notable outcome of this request was joint advocacy carried out by the regional body. The IBC was not able to deliver on the other requests from RCs.

This episode reveals how the reforms are still taking root and have yet to optimize the offer of support at the regional level for effective prevention. It may also suggest that IBCs can be unresponsive and of limited value. However, it is important to recall that the functions ascribed to the IBC come on top of existing responsibilities for UN regional personnel. The authors heard of ongoing efforts to improve coordination, strategic planning, and prioritization of capacities and support, which should result in a course correction over the coming year and improved support capacity for country teams.

5. **Joined-up advocacy:** Common messages issued from the regional level have been shown to have considerable impact at the country level. Aside from a demonstration of common principles, they provide RCs with flexibility to adapt their engagement strategies in sometimes charged national contexts. The disadvantage of joint advocacy is that it can be more time-consuming to prepare following the reforms, given the many offices and officials involved in the chain of review and the more formal structures now in place, and may be too long (unfocused), or watered down. The converse is also true: regional messages can be counterproductive if prepared without consulting RCs and risk upsetting power dynamics and sensitivities in-country.
6. **The role of the strengthened Resident Coordinator in regional prevention:** While the RC has a national mandate, the authors found that they are key drivers of regional prevention efforts in Latin America. Not only are they closer to the crises unfolding on the ground, they have the authority and, typically, the goodwill of country teams to be able to pull together cross-pillar and cross-agency expertise to work in a joined-up way on prevention responses. This is only possible because agencies that make up country teams recognize the stronger but neutral coordination role played by the RC. Prevention efforts are more likely to succeed if the RC has worked with a country team to identify sources of fragility in the Common Country Analysis ahead of any crisis. A Common Country Analysis that has already factored in the elements of fragility that spark a crisis means that the country team already shares a common understanding and agreement on the root causes and are more likely to mobilize and rally around investments and solutions. And where RCs have managed to sustain cross-border, subregional analysis on these sources of fragility, the necessary relationships will already be in place on which new prevention strategies can be grafted.

## Lessons and Recommendations

The UN's experiences in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and Latin America offer deeply contrasting approaches to regional engagement. Looking to broaden the scope of inquiry and comparison, this project also convened an experts-level roundtable during the finalization of this report involving UN staff from the teams covering the Great Lakes, Central Asia, Latin America, and Central Africa. Based on the case studies and this consultation, this final section offers cross-cutting lessons and recommendations as the UN takes forward the next generation of regional approaches.

### Lessons

- 1. A political balancing act:** Whereas the Horn strategy has been described as largely politically-led, the Sahel has both a political and a development track, while Latin America has no standalone political strategy. The strategies in the Great Lakes and Central Africa tend more towards the Horn model, focusing mainly on political engagement without directly driving programming. One advantage of Horn-style strategy is that it remains fairly light touch, allowing the Special Envoy and the office to focus on engagement with national leadership and the more traditional mediation work of envoys. However, without large-scale programming, envoys have fewer sources of leverage and has appeared to struggle to find entry points with powerbrokers in the region. In contrast, the Sahel strategy has come to be dominated by the development plan, which much of the time appears to run on a separate track from the political work. In some respects, the large investment and highly visible programming in the Sahel offers the UN greater access and leverage, but it is not clear whether this is channelled to the prevention priorities of UNOWAS (indeed, this research found significant differences between the two). In Latin America, prevention is rarely directed by regional actors and in some cases, such as with OHCHR, headquarters teams have a much greater role directing and supporting cross-border prevention strategies in the region. The notion of cascading priorities – be they political or development – from the regional level to the national level does not map easily onto experiences in Latin America, where the most robust prevention responses tend to be developed and promulgated by strong country representatives and gradually reach across borders, coming together in subregional initiatives. This points to the need to more deeply understand how a political strategy plays out in different contexts – and whether one is necessary at all in some regions – in particular in regions with high sovereignty barriers and/or weak regional organizations. And it may suggest the need for the UN to review how a political strategy relates to programming and the national priorities of in-country leadership.
- 2. Integration and its discontents:** The 2017 reforms represent the culmination of decades of efforts to improve integration across the UN system. The creation of three new regional Assistant Secretaries-General in the DPPA-DPO joint structure, political strategies, and RCPs were specifically designed to enhance cooperation and coordination across the H-D-P communities. And in many respects, this has been a success: The H-D-P nexus is now the basis for a growing number of country cooperation frameworks, articulating joint goals and metrics for the entire UN family in many settings. As the Sahel experience

demonstrates, this can have a gradually beneficial impact of aligning programming behind common priorities, which should improve outcomes over time. Staying cognizant of these benefits, this project also surfaced many problems that UN colleagues have experienced in attempting to pursue highly integrated approaches in regions facing their own distinct challenges. Broadly, these can be placed into three categories:

- a. *Challenges of superficial coordination.* UN actors must “pretend to be all on the same page even when we’re not.” Here, the development of broad H-D-P plans may create the appearance of coherence, but in some cases may just be an exercise that is subsequently ignored as UN agencies pursue their own priorities. This is especially the case where humanitarian actors wish to establish visible distance between their work and that of political and development agencies.
  - b. *The burden of too much coordination.* The UN gets mired in a constant stream of integration meetings and cross-agency processes that leave little time for more substantive work. Indeed, one of the recurrent complaints from UN actors in the field has been that the requirements to develop cohesive, all-encompassing plans has created more work than is needed, without a corresponding return on investment. “We spend all our time in coordination meetings—when are we meant to do our job?” was a frequently-raised complaint. Because regional structures are dependent on local data to develop holistic analyses, there is inevitably an additional demand on already strained resources at the national level. The benefits of the regional analysis were rarely described as commensurate with the initial investments.
  - c. *A disconnect with other actors.* The focus on H-D-P planning may mean the UN turns inward and ignores the more important relationships with national actors, non-UN agencies, and civil society groups. A common theme was that the H-D-P work did not demand a common vision with the host government or civil society, only one across UN entities. “Integration doesn’t mean we actually get buy-in from the leaders on the ground, but it should,” one UN staff member noted.
3. **A very stretched group of Resident Coordinators:** A core purpose of the UN reforms was to “make development work for prevention,” to position the RC system as a front-line prevention actor around the world. This has required a significant set of shifts within the RC system, away from largely development-focused actors toward an expectation that RCs will perform more of an early warning and response function and deliver on the prevention agenda. A similar shift was meant to occur in regional support structures, such as the RCPs and IBCs, though this has been much slower to take in the regions surveyed for this report.

