



AGENCY FOR
PEACEBUILDING



ITALY AND THE TRIPLE NEXUS

Agency for Peacebuilding

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Photo description: Cash-for-work beneficiary in UN Women's mosaic workshop in Za'atari camp, Jordan (Credit: UN Women/Christopher Herwigi).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The main objective of this report is to re-launch the exchange on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (henceforth, the Triple Nexus) between political institutions, specialised civil society and the research field to foster analytical skills, greater mutual understanding and the implementation of the same Nexus approach. The first part of the study analyses the international context. First, it traces the state and evolution of international cooperation, and the affirmation of the Triple Nexus. Then, it analyses the critical turning points of the Triple Nexus that have emerged in recent years. The second part is dedicated to Italy. After framing the state of the Italy's development cooperation system, the Triple Nexus is first presented in relation to how it has been discussed within the country's institutional governance framework; the opportunities and challenges in implementing it are then presented and discussed. The study also provides recommendations for the next operational steps.

With the adoption of the Italian strategic guidelines on the Triple Nexus approaching, its implementation offers a unique opportunity for the Italian foreign policy and cooperation system to best apply the tools available to address the needs that affect areas of fragility around the world. Like other international actors who took fast action to outline the Nexus approach, Italy faces some challenges, but a full and tangible implementation of the approach can vastly improve the efficiency and impact of the Italian cooperation system.

While the Triple Nexus has gained momentum in international cooperation, its understanding and implementation remain a work in progress. In terms of coordination, three issues have emerged: joint analysis, collective outcomes and so-called "double nexuses". Just about all sources used for this research agree that joint context and conflict analysis should be locally owned and informed, participatory and inclusive both at headquarters and in the areas of intervention, involving differentiated actors. These analyses should include intersectional or gender analysis and connect the risks of violent conflict, disasters and climate change. Furthermore, practices oriented to connecting two silos—and thus working on double nexuses rather than the Triple Nexus approach—are still widely present.

This report also shows that, despite the emerging general support for the Nexus, the operationalisation of the approach at the level of programmes and projects remains limited. A crucial aspect of programming is related to long-term vision and planning. The work of most organisations, across the three silos, continues to be influenced by the tension that exists between the ambitions of long-term

strategies and the short- or, at most, medium-term nature of financing instruments and opportunities. Conceptually, social cohesion – more than protection and resilience – emerges as a concept that can support the Triple Nexus’s operationalisation at the programmatic level. A final issue under programming is monitoring, evaluation and learning. Whether the Triple Nexus approach is effectively operationalised will also depend on how monitoring and evaluation data are collected and used by various actors. In this regard, the use of logical frameworks remains a limiting factor: these tools continue to be predominant across the three silos, yet they are too rigid to monitor and understand changes across the Nexus. In terms of financial resources, funding sources for Triple Nexus programming are still extremely rare. Two other factors are particularly critical in this regard: who receives funds and the availability of flexible funding across the Nexus.

Crucially, how “peace” is defined and, consequently, which actors and actions are involved, makes a crucial difference in implementing the Nexus. The most relevant distinction for the Nexus is between civilian and military approaches to peace work. While civilian approaches are conciliable with humanitarian work, military instruments can generate more fatigue and lead to clear incompatibility. From this study it has emerged that “civilian” peacebuilding, in the definition used by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), could reduce the fear that several actors have, that the Nexus could introduce into the system logics based on security and coercive methods, which would represent a clear breach of the principles of humanitarian action and the participatory development approaches.

Against this backdrop, a fragmented picture emerges, in relation to Italy’s efforts at operationalising the Nexus, which is composed of very different perspectives and interpretations of concepts and instruments. Overall, this might lead to adherence to the Nexus more on paper than in practice. Chiefly, one of the main assets of the strategic guidelines being developed by the Italian Agency for International Development (*Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo*, or AICS) is their explanatory intent. Moreover, on the operational aspects, an orientation emerges more towards adapting existing instruments rather than trying to create new ones, potentially more suitable for the Triple Nexus. On the one hand, this shows a great ability to make virtue of necessity, even in a more “artisanal” way, with the tools that are currently available and without waiting for major reforms; on the other hand, however, it runs the risk of not dealing with a framework that makes the full implementation of a Nexus approach possible only on surface.

The structural level is also important. Within the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (*Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale*, or MAECI) the unit responsible for the Nexus is the one “for international humanitarian emergency interventions”, which is

located within the Directorate General for Development Cooperation. Within AICS, the Nexus approach is coordinated by the Task Force on Emergencies and Fragile States. This structure provides a starting advantage in terms of flexibility, but will need more specific instruments to implement the Nexus. In the report it also emerges that the main Italian NGOs are already familiar with the Nexus approach and that an attempt is already underway to apply its principles according to different interpretations of the OECD-DAC guidelines. In a number of cases, in fact, internal working groups have already been set up within some organisations, which are focusing on the meaning of Nexus and its implications for their programmes.

Given the insights developed above, the following recommendations are offered to help guide future programming:

To all Italian actors working on international cooperation:

- Define a common understanding of what the peace pillar means.
- Develop a specific gender and intersectional perspective for the Nexus approach.
- Define intermediate objectives and instruments to reach the Nexus approach.
- Provide training on the Nexus to relevant staff.

To the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation:

- Adopt the Italian Guidelines on the Triple Nexus and start to operationalise them.
- Strengthen the Italian capacities for peacebuilding and conflict prevention, and ensure that these are effectively integrated with the Guidelines on the Triple Nexus.
- Strengthen the political work on the Nexus.
- Define pilot projects for the implementation of the Nexus.
- Encourage the donor community to make funding more flexible.

To Italian Civil Society Organisations:

- Prioritise and mainstream conflict sensitivity across programmes.
- Support the adoption of new models to manage, monitor and evaluate projects.

INTRODUCTION

The approval of the Italian strategic guidelines on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (henceforth referred to as the Triple Nexus or, simply, the Nexus) is approaching. The guidelines will incorporate the areas of action and the principles defined by the *Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (HDP)* of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which were adopted in February 2019. The Italian guidelines were drafted by a working group made up of representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (*Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale*, or MAECI), from the Italian Agency for Cooperation to Development (*Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo*, or AICS), from Italy's main platforms of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and with the involvement of the academic world. The implementation of the Triple Nexus offers a unique opportunity for the Italian foreign policy and cooperation system to best apply the tools available in areas of fragility.

In Italy, the importance of the Triple Nexus has already been elaborated within the Italian institutions of the sector, in particular by AICS with the creation of the Fragile States Unit. Italy therefore took immediate action to outline its own Nexus approach. This implies additional challenges, as other OECD countries and international agencies are facing, but, if carried forward, they have the potential to vastly improve the efficiency and impact of the Italian cooperation system.

In this framework, as it already had been described in the research report "Italy and Peacebuilding"¹, the centrality of the "peace" pillar is present, but operational lines are still missing and uncertainties remain on how to apply it. This difficulty is not only Italian, but can also be found at an international level. Often, the same NGOs in the humanitarian and development sectors are afraid of the "peace" element of the Nexus due to the possible involvement not only of civil actors working on peacebuilding and crisis prevention, but also of more traditional defence and security actors.

With the strategic guidelines, Italy is opening a new phase of the implementation process of the Triple Nexus. The next step after the approval of this document will be to prepare operational guidelines for implementation, a step also required by the OECD-DAC. From these documents, the implementation phase will begin, which will have repercussions both on country-level projects and on the work of the offices of AICS.

¹ Bernardo Venturi and Stefano Marinelli, "[Italy and Peacebuilding](#)", Agency for Peacebuilding (May 2022).

One challenging step is that the implementation will need to take place in consultation with civil societies. In this framework, the role of organisations specifically dedicated to peacebuilding could be important in supporting the overcoming of fears that have also emerged internationally regarding the compatibility of principles and methods of action in the three different fields. “Civilian peacebuilding”, as per the OECD-DAC category, could reduce the fear, on the part of various actors, that the Nexus will introduce into the system logics based on security and coercive methods, which would be a breach of the principles of humanitarian action and the participatory development approaches.

It should not be forgotten that at the heart of strengthening coherence between humanitarian, development and peace efforts is the goal of reducing people's needs, risks and vulnerabilities, by supporting efforts to prevent violent conflicts and crises. This requires the engagement of a wide range of actors, based on their respective comparative advantage. Reading again the OECD-DAC *Recommendation*, four years after their publication, the message that resonates most strongly at the heart of the Triple Nexus is, in fact, that of prevention.

In this framework, the main objective of this publication is to re-launch the exchange on the Triple Nexus between political institutions, specialised civil society and the research field to foster analytical skills, greater mutual understanding and the implementation of the same Nexus approach. To do this, the first part of the study analyses the international context. First, it traces the evolution of international cooperation and the affirmation of the Triple Nexus. Then, it analyses the critical turning points of the Triple Nexus that have emerged in recent years. The second part is dedicated to Italy. After framing the state of the Italy's development cooperation system, the Triple Nexus is first presented in relation to how it has been discussed within the country's institutional governance framework; the opportunities and challenges in implementing it are then presented and discussed. The study also provides recommendations for the next operational steps.

PART I: THE TRIPLE NEXUS IN CONTEXT

The Rise of the Triple Nexus

Most of the reports and papers published on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus² in the last four years echo that most serious humanitarian crises are conflict-related and approximately 80% of humanitarian needs emanate from violent conflict. Notably, two-thirds of all humanitarian assistance is provided to long-term recipients facing protracted crises of a duration of eight years or more. At the same time, climate-related shocks are becoming more intense and more frequent. These considerations have been bringing diversified actors across the humanitarian, development and peace spectrum to address the main drivers of violent conflict, to plan and coordinate humanitarian assistance and to develop state institutions, resilience and capacities simultaneously—under the aegis of the Triple Nexus. As perfectly described by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) of the United Nations (UN),

“Upholding the principle of humanity in its full breadth – encompassing the protection of life, rights, wellbeing and dignity – and the understanding that it is a shared commitment might further strengthen more effective operationalisation. Put differently, Nexus-thinking may enlarge the scope and time dimension of the humanitarian principles, which in turn can strengthen humanitarian action by responding (or joining up to respond) more holistically to the needs as well as priorities of affected people and communities, saving more lives in the process”³.

Practitioners often note that the Triple Nexus idea is not new. Yet, the Nexus relates to structural and financial transformation across the aid system that can potentially change how aid is planned and financed moving beyond a mere programmatic or conceptual approach.

The Nexus is an evolution of long-running efforts in the humanitarian and development fields that started in the 1990’s with the concepts of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and especially of Linking Relief, Rehabilitation, and Development (LRRD) an approach that gave way to a new emphasis on resilience-building. In parallel, in the early 2000’s the UN system started to mention the term “relief to development continuum”.

² The OECD-DAC defines the Triple Nexus as the “interlinkages between humanitarian, development and peace actions” with the aim of “strengthening collaboration, coherence and complementarity”. See: [“Recommendation on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus”](#) (OECD, 2019).

³ [“Light Guidance on Collective Outcomes”](#) (UN-IASC, 2020).

In the 2000's, fragility became the key concept to tie humanitarian and development actors to work together more closely. While bottom-up peacebuilding was gaining space and visibility, concepts related to prevention (such as disaster preparedness or conflict prevention) became more used and elaborated. Against this backdrop, in 2011 more than 40 countries signed the *New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States*, a document mainly focused on the ideas of “nationally-owned and led development plans” and on “greater aid effectiveness in fragile situations”.

In 2015, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) leveraged new thinking based on the idea that development actors should tackle the most vulnerable and poorest in society and not only in easy-to-engage contexts. At the same time, the SDGs pushed the humanitarian sector to make aid more efficient and to break the vicious cycles of protracted emergencies.

One year later, in 2016, the Triple Nexus gained momentum during the World Humanitarian Summit. The Summit designed a shift to humanitarian response moving away from delivering aid, to ending need. The approved package of reforms to humanitarian funding – usually known as the “Grand Bargain” – listed among the 10 reform goals a closer engagement between humanitarian and development actors.

Moving forward in this direction, in 2017 the UN launched the *New Way of Working*, an approach that aims to strengthen the humanitarian-development nexus and reduce risk and vulnerability and serve as instalments towards achieving the SDGs. Then, in 2018, the UN Secretary General, António Guterres, issued its *Sustaining Peace* report, which re-iterated the importance of working together towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the need for “greater coherence and synergies across the United Nations system”. From his takeover as UN Secretary-General in 2017, Guterres highlighted the centrality of prevention and added *de facto* the “peace pillar” to the humanitarian-development double nexus. In this framework, the UN-World Bank publication *Pathways for Peace* (2018) strengthened and further elaborated the message on preventing conflict, especially from an economic perspective. The World Bank also launched a pilot collaboration with the UN, “the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Initiative”, for countries at risk.