The RCs are the primary implementing actors for the overwhelming bulk of the initiatives linked to the regional strategies: whether cross-border projects, accessing conflict-affected areas, or advancing capacity-building initiatives. RCs bear the brunt of the new energy behind regional prevention. And, as nearly every RC interviewed for this study is quick to point out, they are expected to take on this preventive role with fewer resources than ever before (though DCO has taken significant steps to improve support to RCs

globally). This overstretch of RCs has several interrelated knock-on effects for regional strategies:

- a. *A disconnect between regional plans and national implementation.* In several instances, a set of regional priorities and analysis did not match neatly onto the national plans laid out by RCs. For example, a regional plan might identify land tenure and climate change as key drivers of instability, but an RC will have a set of national obligations around food security and humanitarian response.
  - b. *Underprioritization of regional initiatives in the UN's national plans and, vice-versa, an underprioritization of national concerns in regional plans.* "If I have to choose between an obligation to a national government and an ask from a regional office, I have to take the first obligation," one RC noted. In Latin America, as a result of the disconnect noted above, some regional initiatives started as political projects without roots in country offices, substantially increasing the work of RCs later as they attempted to negotiate accommodation of new priorities in national contexts.
  - c. *RC burnout.* As a result of competing pressures, and needing to respond to asks from Headquarters, regional offices, and dozens of agencies, this project identified a high risk of RC burnout, especially in the context of COVID-19 response. "The list of expectations on RCs is simply too much, we can't keep up," was a phrase reiterated by many RCs around the world.
  - d. *Regional capacity for emerging challenges.* In some regions, the prevention agenda is principally a national set of priorities that grows into cross-border initiatives. This may see RCs petitioning for support at the regional level. "We don't always see the benefit of the regional offices here on the ground right away," one RC noted. RCs point out the struggle to draw sufficient attention to worsening fragility despite tell-tale signs of emerging crises. Despite calls from multiple RCs to tackle emerging challenges, capacities simply do not exist at regional level to provide either swift surge capacity or responses. The joint UNDP-DPPA PDAs and Regional Programme Specialists can assist, but are too few in number to represent an adequate response capacity.
4. **The value of analysis:** While there may be differences of view as to the operational value of regional strategies, nearly all experts consulted agreed that regional analysis was of real benefit to the UN system. This analysis might come from UNDP-DPPA PDAs and Regional Programme Specialists, agencies with a regional remit, or a UN office with analytic capacities. Some opportunities and challenges linked to the newly generated regional analysis are:
  - a. There are some signs that the regional inputs to Common Country Analysis frameworks have resulted in a richer document that provides a better sense of prevention challenges and the links to the development agenda. A Common Country Analysis that takes into account the challenges linked to a crisis will ensure that the country team already shares a common understanding and agreement on the root causes and are more likely to mobilize and rally around investments and solutions. Whether farmer-herder reports from UNOWAS, climate-security assessments in the Horn, or multidimensional conflict analysis support from the

Regional Programme Specialist in Latin America, having a regional perspective is crucial and not easily delivered by any other actor.

- b. The relatively rapid increase in the number and quality of PDAs across the UN system, including their placement in several regional offices, has boosted this analytic capacity in a meaningful way. However, it bears repeating that PDAs are not a crisis management tool – they are meant to be a prevention capacity. The challenge ahead for the UN system at the regional level is finding ways to operationalize the analysis generated across very different types of prevention contexts including the analysis provided by UNDP-DPPA PDAs and Regional Programme Specialists.
  - c. Respondents point to a missing skillset that enables the full leveraging of regional analysis, specifically, the capacity in-country to convert complex analysis into prioritized programming.
  - d. While PDAs are universally recognized as playing a useful function, these roles can have a distorting effect as well. Funding for prevention is more likely to flow to countries where PDAs provide support, as they can help improve the quality of conflict assessments, increasing the likelihood of funding. This relationship between quality of analysis and prevention funding means that upstream prevention that does not revolve around an immediate crisis is likely to receive lower priority status. With upward of 50 countries launching cooperation frameworks in the next year, there is a window of opportunity in 2022-2023 to shift the way analysis is used at regional and national levels.
5. **Uneven data availability across regions:** As the Sahel case study highlighted, a consolidated and resourced effort to bring data together and incorporate it into strategic planning can deliver results, especially in terms of building an evidence base for programming, but also in terms of establishing a better common understanding of root causes of instability. Data related to the impact of programming is particularly scarce across the UN, leaving the multilateral system largely in the dark as to which interventions are most effective. Is the governance support to Sahelian countries helping to drive risks of instability downwards? Have the cross-border programmes in the Horn lowered tensions among communities? Have new analytical capacities come online in Latin America that substantively improve prevention in national or in cross-regional contexts? These are questions that can only be answered by a much more rigorous use of data, investing in the kinds of information that will allow the UN to measure the impact of its actions. They are also questions to which major donors demand answers, meaning that continued funding of regional initiatives will depend largely on improvements in the UN's ability to show impact.
6. **“Uniquely positioned” for cross-border interventions:** The growth in recent years of cross-border programming has been one of the most important successes of the UN. Indeed, the PBF has developed helpful policy guidance to assist other UN actors in implementing a much broader array of transboundary interventions.<sup>158</sup> As one UN expert noted, some UN regional offices are “uniquely positioned” to support this work, able to assess risks beyond national boundaries, unrestricted by onerous national planning frameworks, and able to bring actors together in an impartial manner. Thus far, cross-border work has helped to tackle important issues such as farmer-herder tensions, localized disputes over

resources, and even some larger-scale issues such as the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam along the Nile. Given current climate, demographic, and conflict trends, cross-border dynamics are likely to become more volatile in the coming period, requiring even more dedicated analysis and response by the UN system and its partners and donors. However, this experience is not uniform, and some of the experiences in Latin America have underscored the limitations of regional structures to anticipate, prioritize, or direct cross-border prevention efforts. There are dynamic examples of prevention activities at the subregional level in Latin America, but these tend to operate independent of, and not as a result of, regional prevention initiatives and capacities.

7. **Growing pains for the Regional Collaborative Platforms:** The RCP initiative has enormous potential to align UN development activities and minimize duplication across large regions. By linking the UN's work to IBCs, the hope is for regional analysis to scale up quickly in anticipation of crises and ensure that the UN responds with the best constellation of actors for a given setting. Keeping in mind that these structures are still relatively new and have not had adequate time to mature and course correct, this research has nevertheless found that early stress tests of the RCP/IBC model has yet to demonstrate value added for those implementing prevention strategies in Latin America and in different parts of Africa. Recurrent challenges identified across regional offices include:

- a. *Slow, conflicting messaging regarding the prevention responsibilities of the RCPs.* Evidence gathered during this study indicates that RCPs were not always clear on their prevention role and may, in some cases, have been encouraged to minimize this aspect of their work. The reasons for this are understandable: prevention requires information, analysis, and knowledge of local context on the ground, and some Member States may hesitate to assent to the reformed regional bodies carrying out such activities. Nevertheless, the Secretary-General has stressed that: "regional actors are central to sustaining peace and preventing and responding to insecurity" and should therefore be bolstered. This message is crystallizing organization-wide, if slowly, removing any doubt that prevention is inseparable from development and constitutes a central objective of RCPs. However, between 2017 and 2021, there was significant confusion regarding these priorities that may have contributed to the view, frequently expressed, that "actors at the regional level are just doing the same things as before." The release of the September 2021 UN Development System Management and Accountability Framework included important clarifications on the core functions of RCPs, notably, that they are to "support linkages between humanitarian and development programming, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 46/182, and in conflict and post-conflict settings, support the integration of UN country team's work with UN peace operations to fully contribute to building resilience, prevention and sustaining peace." This recent clarification may spark a substantive shift in the ways RCPs work and see them build up greater prevention capacities in months ahead.
- b. *A single RCP for Africa dilutes its impact, lumping together far too many diverse subregions.* "The problems we have in the Horn are fundamentally different from those in the Sahel, or the Great Lakes ... it doesn't make any sense to consider us one

- region,” one expert noted. Even its main function – acting as a knowledge hub – has limited utility across the very different subregions of the continent.
- c. *RCPs are mainly focused on development programming, which is only relevant to those offices and regions with a significant development focus.* As such, RCPs may have much more traction with the group implementing the development-heavy aspects of the Sahel strategy, but feel largely disconnected from the political work of the envoys in UNOWAS, Central Africa, the Horn, and the Great Lakes. In Latin America, it may struggle to stretch development approaches into territory seen to be the purview of conflict and humanitarian actors. Where it is thought to bring value is in addressing prevention challenges that fall between agency mandates, which require additional political heft to land at the national or regional level. Evidence that RCPs are playing this role is limited.
  - d. *Issue-Based Coalitions have not yet been responsive to the priorities set by RCs and have in some settings become yet another coordination obligation.* Rather than offering an opportunity to scale up prevention responses, many UN experts describe IBCs as another forum for turf battles between agencies. Part of this can be attributed to the genesis of IBCs – a structure that originated in Europe and that functioned well in a particular context, which has since been transposed in all regions albeit in very different political, economic, and crisis contexts. The lack of clarity regarding the services offered by IBCs has generated new expectations and some disappointment. It is important to recall that IBCs largely self-organize at the regional level and create a new layer of expectation on regional personnel that already service activities agreed with their respective headquarters and field personnel. However, this study has also gathered examples of innovative attempts by the IBCs to align their limited capacities to the needs of RCs in some regional contexts. To address concerns at the country level, some IBCs are preparing a menu of services to communicate more clearly what can be offered to RCs to “better match joint capacities at regional level with RC needs.” A revamping of IBCs’ terms of reference is also underway in some regions.
8. **Surge capacity at regional level:** The regional reforms aimed to pool expertise at the regional level specifically in support of RCs and country teams. In the Secretary-General’s 2021 update on the implementation of the reforms, he states as an explicit ambition of the RCPs and IBCs that these “platforms move their focus from process to substance, measuring impact and reporting on results in line with regional priorities and specificities and [...] identify ways to strengthen the availability of surge capacities when circumstances require.”<sup>159</sup> This project found that there remains significant confusion throughout the system with regards to this priority and mandate for the UN’s regional development coordination bodies. Some indicated that this surge capacity was incorrectly tied to RCPs, as the capacities relied solely on the availability of resources within agencies, funds, and programmes. Instead of pooled surge capacities homed in IBCs, parallel surge capacities are being put in place. OHCHR, for instance, is expanding its subregional emergency response teams in support of the Rights Up Front initiative to be able to collect information, feed Regional Monthly Review analyses, and address human rights violations in a prompt and agile manner, though this is largely disconnected from coordinating structures like RCPs or IBCs.<sup>160</sup> These new OHCHR prevention platforms are notably well-networked in communities and rely on and disseminate information

collected with civil society partners and national human rights institutions. The RC is seen as a key client and beneficiary of these new surge prevention capacities provided by OHCHR, alongside the human rights advisors supporting RCs, by bypassing the RCP structure altogether.

## Recommendations

Based on these findings, and drawing from the expert roundtable event that included experts from the major regional prevention offices and programmes across the UN, this section offers recommendations for the UN system and Member States to improve regional prevention approaches.

- 1. Take a hard, independent look at the Humanitarian-Development-Peacebuilding nexus:** Integrating approaches across humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors can have enormous benefits, aligning short-term interventions with the kind of deeper structural support that can help regions transition from decades of instability. But these benefits should not be taken as a given. If anything, this project surfaced a growing discontent with the burdens and downsides of implementing the H-D-P nexus, including the enormous time and effort required to produce documents that often do little to improve the effectiveness of programming. Indeed, one of the greatest downsides of the H-D-P work may have been to orient the UN almost entirely inwards in its strategic development, absorbing the bulk of leadership's energy on coordination across UN pillars with comparatively little investment in partnerships with other actors who may have far more leverage and relevance. This worrying finding points to the need for a serious, independent assessment of the H-D-P nexus approach, one that is open to the possibility that omnibus approaches to integration may not always be optimal.
- 2. Co-develop parts of a regional strategy with national and regional actors:** A striking commonality across many regional strategies was their development behind closed doors, among UN actors only, and often with only fairly light inputs from national governments and regional organizations. While it may be necessary to keep a close hold on some sensitive aspects of a regional strategy, the downside of a fully internal one is too high. Lack of buy-in from the actors who matter most in a regional strategy spells its certain demise. Instead, the UN should develop strategies at least partially in direct and open collaboration with the national and regional actors who will form its most important partners.
- 3. Explore a spectrum from framework to strategy:** This study has identified three different prevention models: (a) a cascading model in the Sahel, where regional strategies are meant to shape national plans; (b) a net model in the Horn, that aims to gather actors together in a very wide and permeable boundary, drawing them gradually closer together to achieve added coherence; and (c) an alliance model in Latin America built around coalitions that form on the basis of appeals to other RCs and regional actors for specific and specialist input and funding, taking into account locally-identified risks. This report argues that there is a place for each of these

models, and others as well. For instance, in volatile settings with frequent leadership transitions, developing a lighter framework of UN priority areas may be more useful than a full-blown political strategy. The advantages of a net model include: (a) greater flexibility in shifting resources around moving priorities; (b) less appearance of micromanaging RCs in their national programming; (c) a less ambitious set of deliverables in regions that may struggle to show short-term progress; and (d) less likelihood that agencies and RCs will get into battles over turf and programming priorities. Rather than require a multi-year strategy for all settings, the UN should explore how lighter frameworks could take advantage of fluid situations and offer a more iterative approach to programming. Latin America's alliance model is one example of a regional prevention approach developing outside of a fixed political strategy. However, its shortcomings are also clear: this *ad hoc* approach forgoes standing capacity at the regional level backed by predictable resources.