In February 2019, the OECD-DAC, during the Senior Level Meeting composed of 29 of its member states as well as the European Union (EU) and five UN agencies, adopted the *Recommendation on the Humanitarian Development-Peace Nexus*⁴. This was a crucial moment, which created momentum around the Triple Nexus. The *Recommendation* “calls for strengthened policy and commitments across key global

⁴ Organisations and adoption dates (here is the [full list](#)): EU (22 February 2019), International Organization for Migration (20 October 2020), United Nations Children's Fund (24 September 2020), United Nations Development Programme (16 April 2020), United Nations Population Fund (19 November 2020), and the World Food Programme (24 September 2020).

frameworks including Agenda 2030, the *Sustaining Peace* resolutions and *Agenda for Humanity*, among others” and strengthened coherence between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding operations to reduce risks and vulnerabilities, and ultimately end need⁵. At the same time, “at the centre of strengthening the coherence between humanitarian, development and peace efforts, is the aim of effectively reducing people’s needs, risks and vulnerabilities, supporting prevention efforts and, thus, shifting from delivering humanitarian assistance to ending need”⁶.

Overall, the DAC Recommendation is a plea for prevention: “prevention always, development wherever possible, humanitarian action when necessary”⁷. Yet, despite prevention being almost twenty times cheaper than the cost of conflicts, investments in preventing conflict remain low, at an estimated 2% of total spending on Official Development Aid (ODA)⁸.

In this framework, the multi-faceted variables that could escalate into violent conflict need therefore to be quickly understood, anticipated and dealt with in order to prevent conflict. This approach also entails recognising and enhancing current capacities and positive factors to improve societal institutions, systems and relationships. Enhancing national and local capacity for dialogue and facilitation includes making sure that good offices, crisis response, and mediation are quickly and easily deployable.

Since 2019, different international and regional organisations, along with like-minded states and NGOs, have started to adopt and in some cases operationalise the *DAC Recommendation*. For example, as DAC members, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)⁹ and the World Food Programme (WFP) have invested in the Nexus approach; the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA)¹⁰ and Irish Aid have commissioned specific analyses; while NGOs like Oxfam International, World Vision, Christian Aid, Mercy Corps and the Norwegian Refugee Council, among others, have been crafting their approaches.

The EU has also extensively worked on the Nexus. While relevant units in Brussels had already started to operationalise the humanitarian-development nexus in 2017¹¹ through pilot countries¹², the “peace pillar” was added in 2018¹³. The European Commission’s *Communication on the EU’s humanitarian action* committed the EU to step up its work to link humanitarian relief with development and

⁵ “DAC Recommendation on Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus”, OECD-DAC (2019), p. 3.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The World Bank Group has calculated that, on average, for every USD 1 spent on prevention, up to USD 16 can be saved in terms of cost of conflicts (Strategy for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence 2020–2025).

⁹ See, for example: Osama Tageldin, “Combining humanitarian, development, and peace efforts is essential for stable communities in Sudan. But...what does that look like?”, UNDP Sudan (2022).

¹⁰ See: Development Initiatives, “Donors at the Triple Nexus: lessons from Sweden” (2019).

¹¹ “[Operationalising the Humanitarian-Development Nexus - Council conclusions](#)”, Council of the European Union (2017).

¹² These included Sudan, Nigeria, Chad, Uganda, Myanmar and Iran. Joint humanitarian-development-peace frameworks were also in place in response to the Syria crisis in Lebanon and Jordan.

¹³ “[Annual report on the European Union’s humanitarian aid operations financed in 2018](#)”, European Commission (2020).

peacebuilding, recognising that humanitarian aid is not designed as a long-term solution to the needs of people impacted by crises. In line with this approach, in early 2018 the EU adopted the *Integrated Approach*, which is now a core pillar of its foreign policy¹⁴. The *Approach* expanded the adoption of the Triple Nexus beyond the pilot countries. Overall, the EU has made relevant progress in terms of joint analysis and coordination with other international organisations, while flexibility in funding still represents a critical limitation¹⁵.

Critically, the definition of the peace pillar remains ambitious. In the EEAS-Commission internal services note on the peace element of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (2021), “the ‘peace component’ refers to conflict prevention, diplomacy, mediation, stabilisation, conflict resolution and peacebuilding at large with each type of actor tackling elements of it according to their mandate and comparative advantages”¹⁶. The document therefore includes in the peace pillar “hard security” cooperation and engagements, including EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) military operations¹⁷. This wide approach was then clarified in November 2022 through the “constructive ambiguity” of the expression “soft security”¹⁸ and therefore with limitations to the military component. It is also relevant to highlight that the *EEAS-Commission internal services note* clearly includes references to the need to work, in a Triple Nexus approach, on the political dimension: “Addressing the political dimension is essential for sustainable peace, as the structural causes or risks of conflict are often political in nature (exclusionary politics and service delivery; state violence; structural inequalities; unequal access to power and resources, weak social contract)”¹⁹. Or also: “Crises with a political dimension demand political guidance and political response. [...] Political/ diplomatic engagement may come in support of negotiations in favour of a peace agreement. It may also be mobilised to advocate for humanitarian access”²⁰.

¹⁴ “[Council Conclusions on the Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises](#)”, European Commission (2018).

¹⁵ Research Interview, March 2023.

¹⁶ “Internal services note on the peace element of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus”, EEAS-European Commissions (2021), p. 1.