4. **Invest time and resources in partnerships:** Across the regions studied, the UN's partnership with international financial institutions and the private sector was described as *ad hoc* and non-strategic. While there are emerging good practices – such as the growing use of joint UN and World Bank assessments in many countries – the UN still lacks deeper strategic partnerships with international financial institutions, regional banks, and private sector actors who often carry significant weight in fragile settings. Experts pointed out that the UN has had a series of reports from Brahimi to Prodi, from the High-level Panel on Peace Operations to the Common Agenda, all emphasizing partnership but with little actual progress to date in line with these recommendations (with the possible exception of the UN and AU partnership). The message from regional experts was clear: without a much more serious partnership with these actors, the UN will struggle to build leverage and offer meaningful responses in the face of emerging crises. This may well involve a greater share of resources going into partnerships than programming.
5. **Triage to avoid Resident Coordinator burnout:** RCs are now the fulcrum of the UN's prevention regime, responsible for bridging the H-D-P nexus, linking to regional organizations, responding to early warning signals, and developing national plans with sometimes difficult governments. As described above, this is an extraordinary burden that has left many RCs overstretched, needing to make difficult decisions about their use of scarce time and resources. The authors frequently heard RCs referring to “burnout” and the impossibility of the tasks facing them, including the onerous obligations of participating in regional initiatives that rarely offered them direct value added. While acknowledging the extraordinary efforts of the DCO to generate resources for RCOs around the world, this research suggests that one of the most important future tasks may be to offer more triage support, finding ways to alleviate some of the reporting, planning, and coordinating burdens that fall on RCs to allow them to pursue their more impactful work. An external audit of the obligations currently being placed on RCs, driven by the goal of reducing their workload to the most effective lines of activity, might be helpful (though of course would impose yet another process on RCs). Another recommendation offered by some experts was the designation of Member State “champions” who can take on some of the broader resource mobilization and coordination work at the regional level, a particularly

important role in middle-income countries that struggle to sustain donor attention to indicators of worsening fragility. This suggestion is slated for further review and refinement in a follow-up study.

- 6. Establish common starting points for the regional and national:** There is a significant difference between a regional strategy like the Sahel (which drives programming) and ones like Central Africa and the Horn, which largely align with existing national priorities. Without advocating for one approach over another, research undertaken for this study pointed to the importance of building a common analytic starting point for the UN's regional and national leadership. Jointly developing a Common Country Analysis and/or cooperation framework is one such way to build a shared understanding of needs. The introduction of Regional Programme Specialists alongside nationally-stationed PDAs is a very positive development that could drive this common assessment process. Participants at the expert roundtable convened in the context of this study, pointed to the need for more cross-regional dialogue that would allow UN personnel to learn from prevention approaches in other regions – they suggested that these opportunities were non-existent now.
- 7. Urgently clarify the prevention role and capacities of Regional Collaborative Platforms and their Issue-Based Coalitions:** This study documented consistent misunderstandings with respect to the role of the RCPs and IBCs and their role in supporting prevention activities. There would be great benefit in clarifying whether RCPs and IBCs have a consistent set of tools and resources that can be deployed in all regions to support prevention approaches and whether the IBCs should coalesce around emerging needs (and end once those needs have been addressed through a sunset clause) or exist in semi-permanence. Additionally, some attention should be given to tailoring the RCP offering to the specific regional prevention models identified in this study – an RCP may operate differently in the Sahel, where a cascading prevention model exists, and Latin America, where this study has identified an alliance model. For larger UN entities, the regional level merely represents a back-up resource for country teams. It is clear that national teams do not consistently view the regional assets as a significant resource for the whole UN country team or providing meaningful guidance on prevention approaches. There is specific room to improve how RCs interact with regional experts and the IBCs. In some cases, RCs should have unfettered access to regional experts, possibly through a light coordination with the regional DCO director, who can reach out to the relevant experts and networks.
- 8. Differentiate between crisis response and the bigger prevention picture:** Across the strategies, there was a sense that much of prevention was focused on longer-term structural drivers of conflict. While this is crucial and aligned with key initiatives like the joint World Bank and UN *Pathways for Peace* report, there was a sense that the strategies did not position the UN for crisis response, such as the coups in Guinea and Sudan, or the civil war in Ethiopia. Especially in volatile regions with frequent transitions in leadership, it may be necessary to differentiate between a multi-year approach geared at addressing structural issues, and a nimbler rapid response that allows the UN to act quickly in the face of fast-moving crises. As one UN expert noted: “you can’t expect a working group that meets six times a year to respond to a coup.”

This need to work across structural prevention and crisis response simultaneously could be more thoroughly considered in the context of the Regional Monthly Review process in Headquarters as well.

- 9. From funding to financing:** Across the regional offices, investment in prevention remains largely centred on project-based funding, responding to the national priorities of major donors or instructions given by regional agency, fund, and programme directors. The result is heavily earmarked, short-term programme funding that is subject to intense competition across UN agencies. A set of interrelated shifts could help in this context: from short-term projects to longer-term programming, from earmarked funds to pooled resources around common objectives (e.g. the PBF or Multi-Partner Trust Fund), and from measuring success based on fundraising and expenditure to a much more serious effort at measuring impact. Funding put at the disposal of regional agency, fund, and programme directors could be conditioned on disbursement for joint initiatives. The role of the PBF and RECs could be far more central as well. The PBF has underspent available resources for cross-border activities but is deeply committed to this type of prevention approach, indicating untapped potential. Despite their central role in the RCPs, UN staff tend to have a poor understanding of the roles of RECs, their potential to support longer-term prevention efforts, and their connection to the major banks and private sector actors who could take forward such an approach. The Humanitarian-Development-Peacebuilding and Partnership Facility is improving understanding of the way the UN and the international financial institutions can work together on prevention, but indications are that the regional and country level prevention actors still struggle to link their priorities and challenges with overarching international financial institutions' priorities and mandates.
- 10. Develop a concept of regional governance:** Much of the UN's work in fragile regions is focused on capacity development for national governments, helping them to improve rule of law, security, and delivery of basic services. As the Sahel and Latin America case studies illustrated, this work on governance is often the most underresourced, despite agreement that poor and/or inequitable governance is a root cause of instability. Moreover, the term "governance" typically refers exclusively to the national capacities of a State to provide stability within its borders. As the Horn of Africa experience over the past four years demonstrates, a lack of functioning regional governance institutions can be a major factor in conflict risks. IGAD's fragmentation has meant it is poorly positioned to partner with others in addressing new crises. Indeed, signs of fracture within ECOWAS as it struggles to respond to a series of coups and destabilizing trends in West Africa are a worrying indication that it may be less able to prevent future conflicts. In Latin America, the challenge will remain resourcing prevention initiatives that address growing mistrust and a fraying social contract in the context of structured cooperation frameworks with governments that may not acknowledge the utility of such investments. Across other regions, such as the Great Lakes and Central Africa, underfunctioning regional organizations point to the need for greater investment and attention to the priority of regional governance.
- 11. Invest in data:** The UN remains an extraordinarily activity-driven organization, often equating programmatic expenditure with impact. However, where regions have taken

data seriously – such as the emerging work on the Sahel strategy – the UN has an evidence base to drive programming. By drawing on UN-generated data in the Sahel, the authors were able to point to mismatches between analysis and resources, but also to innovative ways the UN has gradually shifted approaches in response to new dynamics (e.g. transhumance). Across much of the UN, however, the system remains mired in outdated activity-based budgets, programming that is not based in a theory of change, and a poor sense of whether the UN is having any impact at all. While it is often difficult to establish the complex causal links between prevention activities and risk reduction,<sup>161</sup> the first step is to take data collection and analysis much more seriously. The RECs hold significant data, but they are not a panacea. The UN Office of Internal Oversight Services and Joint Inspection Unit’s reports have noted that, while RECs are meant to provide effective and reliable support to Member States in connection with the 2030 Agenda, there was “insufficient capacity to address key statistical needs and the lack of resources to respond appropriately.”<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> The history of the Issue-Based Coalition can be traced back to UN efforts in Europe to address the situation of the Roma people.

<sup>50</sup> Broadly, Sahelian Africa includes parts of Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, South Sudan, Cameroon, Central African Republic and Ethiopia. For the purposes of this paper, however, we follow the ten countries listed in the UN Support Plan for the Sahel: Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad. Africa Renewal, “The Sahel: Land of Opportunities,” last accessed 9 March 2022, <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/sahel>.

<sup>51</sup> Sebastian von Einsiedel et al., *Civil War Trends and the Changing Nature of Armed Conflict* (Tokyo: United Nations University, 2017), <https://cpr.unu.edu/civil-war-trends-and-the-changing-nature-of-armed-conflict.html>.

<sup>52</sup> United Nations, *UN Support Plan for the Sahel: Working Together for a Prosperous and Peaceful Sahel* (Dakar: United Nations, 2018)

<sup>53</sup> Abdoulaye Mar Dieye, “Foreword,” *Progress Report on the Implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel January 2019-December 2020* (Dakar: UNISS, 2021), <https://unis-sahel.org/2021/06/23/uniss-progress-report-english/>.

<sup>54</sup> United Nations Security Council, “Resolution 2056, adopted by the Security Council at its 6798th meeting,” United Nations, 5 July 2012, S/RES/2056.

<sup>55</sup> African Union, “The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework,” Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 16 January 2008, MSC/REG.1/01/08, <https://au.int/ar/node/39184>.

<sup>56</sup> Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, *Progress Report on the Implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel January 2019-December 2020* (Dakar: UNISS, 2021).

<sup>57</sup> Other examples include the Nouakchott Process, an AU-led initiative that includes a range of countries within and beyond UNOWAS’ mandate area, and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), which includes Cameroon but no other countries within UNOWAS’ mandate.

<sup>58</sup> For an interactive map of these overlapping mandate areas, Amandine Gnanguênon, “Mapping African Regional Cooperation,” European Council on Foreign Relations, last accessed 9 March 2022, <https://ecfr.eu/special/african-cooperation/>.

<sup>59</sup> United Nations Security Council, “Resolution 2391, adopted by the Security Council at its 8129th meeting,” United Nations, 8 December 2017, S/RES/2391.

<sup>60</sup> Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, *Progress Report on the Implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel January 2019-December 2020* (Dakar: UNISS, 2021).