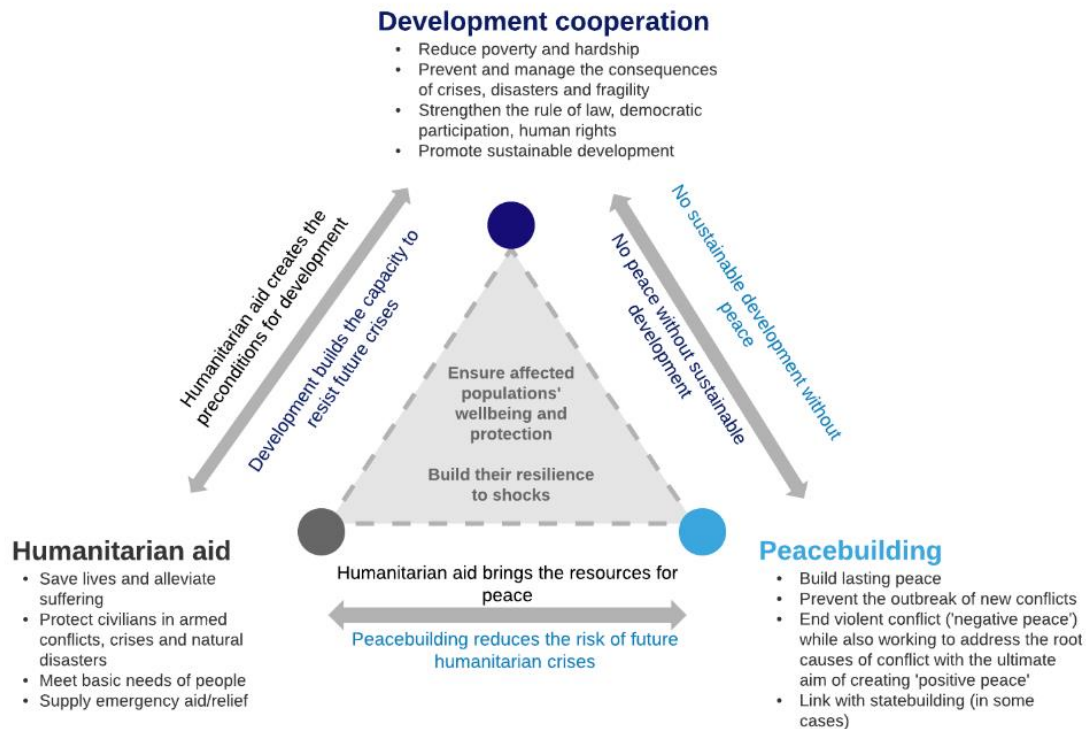
¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁸ “[Good practices in the operationalisation of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus](#)”, Council of the European Union (2022).

¹⁹ “Internal services note on the peace element of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus”, EEAS- European Commissions (2021), p. 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Fig. 1 Linkages between development cooperation, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding



Source: Medinilla A. et al., "Think local. Governance, humanitarian aid, development and peacebuilding in Somalia", Discussion Paper 246 (ECDPM, 2019).

Adapting the system: key features (and bottlenecks) of the Triple Nexus

While the Triple Nexus has gained momentum in international cooperation, its understanding and implementation remain a work in progress. The eleven principles presented in the OECD-DAC Recommendation are a valuable reference. The indication, provided by the DAC, to promote the use of the Nexus "jargon free and practical-oriented", is also certainly appreciable. Against this backdrop, this section is two-fold and oriented to assess the operationalisation of the Nexus. On the one hand, it presents the main features that emerged during the last three years in the literature. On the other, it analyses the main constraints emerged so far, with particular reference to the bottlenecks presented in the *Interim Progress Review* of the *DAC Recommendation* published in May 2022²¹. This section is structured around the three *Recommendation* areas: coordination, programming, and financing.

²¹ "The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus Interim Progress Review", OECD-DAC (2022).

Box 1: The eleven principles of the OECD-DAC Recommendation

Coordination

1. Undertake joint risk-informed, gender-sensitive analysis of root causes and structural drivers of conflict, as well as positive factors of resilience and the identification of collective outcomes incorporating humanitarian, development and peace actions.
2. Provide appropriate resourcing to empower leadership for cost-effective co-ordination across the humanitarian, development and peace architecture.
3. Utilise political engagement and other tools, instruments and approaches at all levels to prevent crises, resolve conflicts and build peace.

Programming

4. Prioritise prevention, mediation and peacebuilding, investing in development whenever possible, while ensuring immediate humanitarian needs continue to be met.
5. Put people at the centre, tackling exclusion and promoting gender equality.
6. Ensure that activities do no harm, are conflict sensitive to avoid unintended negative consequences and maximise positive effects across humanitarian, development and peace actions.
7. Align joined-up programming with the risk environment.
8. Strengthen national and local capacities.
9. Invest in learning and evidence across humanitarian, development and peace actions.

Financing

10. Develop evidence-based humanitarian, development and peace financing strategies at global, regional, national and local levels, with effective layering and sequencing of the most appropriate financing flows.
11. Use predictable, flexible, multi-year financing wherever possible.

Coordination

In terms of coordination, three issues emerged: joint analysis, collective outcomes and double nexuses. Just about all sources used for this research agree that joint context and conflict analysis should be locally owned and informed, participatory and inclusive both at headquarters and in the areas of intervention, involving differentiated actors. These analyses should include intersectional or gender

analysis and connect the risks of violent conflict, disasters and climate change. Additionally, the analysis should be periodically updated to provide real-time feedback on the evolving dynamics in crisis areas.

According to the OECD-DAC *Interim Review*, however, “joint risk-informed, gender-sensitive analysis of root causes and structural drivers of conflict” presents some clear bottlenecks. On the one hand, there is a limited commitment to deliver under one strategy. **While coordination among different actors has improved, “joint planning” remains a more ambitious objective.** Additionally, coordination is mainly international, therefore not really differentiated and localised.

On the other, further policy work is also needed on the meaningful inclusion of local actors. In fact, local actors are used more to extract data and information than in terms of “meaningful inclusion”. At the same time, they are often not involved in joined-up planning processes, but more in the implementation phase.

Collective outcomes are a central concept for the OECD-DAC, but the concept remains rather vague, making its implementation difficult. A collective outcome can be defined as “a jointly envisioned result to address and reduce need, risk and vulnerabilities, requiring the combined effort of humanitarian, development and peace communities and other actors as appropriate”²². Therefore, the ultimate collective outcome is ending human suffering by addressing the drivers of conflict and vulnerability and, consequently, reducing humanitarian needs. This means that the Triple Nexus approach should be tied to the overarching organisational strategy – to higher-level outcomes – to be successful and sustainable. The same OECD-DAC *Interim Review* finds that “a common understanding of the concept of collective outcomes is lacking” and that there is limited knowledge and application of guidance around the collective outcomes concept. In addition, “collective outcomes remain driven by multilateral actors rather than being truly inclusive”.