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- <sup>63</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Group, "RCP: Africa," last accessed 9 March 2022, <https://unsdg.un.org/un-in-action/rcp-africa>.
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- <sup>65</sup> The World Bank, "The World Bank Boosts Support to the Sahel for a Resilient Recovery from the Security and Economic Crisis," 15 December 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/12/15/the-world-bank-boosts-support-to-the-sahel-for-a-resilient-recovery-from-the-security-and-economic-crisis>.
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- <sup>67</sup> See, e.g., U.S. Department of State, "Office of the Special Envoy for the Sahel Region of Africa," last accessed 9 March 2022, <https://www.state.gov/bureaus-offices/under-secretary-for-political-affairs/bureau-of-african-affairs/office-of-the-special-envoy-for-the-sahel-region-of-africa/>.
- <sup>68</sup> African Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank.
- <sup>69</sup> Alliance Sahel, "The Sahel Alliance," last accessed 9 March 2022, <https://www.alliance-sahel.org/en/sahel-alliance/>.
- <sup>70</sup> The Coalition for the Sahel, "Providing a More Collective and Inclusive Response to the Sahel Crisis," last accessed 9 March 2022, <https://www.coalition-sahel.org/en/>.
- <sup>71</sup> OECD, "Development finance data," last accessed 10 March 2022, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-data/>.
- <sup>72</sup> NB: the November 2021 UNISS White Paper notes that there is no formalized regional theory of change for the UN. Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, *White Paper: Synthesis of preliminary findings* (Dakar, UNISS, 2021).
- <sup>73</sup> Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, *Rapid Assessment of United Nations investments in the Sahel (2016 – 2020), Reflections on UN and partner investments in the region* (Dakar: UNISS, 2021): 24, <https://unis-sahel.org/2021/10/29/rapid-assessment-of-united-nations-un-investments-in-the-sahel-2016-2020-reflections-on-un-and-partner-investments-in-the-region/>.
- <sup>74</sup> See, e.g., UN Peacebuilding, "Burkina Faso," *The Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund Briefs* (2020), [https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/country\\_brief\\_bf\\_20200306\\_1.pdf](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/country_brief_bf_20200306_1.pdf).
- <sup>75</sup> Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, *Rapid Assessment of United Nations investments in the Sahel (2016 – 2020), Reflections on UN and partner investments in the region* (Dakar: UNISS, 2021): 43, <https://unis-sahel.org/2021/10/29/rapid-assessment-of-united-nations-un-investments-in-the-sahel-2016-2020-reflections-on-un-and-partner-investments-in-the-region/>.
- <sup>76</sup> The High-level Committee on Programmes supported the initiation of an inter-agency predictive analytics pilot focused on the interconnectedness of displacement, climate risks, food insecurity, increased violence and threats to livelihoods in the Sahel region. The pilot exercise was launched in February 2020 under the leadership of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). It consulted 22 UN entities and leveraged data sets from different entities across the UN system, including the humanitarian data exchange, as well as sources outside of the UN such as open data and social media. Following the successful incubation, the project transitioned to the region under the leadership of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, in support of the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and the region's governments with UNHCR continuing to provide support on the project.
- <sup>77</sup> Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, *Progress Report on the Implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel January 2019-December 2020* (Dakar: UNISS, 2021).
- <sup>78</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>79</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>80</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>81</sup> The Fund for Peace, "Country Dashboards: Fragile States Index," last accessed 9 March 2022, <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data>.

- <sup>82</sup> Data from Jeffrey Sachs et al., “Rankings,” *The Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals. Sustainable Development Report 2021* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), <https://dashboards.sdindex.org/rankings>.
- <sup>83</sup> World Justice Project, “Rule of Law Index,” last accessed 9 March 2022, <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/>.
- <sup>84</sup> World Bank, “Databank: Worldwide Governance Indicators,” last accessed 9 March 2022, <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/worldwide-governance-indicators>.
- <sup>85</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Peace Index 2020: Measuring Peace in a Complex World* (Sydney: Institute for Economics & Peace, 2020), [https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/GPI\\_2020\\_web-1.pdf](https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/GPI_2020_web-1.pdf).
- <sup>86</sup> Diagram drawn from data in the Sustainable Development Report. Jeffrey Sachs et al., “Rankings,” *The Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals. Sustainable Development Report 2021* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), <https://dashboards.sdindex.org/rankings>.
- <sup>87</sup> United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, “UN Security Council Briefings,” last accessed 9 March 2022, <https://unowas.unmissions.org/un-security-council-briefing>.
- <sup>88</sup> UN Development Programme, “Statement delivered by Asako Okai at the Global Refugee Forum - Development and HDP Nexus Addressing Forced Displacement,” 17 December 2019, <https://www.undp.org/speeches/humanitarian-development-and-peace-nexus-addressing-forced-displacement>.
- <sup>89</sup> See, e.g., United Nations Peacebuilding, “Sahel,” last accessed 9 March 2022, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/tags/sahel>.
- <sup>90</sup> Several of these are covered in a previous UN University study. Adam Day, Rebecca Brubaker, Laurie Nathan and João Honwana, *Capturing UN Preventive Diplomacy Success: How and Why Does It Work?* (Tokyo: United Nations University, 2018), <https://cpr.unu.edu/research/projects/capturing-un-preventive-diplomacy-success-how-and-why-does-it-work.html>.
- <sup>91</sup> For a good description, see, Oxfam, *The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus: What does it mean for multi-mandated organizations?* (London: Oxfam, 2019), <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/humanitarian-development-peace-nexus-what-does-it-mean-multi-mandated-organizations>.
- <sup>92</sup> Leah Zamore, *The Triple Nexus in Practice: Toward a New Way of Working in Protracted and Repeated Crises* (New York: Center on International Cooperation, 2019), <https://cic.nyu.edu/publications/the-triple-nexus-in-practice>.
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- <sup>94</sup> Since its inception, 60 member states contributed to the Peacebuilding Fund, and 42 have made commitments and pledges for the present 2020-2024 Investment Plan. See, United Nations Peacebuilding, “PBF Donor Commitments and Pledge Tracker,” last accessed 9 March 2022, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/contributions>.
- <sup>95</sup> Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, *Rapid Assessment of United Nations investments in the Sahel (2016 – 2020), Reflections on UN and partner investments in the region* (Dakar: UNISS, 2021): 54.
- <sup>96</sup> Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, *Rapid Assessment of United Nations investments in the Sahel (2016 – 2020), Reflections on UN and partner investments in the region* (Dakar: UNISS, 2021): 24, <https://unis-sahel.org/2021/10/29/rapid-assessment-of-united-nations-un-investments-in-the-sahel-2016-2020-reflections-on-un-and-partner-investments-in-the-region/>: 54.
- <sup>97</sup> Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, *White Paper: Synthesis of preliminary findings* (Dakar, UNISS, 2021).
- <sup>98</sup> See, USA for UNHCR, “Sahel Refugee Crisis,” last accessed 9 March 2022, <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/sahel/>.
- <sup>99</sup> Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, *Rapid Assessment of United Nations investments in the Sahel (2016 – 2020), Reflections on UN and partner investments in the region* (Dakar: UNISS, 2021): 41.
- <sup>100</sup> However, these issues continue to receive far less funding priority than the analysis would suggest is needed.
- <sup>101</sup> Adam Higazi and Shidiki Abubakar Ali, *Pastoralism and Security in West Africa and the Sahel: Towards Peaceful Coexistence* (Dakar: UNOWAS, 2018), <https://unowas.unmissions.org/pastoralism-and-security-west-africa-and-sahel>.
- <sup>102</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>103</sup> Ibid: 45.
- <sup>104</sup> Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, *Rapid Assessment of United Nations investments in the Sahel (2016 – 2020), Reflections on UN and partner investments in the region* (Dakar: UNISS, 2021): 24, <https://unis-sahel.org/2021/10/29/rapid-assessment-of-united-nations-un-investments-in-the-sahel-2016-2020-reflections-on-un-and-partner-investments-in-the-region/>.

<sup>105</sup> An exception to this is the Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Divided, which specifically involves local actors in its data usage.