Finally, practices oriented to connecting two silos—and thus working on double nexuses rather than the Triple Nexus approach—are still widely present. The predominant double nexuses are the Humanitarian-Development Nexus and the Security-Development Nexus. The former has a more consolidated practice, while the latter has often generated open discussions on the blurring of the two fields and related concerns, especially from NGOs, on the misuse of development funds. Adopting a Triple Nexus approach represents a step forward that many non-specialised civil servants and practitioners are not willing to do (but they will probably not say it in public). In fact, during the interviews and in informal talks a certain fatigue to adopt new instruments and approaches often

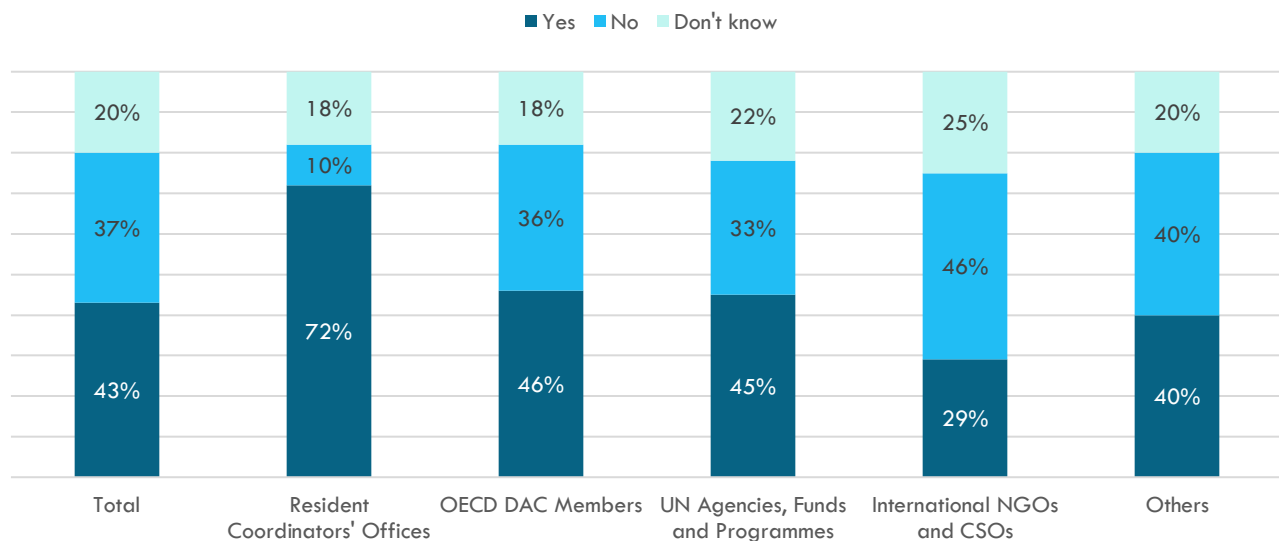
²² [“Light Guidance on Collective Outcomes”](#), UN-IASC (2020).

emerged along with the idea that it can increase the organisations' burden, but the results are not granted.

Programming

The OECD-DAC *Interim Review* showed that **while there is emerging general support for the Nexus, the operationalisation of the approach at the level of programmes and projects remains limited**. At the same time, the perception of the concrete impact of the Nexus on programming presents a significant cleavage that should not be underestimated. For example, while most UN Resident Coordinators' Offices see a contribution of the Nexus to a coherent and complementary collective response, less than one out of three INGOs and CSOs have the same perception (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2: Perceptions of contributions of the Triple Nexus approach to a coherent and complementary collective response²³



Source: OECD (2022).

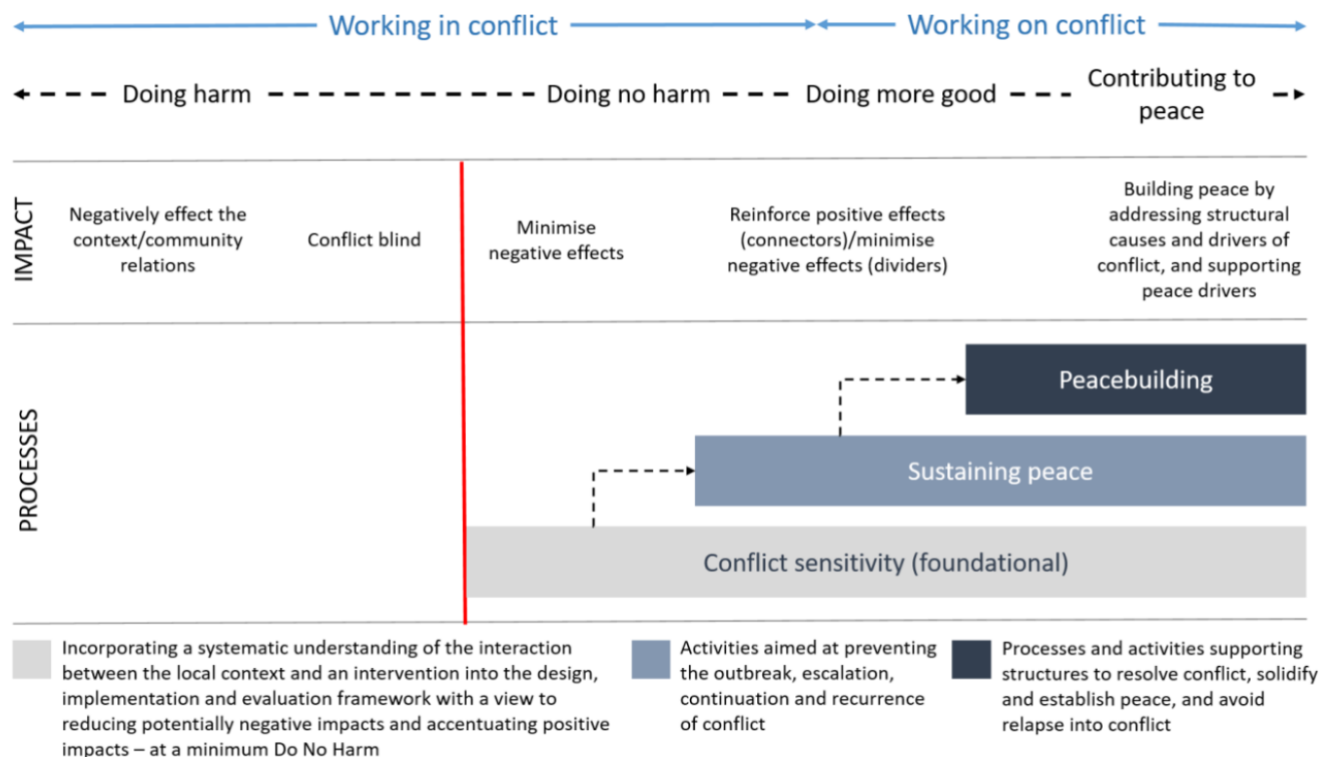
A crucial aspect of programming is related to long-term vision and programming. The work of most organisations, across the three silos, continues to be influenced by the tension that exists between the ambitions of long-term strategies and the short- or, at most, medium-term nature of financing instruments and opportunities. As a consequence, many organisations are restricted to time-bound, individually funded projects with short-term objectives. This projectisation undermines long-term programming and

²³ The specific question used was: "Have you seen any change in the coherence and complementarity of the collective response as a result of adopting a nexus approach in your geographic area of responsibility?".

lasting partnerships with effects on the implementation of the Triple Nexus and the potential systemic transformation and impact in fragile and unstable areas characterised by protracted violence. Besides long-term vision and programming, **the Triple Nexus approach needs adaptive management.** Programmes and projects need to be agile and responsive to changes in context. Notably, the impact on drivers of fragility and vulnerability over time will need to operate beyond project timeframes.

A robust understanding of context and conflict dynamics is also paramount to designing solid conflict-sensitive interventions in conflict areas for all projects and actions in conflict areas (and not only for peacebuilding projects working on conflict dynamics to halt violence). A 2020 publication by IASC visualises the peace elements in Nexus approaches with an operational lens (See Figure 3 below).

Figure 3: The Peace Spectrum



Source: IASC-UN (2020).

Operationalising the Nexus requires conflict sensitivity. In fact, a conflict sensitive approach helps to address negative and unintended consequences that can occur with the implementation of humanitarian and development interventions and to maximise the potential contribution to strengthening social cohesion and building peace. At the same time, as outlined very well by the international NGO Interpeace, the focus of conflict sensitivity cannot be only on the impact of external actors; it should also embrace "the broader local system": "Taking a peace-sensitive approach to humanitarian response

adds a focus on the role and impact of local capacities and resources, instead of focusing on the role and impact of outside interventions alone. In doing so, it extends the attention of humanitarian actors beyond immediate conflict and aid dynamics to include medium and long-term peace impacts”²⁴. This peace-sensitive approach can be considered a component of the Nexus, also because the Triple Nexus approach cannot be considered only in terms of conflict sensitivity. The Nexus aims to connect the three fields and the “peace pillar” includes several activities and approaches, as discussed in the next section.

Box 2: Conflict sensitivity

The concept of “conflict sensitivity” refers to the understanding of how assistance links with conflict in a specific context bringing awareness of the conflict dynamics. This practice aims to minimise unintended negative effects and risks that aid activities may cause in conflict, and, whenever possible, influence in a positive way by building the local capacities for sustainable peace and development as well as protecting and promoting the fulfilment of human rights.

The conflict sensitive approach is rooted in the *Do No Harm* (DNH) principle, which has been developed since the early 1990’s. The DNH approach moves from the consideration that aid programmes in conflict affected contexts may become an additional element of the conflict or produce unintended consequences, this is because transferring resources into a resource-scarce environment may not be a neutral operation and it may alter existing power dynamics. The DNH approach recognises multiple options for adapting programmes developed by humanitarian and development organisations in supporting disengagement and peaceful agreements and it represents a leading tool for the application of conflict sensitivity.

A conflict sensitive approach to sustainable development can be applied to all contexts, regardless of the severity of the violence, and it adapts to all areas of sustainable development including humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts; furthermore, it does not require to change the mandate, rather it can be mainstreamed across any priority. An effective application of the conflict sensitive approach includes a deep understanding of the context in which the programmes are operating, and an accurate understanding of the aid intervention’s dynamics so that it is possible to prioritise activities to mitigate the drivers of conflicts and to interact with opportunities to build sustainable peace. Moreover, adopting a conflict sensitive perspective enables to implement humanitarian and development programmes tied to peacebuilding.

²⁴ [“How humanitarian response can strengthen resilience to violent conflict and end need – Insights and Recommendations”](#), Interpeace (2016).

Local ownership represents another key issue under programming. Ownership is paramount for all areas of international cooperation and has been for a while now. The collaboration with local actors should avoid mechanisms of exclusion and should be reflected in the Triple Nexus. Ideally, meaningful partnerships aimed to contribute to the resilience of a community or society at large are meant to be a pillar of long-term sustainable interventions. Practically, ensuring ownership is a point of weakness for many such interventions.

From a Triple Nexus perspective, **the first concrete risk is that a Nexus approach could inadvertently reduce local ownership due to the greater complexity of the concept and the need for greater capacities and higher-level coordination**—just to name a few issues. This risk is still not discussed in the literature and deserves more attention. If the Nexus also means greater bureaucracy and additional administrative requirements, the future trend could be to have even more international actors involved to guarantee the Nexus approach, further eroding local ownership.

Social cohesion is another concept that can support the Triple Nexus's operationalisation at the programmatic level. Supporting social cohesion at the community level can prevent violent conflicts and enable more effective development and humanitarian interventions. It can also avoid local resource competition, ensuring greater sustainability and ownership. **The concept of social cohesion could be therefore an instrument of the Triple Nexus**, helping to address issues including community dialogue, access to resources, gender equality, youth engagement, food security and livelihoods, human mobility or the provision of health services.

Other concepts tied to social cohesion, such as protection and resilience, do not have the same strength from a Nexus perspective. For example, humanitarian and development actors share many of the same protection principles and working on protection could be also familiar to peace actors in terms of preventing different forms of violence. Yet, protection work is normally grounded on a central role of external actors, with constraints on sustainability and ownership. For its part, the concept of resilience can be useful to reflect on how humanitarian, development and peace actions can contribute to sustainable collective outcomes through coordinated and integrated actions seeking to empower local communities. However, resilience risks overlooking elements for tackling causes of conflicts and social tensions. From a peace perspective, for example, resilience can contribute to tackling some root causes, but it does not address direct and structural causes of war. Despite the wide use of “protection” and even more of “resilience” in international cooperation, these approaches therefore show some constraints in the Nexus approach.

A final issue under programming is monitoring, evaluation and learning. Whether the Triple Nexus approach is effectively operationalised will depend on how monitoring and evaluation data is collected

and used by various actors. In this regard, the use of logical frameworks remains a limiting factor: these tools continue to be predominant across the three silos, yet they are too rigid to monitor and understand changes across the Nexus. NGOs in particular have been trying to move beyond logical frameworks and to develop new and innovative solutions, with tangible benefits in terms of both accountability and learning. Yet, logical frameworks remain widely in use on account of the narrative around their use, whereby they are part and parcel of the contractual obligations that define the relations between donors and grantees. At the same time, logical frameworks have positive functions, even in Nexus programmes: as a management tool, they can help implementers to plan their interventions and to coordinate complex activities that fall under the responsibility of different teams or partners. The fact that logical and results frameworks have fixed elements is, as such, not the main limitation with these tools, as indeed these are often welcome. The problem, instead, is determining which elements should be fixed and which should be flexible. In this, it will be important that donors and implementing agencies find alignment on finding new, Nexus-appropriate monitoring and evaluation tools, including ensuring adequate financial resources for transitioning beyond logical frameworks.