<sup>106</sup> Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, *Rapid Assessment of United Nations investments in the Sahel (2016 – 2020), Reflections on UN and partner investments in the region* (Dakar: UNISS, 2021): 44.

<sup>107</sup> David Passarelli, Adam Day and Fatima Denton, *Beyond Opportunism: The UN Development System's Response to the Triple Planetary Crisis* (New York: United Nations University, 2021), <https://cpr.unu.edu/research/projects/the-triple-planetary-crisis.html>.

<sup>108</sup> See, e.g., World Bank Group and the Solar Energy Research Institute of Singapore (SERIS), *Where Sun Meets Water: Floating Solar Market Report* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2018), <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/energy/publication/where-sun-meets-water>.

<sup>109</sup> UN University Centre for Policy Research has outlined this approach in its recent work on the UN's Rule of Law programming. Adam Day and Jessica Caus, *Rule of Law and Sustaining Peace: Towards More Impactful, Effective Conflict Prevention* (New York: United Nations University, 2021), <https://cpr.unu.edu/research/projects/rule-of-law-peace.html>.

<sup>110</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Group, "Next-generation Regional Collaborative Platform meeting kicks off for first time with regional UN entities in Africa," 3 March 2021, <https://unsdg.un.org/latest/announcements/next-generation-regional-collaborative-platform-meeting-kicks-first-time>.

<sup>111</sup> Africa UN Data for Development, "Africa UN Data for Development Portal," last accessed 9 March 2022, <https://ecastats.uneca.org/africaundata>.

<sup>112</sup> While the Horn of Africa is often described as being only Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia, the UN regional strategy for the Horn includes all Member States of IGAD, adding Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda.

<sup>113</sup> Suleiman Walhad, "The Intergovernmental Authority For Development (IGAD): A Failed NGO To Be Replaced By Horn Of Africa States – Analysis," *Eurasia Review*, 8 February 2022; Redie Bereketeab, "8 - Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD): A Critical Analysis," *Regional Integration, Identity & Citizenship in the Greater Horn of Africa* eds. Kidane Mengisteab and Redie Bereketeab (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); K Isaac Weldesellassie, "IGAD as an International Organization, Its Institutional Development and Shortcomings," *Journal of African Law* 55, 1 (2011); Getachew Zeru Gebrekidan and Messay Asgedom Gobena, "Rethinking IGAD's Role in Addressing Emerging Regional Security Threats," *Wilson Center SVNP Special Paper Series 4* (2021).

<sup>114</sup> United Nations, "UN Regional Strategy for the Horn of Africa," internal report on file with author.

<sup>115</sup> These reports are internal to the UN, on file with author.

<sup>116</sup> NB: this is not at all an exhaustive list but is meant to highlight the breadth of initiatives under the pillars. And given that much of the work of the Horn Strategy is confidential, these descriptions are kept fairly generic.

<sup>117</sup> International Organization for Migration, *Regional Migrants Response Plan for the Horn of Africa and Yemen 2018 – 2020* (Geneva: IOM, 2020), <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/2020-rmrp-appeal-regional-migrants-response-plan-horn-africa-and-yemen-2018-2020>.

<sup>118</sup> International Organization for Migration and African Union Commission, *Africa Migration Report* (Geneva: IOM, 2020), <https://publications.iom.int/books/africa-migration-report-challenging-narrative>.

<sup>119</sup> For resources on trends in the Horn, see: Mo Ibrahim Foundation, "COVID-19 in Africa: A Challenging Road to Recovery," Ibrahim Index of African Governance (2021), <https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/iiag/downloads>; Bertrand Assamoi et. al, "The impact of Covid-19 on governance, peace and security in the Horn of Africa," Dalberg, 1 September 2020, <https://dalberg.com/our-ideas/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-governance-peace-and-security-in-the-horn-of-africa/>; The Fund for Peace, *Fragile States Index Annual Report 2021* (Washington DC: Fund for Peace, 2021), <https://fragilestatesindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/fsi2021-report.pdf>; Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, "Global Organized Crime Index," last accessed 9 March 2022, <https://ocindex.net/>.

<sup>120</sup> See, e.g., Edith Lederer, "UN urges Sudanese to support prime minister for democracy," *AP News*, 1 December 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-africa-sudan-united-nations-antonio-guterres-d3b8fbfe89832d-00a79dd7ffe76dd1d8>.

<sup>121</sup> United Nations Department of Political Affairs, *Strategic Plan 2020-2022* (New York: UN DPPA, 2020), [https://dppa.un.org/sites/default/files/undppa\\_strategic\\_plan\\_2020-2022.pdf](https://dppa.un.org/sites/default/files/undppa_strategic_plan_2020-2022.pdf).

<sup>122</sup> Acute domestic violence and cross-border violence spurred by criminal cartels are notable exceptions.

<sup>123</sup> As in other regions, prevention activities in Latin America are highly political as they frequently target State institutions and standards of governance, notably, corruption and transparency.

<sup>124</sup> Examples of regional coordination structures include regional bodies and institutions of the Central American Integration System (SICA), MERCOSUR, the Organization of American States (OAS), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the South American Social Development Council (CSDS in Spanish), the Tuxtla Mechanism for Dialogue and Coordination, and the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle. Other prominent non-governmental regional coordinating platforms include the Latin American Network of Women Transforming the Economy (REMTE), the Latin American by the Coordination of Rural Organizations (CLOC), and the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social and Solidarity Economies (RIPESS LAC).

<sup>125</sup> Marcelo Saguier and Zoe Brent, “Social and Solidarity Economy in South American regional governance,” *Global Social Policy* 17, 3 (2017).

<sup>126</sup> Luis Felipe López Calva, “Issue-Based Coalitions and Thematic Working Groups of the RCP LAC,” Presentation, 18 March 2021, [https://foroalc2030.cepal.org/2021/sites/default/files/presentations/ppt\\_ibc\\_lflopezcalva.pdf](https://foroalc2030.cepal.org/2021/sites/default/files/presentations/ppt_ibc_lflopezcalva.pdf).

<sup>127</sup> United Nations, *2020 System-Wide Results Report of The United Nations Development System in Latin America and the Caribbean* (New York: United Nations, 2021).

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Statement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet,” 8 December 2021, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27930&LangID=E>.

<sup>130</sup> Héctor Díaz Polanco and Lucia Rayas, *Indigenous Peoples in Latin America: The Quest for Self-Determination* (Milton Park, UK: Routledge, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429499869>.