Financing

Financing represents a crucial component of the Triple Nexus implementation. In practice, funding sources per Triple Nexus programming are extremely rare. Two other factors are particularly critical: who receives funds and the availability of flexible funding across the Nexus.

Concerning the first issue, national and local CSOs directly received only 1,2% of all international humanitarian assistance in 2021²⁵. This structural criticality represents a contradiction in terms of local ownership and is laid in the opposite direction of the Grand Bargain approach to increase the volume of direct, quality funding to local actors. Similarly, the eighth principle in the *OECD-DAC Recommendation* is focused on strengthening national and local capacities, chiefly prioritising funding to local organisations.

Secondly, the *OECD-DAC Interim Review* shows progress in some donors' flexibility. At the same time, the *Interim Report's* survey shows some contradictions and fatigue to apply a Nexus approach to financing. For example, while it was reported that nearly two-thirds of OECD members perceive to be able to align financing with activities across the Nexus where appropriate (64%), the majority did not think (or was not sure) their organisation had the ability to avoid fragmented, siloed or inappropriately short-term funding (55%).

²⁵ Development Initiatives (2022), cit.

Overall, funding instruments across the Nexus should be more flexible and adapted to local needs. At the same time, funding instruments should adequately address the need for civil society organisations to invest in joint and regular conflict analysis and to be conflict-sensitive.

The challenges of the peace pillar

As presented earlier, peace is the newest component of the Nexus. The definition of “sustaining peace” as presented by the UN General Assembly and the Security Council in 2016—through twin resolutions²⁶—results particularly useful for the Triple Nexus. In fact, sustaining peace should be broadly understood as both a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account, which encompasses activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict.

In the *OECD-DAC Recommendation*, the peace work is a central principle: “Prioritise prevention, mediation and peacebuilding, investing in development whenever possible, while ensuring immediate humanitarian needs continue to be met”. Yet, the *Interim Report* presents how resources for peacebuilding are limited and even declining. Furthermore, the document highlights that “research for this report finds only limited evidence of concrete progress in implementing the *OECD-DAC Recommendation* principle of prioritising prevention and peacebuilding while investing in development remains most visible in the more stable among fragile contexts”²⁷.

Overall, while the operationalisation of the Humanitarian-Development Nexus is more consolidated, the “peace pillar” remains the major challenge in the Triple Nexus. In particular, humanitarian actors are often concerned that becoming involved with political or security players can cause issues for the core principles of the sector, such as impartiality or neutrality. Yet, only a few interventions can be considered fully neutral. As a starting point, a better understanding of respective roles or joined-up analysis can ensure that decisions are taken in a context-specific, conflict-sensitive and mutually reinforcing manner²⁸.

Crucially, how “peace” is defined and, consequently, which actors and actions are involved, makes a crucial difference in implementing the Nexus. There are, in particular, four distinctions: civilian and military approaches, negative and positive peace, peace with capital or small “p”, and the *OECD-DAC* definition of “Conflict, peace and security”.

²⁶ A/RES/70/262 and S/RES/2282.

²⁷ *OECD-DAC* (2022), cit.

²⁸ UN-IASC (2020), cit.

The most relevant distinction for the Nexus is between civilian and military approaches to peace work. While civilian approaches (such as community dialogue, reconciliation, social cohesion, etc.) are conciliable with humanitarian work, military instruments can generate more fatigue and lead to clear incompatibility. In fact, the Nexus is not mere information-sharing and coordination among different sectors, regardless of who these are; and working with military actors could generate tensions and misunderstandings for development and peacebuilding actors as well. Similarly, the distinction could be also represented by civilian approaches focused on human security and traditional (or even hard) security implemented through military means.

Secondly, there is the distinction between “negative peace” (usually considered as the absence of direct and organised violence) and “positive peace” (defined as attitude and structures to sustain peaceful societies). Some authors reflect that “positive peace” could be more appropriate in a Nexus approach because focused on addressing the root causes of conflict and genuine conflict transformation²⁹. While this distinction can be helpful to the Nexus work, it should be also considered that in some contexts it could be reductive to consider negative peace as merely related to stabilisation and security, and “positive peace” to “softer” activities such as conflict prevention, mediation or peacebuilding. In fact, negative and positive peace efforts are intrinsically interlinked and negative peace could be part of a broader effort implemented by civilian actors and fully compatible with the Nexus approach.

Another distinction often used by policy-makers (in particular the EU) is between “Peace” (with capital “p”), which is achieved by high-level diplomacy, political solutions and securitised responses, and “peace” (with small “p”), which is instead focused on building the capacity for peace within societies. In the literature, this distinction is also presented as “top-down” or “bottom-up” peacebuilding. The peace work at the community level – in particular at the local level to address key drivers in the short-to-intermediate term – is clearly part of the “international cooperation” work and represents the core of the pillar that can be integrated into the Nexus and aligned with the core mandate of the humanitarian field. At the same time, peacebuilding within societies does not exclude connections and joint work between the community level and the highest levels (for example, in multi-track diplomacy), especially if we consider the centrality of the political dimension in the Nexus. As a consequence, these definitions of peace remain ambiguous and limited in operational terms.

Finally, working around the OECD-DAC categories for ODA can result useful to clarify the peace pillar work. The OCSE-DAC Code 0152, “Conflict, peace and security” covers a broader range of activities (see Table 1 below). The sub-area “Civilian peacebuilding” (code 15220) is certainly the essence of the peace pillar in the Nexus. Other areas, such as “Participation in international peacekeeping operations”

²⁹ Medinilla A. et al., ECDPM (2019), cit.

(code 15230) could present some more challenging issues (for instance, how to work on “joined-up programming”). Some other peacebuilding activities, such as security sector reform (SSR) and disarmament, demobilisation and rehabilitation (DDR) fall in between and need specific and careful context-related considerations.

Table 1: OECD-DAC Code 0152, “Conflict, peace and security”, and related sub-categories

15210	Security system management and reform
15220	Civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution ³⁰
15230	Participation in international peacekeeping operations
15240	Reintegration and Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) control
15250	Removal of land mines and explosive remnants of war
15261	Child soldiers (prevention and demobilisation)

It should be highlighted that **the Nexus remains also connected to a political dimension and cannot be considered merely as a technical approach**. For example, even “little p” interventions can require a re-balancing of socio-political and power dynamics through activities such as youth inclusion or women empowerment. As a consequence, policy-makers and practitioners should expect to navigate a certain degree of contested issues and policies.