<sup>131</sup> Manuel Meléndez-Sánchez, “Latin America Erupts: Millennial Authoritarianism in El Salvador,” *Journal of Democracy* 23, 3 (2021), <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/latin-america-erupts-millennial-authoritarianism-in-el-salvador/>

<sup>132</sup> Economic development alone will not stop violence. See, Paige Arthur and Céline Monnier, *Unpacking Prevention: Member State Perspectives* (New York: Center on International Cooperation, 2019).

<sup>133</sup> Data visualized is from the Social Conflict Analysis Database maintained by the Strauss Centre. The database contains information on protests, riots, strikes, and other social disturbances in Latin American and the Caribbean. The focus of the dataset is information on social and political disorder other than that which is generally available for large-scale events such as civil and international war. The primary source of information for this dataset comes from searches of Associated Press and Agence France Presse newswires, as compiled by the Lexis-Nexis news service. See, Robert Stauss Center, “Social Conflict Analysis | Database,” last accessed 9 March 2022, <https://www.strausscenter.org/ccaps-research-areas/social-conflict/database/>.

<sup>134</sup> Helen Moestue, Leif Moestue and Robert Muggah, *Youth violence prevention in Latin America and the Caribbean: a scoping review of the evidence* (Oslo: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, 2013).

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Pan American Health Organization, *Regional Status Report 2020: Preventing and Responding to Violence against Children in the Americas* (Washington, DC: Pan American Health Organization, 2020).

<sup>137</sup> United Nations, *2020 System-Wide Results Report of The United Nations Development System in Latin America and the Caribbean* (New York: United Nations, 2021).

<sup>138</sup> This survey carried was out between 27 June and 24 July 2021, 2019. n = 403. Statista, “Most important problems faced by Latin America according to opinion leaders and journalists in 2021,” last accessed 9 March 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1069008/latin-america-main-problems/>

<sup>139</sup> Others include, financial technological and trade asymmetries, tax avoidance, and climate change. See, United Nations Economic and Social Council, “Statement by Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC),” 22 May 2020, <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/files/en/oas/ExecSecretaryECLAC-OAS2020-RegionalDimension.pdf>.

<sup>140</sup> United Nations Joint Inspection Unit, *Review of Management and Administration in the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean* (New York: UN JIU, 2020), JIU/REP/2020/4.

<sup>141</sup> Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, “ECLAC Presents to CELAC the Region’s Challenges to Achieving Sustainable Development in a Complex Context,” 24 January 2017, <https://www.cepal.org/en/comunicados/cepal-ex-pone-la-celac-desafios-la-region-lograr-un-desarrollo-sostenible-un-contexto>

<sup>142</sup> The first RCP annual results report will be presented to Member States in 2022. We should expect a significant number of the initiatives that focus on the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery measures. In General Assembly resolution 75/233 of December 2020, the UN Development System was instructed to “analyse the lessons learned from the response plans to the pandemic at the national, regional and global levels and to identify gaps and challenges in order to better prepare and provide assistance, upon request, for possible related future shocks including through contingency planning, risk information

and early warning systems, where appropriate.” UN General Assembly, “Quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system,” United Nations, 20 December 2020, A/RES/75/233.

<sup>143</sup> A strong current of the February 2020 workshop with Resident Coordinators in Montevideo, Uruguay, organized by DPPA under the title “Supporting UN engagement in political crisis: a workshop for Resident Coordinators.” This activity represents an example of demand-driven support to the RCs that bridges across the UN’s traditional pillars of work.

<sup>144</sup> United Nations General Assembly, “Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 75/233 on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System,” United Nations, 26 April 2021, A/76/75.

<sup>145</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Council, “Regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields: Report of the Secretary-General,” United Nations, 26 May 2021, E/2021/15.

<sup>146</sup> United Nations, *2020 System-Wide Results Report of The United Nations Development System in Latin America and the Caribbean* (New York: United Nations, 2021).

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Regional Group of UNAIDS Sponsors for Latin America and the Caribbean, “The COVID-19 Response in Latin America and the Caribbean Must Respect Human Rights and Not Increase the Stigma and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity,” 23 April 2020, <http://onusidalac.org/1/images/COVID19-DDHH-LGBTI-ONUSIDA-UNFPA-PNUD-PMA-OPS-UNICEF-TRADUCCION-INGLES.pdf>.

<sup>149</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Group for Latin America and the Caribbean, “COVID-19 Must Be Addressed through International Solidarity and Cooperation,” 26 May 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/lac/en/press-releases/covid-19-must-be-addressed-through-international-solidarity-and-cooperation>.

<sup>150</sup> Response for Venezuelans, *R4V End of Year Report 2019* (Panama: R4V, 2020).

<sup>151</sup> United Nations General Assembly, “Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 75/233 on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System,” United Nations, 26 April 2021, A/76/75.

<sup>152</sup> United Nations Joint Inspection Unit, *Review of Management and Administration in the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean* (New York: UN JIU, 2020), JIU/REP/2020/4.

<sup>153</sup> Interview with the author, 7 July 2021.

<sup>154</sup> Javier Surasky, *Roll out of the Regional Reform: State of Play, Bottlenecks, and Aspirations* (Bogota: Centro de Pensamiento Estratégico Internacional, 2021).

<sup>155</sup> Dalberg Global Development Advisors, *System-Wide Outline of Functions and Capacities of the UN Development System* (New York: Dalberg, 2017).

<sup>156</sup> Interview with the author.

<sup>157</sup> 13 October 2021 communication from Resident Coordinators in Central America to the IBC on Human Mobility, on file with author.

<sup>158</sup> United Nations Peacebuilding and Peace Nexus Foundation, *Guidance Note on PBG Cross-border and Regional Programmes* (New York: UN Peacebuilding, 2020), <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/guidance-note-pbf-cross-border-and-regional-programmes>.

<sup>159</sup> United Nations General Assembly, “Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 75/233 on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System,” United Nations, 26 April 2021, A/76/75.

<sup>160</sup> OHCHR does participate in the IBC on Human Mobility at the regional level in Latin America.

<sup>161</sup> United Nations Department of Political Affairs, *Strategic Plan 2020-2022* (New York: UN DPPA, 2020), [https://dppa.un.org/sites/default/files/undppa\\_strategic\\_plan\\_2020-2022.pdf](https://dppa.un.org/sites/default/files/undppa_strategic_plan_2020-2022.pdf).

<sup>162</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Council, “Committee for Programme and Coordination Fifty-seventh session: Thematic evaluation of the regional commissions,” United Nations, 17 March 2017, E/AC.51/2017/8.



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