Overall, **a shared understanding of the peace pillar is paramount for the implementation of the Triple Nexus**. Without a common ground, the peace component can generate fears and misunderstandings. For this reason, “Civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution” and peace with “little p” and positive peace are concepts that can contribute to a better-defined implementation of the Nexus.

³⁰ Civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution is defined as “Support for civilian activities related to peace building, conflict prevention and resolution, including capacity building, monitoring, dialogue and information exchange. Bilateral participation in international civilian peace missions such as those conducted by the UN Department of Political Affairs (UNDPA) or the European Union (European Security and Defence Policy), and contributions to civilian peace funds or commissions (e.g., Peacebuilding Commission, Peacebuilding thematic window of the MDG achievement fund, etc.)” (OECD).

Box 3: Defining peacebuilding

Peacebuilding has been officially considered part of development cooperation since 2007, when the OECD-DAC recognised that activities such as SSR, civilian and post-conflict peacebuilding, and small arms and light weapons control, contribute to development goals³¹.

The OECD-DAC has also developed a guiding definition: "Peacebuilding and reconciliation focus on long-term support to, and establishment of, viable political and socio-economic and cultural institutions capable of addressing the root causes of conflicts, as well as other initiatives aimed at creating the necessary conditions for sustained peace and stability. These activities also seek to promote the integration of competing or marginalised groups within mainstream society, through providing equitable access to political decision-making, social networks, economic resources and information, and can be implemented in all phases of conflict [...]. Peacebuilding involves both long-term preventive measures and more immediate responses before, during and after conflict"³².

Overall, peacebuilding therefore entails a variety of actions aimed at addressing a conflict's underlying causes through the search of creative solutions toward peaceful coexistence and a resilient future. Peacebuilding processes work in a long-term perspective and it requires the involvement of diversified actors, from political institutions to grassroots organizations. Activities aimed at promoting peace can include institution-building, post-conflict reconstruction and development, dialogue and conflict settlement, disarmament, and demobilisation, as well as addressing problems of poverty, marginalisation, and inequality, activities may also include initiatives to advance social justice, gender equality, and human rights.

In Italy, peacebuilding has received little attention and it has not yet been acknowledged as a topic needing significant political or budget intervention strategy. The Law on International Cooperation (Law no. 125/2014) describes development cooperation as a synthesis of "international cooperation for sustainable development, human rights and peace". Yet, the major Italian NGOs have very few specialised skills in peacebuilding and averting violent conflicts, in part because there are no specific budgetary allocations for peacebuilding and there is a limited number of peacebuilding trained personnel. While there are some strengths in the Italian normative context for peacebuilding and conflict resolution or prevention, the same cannot be said for institutional infrastructures. Both MAECI and AICS lack task forces, directorates, or offices specifically focused on peacebuilding.

³¹ "[Creditor Reporting System \(CRS\)](#)", OECD (2021).

³² "[Guidelines on Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation](#)", OECD (1997), p. 86.

PART II: ITALY AND THE TRIPLE NEXUS

Italy's development cooperation system

The Institutional and Financial Framework

Italy has a long tradition of international cooperation that places the country among the main donors =, although it has struggled to find its own clear identity and to define its priorities. In 2022, Italy was the twentieth donor in relative terms – Italy's ODA was 0,32% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – and the ninth in absolute terms (at USD 6,5 million in 2022)³³. The institutional governance regulating development cooperation is structured and regulated by Law 125/2014, which in its first article enunciates the central role of cooperation as a fundamental component of Italian foreign policy: “international cooperation for sustainable development [...] is an integral and qualifying part of Italy's foreign policy”³⁴. Practically, however, there has often been a lack of a stable political direction able to make it an effective priority. In this context, one of the traditional strengths of Italian development cooperation lies in the dense network of NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) recognised as cooperation actors by AICS (over 250 by mid-2022³⁵).

The direct political responsibility for development cooperation lies with the MAECI, which coordinates with the Inter-ministerial Committee for Development Cooperation (*Comitato Inter-ministeriale per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo*, or CICS) and relies since 2014 on AICS for the implementation of its policies. Institutional governance is completed by the so-called Cassa Depositi e Prestiti (CDP)³⁶ and by the National Council for Development Cooperation (*Consiglio Nazionale per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo*, or CNCS) and finally includes NGOs, territorial authorities, and other public and private actors (including for-profit) active in the sector. The CNCS represents a permanent instrument of participation that is called upon to express opinions on issues pertaining to development cooperation.

In financial terms, Italy – like other donor countries – is still far from the 0,7% ODA/GDP target. In the last two years, Italy has recorded a slight increase in ODA after three years of decline. However, it must be underlined that the increase is due to increased spending on the costs for asylum seekers within

³³ “[Official Development Assistance \(ODA\) in 2022](#)”, OECD (2023).

³⁴ “[Disciplina generale sulla cooperazione internazionale per lo sviluppo](#)”, OECD (2014).

³⁵ “[CSOs List](#)”, AICS (2022).

³⁶ This is the Italian state-owned financial institution that provides the financial resources for ODA, which are assigned through AICS. The majority shareholder of the institution is the Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance.

its borders, donations of Covid vaccines and humanitarian costs related to the war in Ukraine. Thus, for example, Italian aid to Africa was more than halved, from USD 1,030 billion in 2021 to USD 491 million in 2022. The same applies to the funds for Low Development Countries (LDCs), which dropped from USD 925 million in 2021 to USD 335 million in 2022³⁷.

Italy participates in the achievement of EU and international objectives mainly through multilateral aid (almost 70% in 2020)³⁸. The trend of multilateral aid from Italy, albeit with fluctuations derived from the budgets of international organisations, has been slightly increasing over the last decade. Italian funds allocated to multilateral aid for development cooperation have mainly gone to EU institutions, the World Bank and UN agencies.

Bilateral cooperation, on the other hand, represents a minority component of Italy's ODA, around 30%, and has historically been fluctuating. From 2011 to 2017, bilateral cooperation grew, while it has been declining since then. Also in 2020, Italy allocated bilateral ODA funds mainly through the public sector, NGOs and multilateral organisations. It should be noted that CSOs saw their contribution decrease from 16,2% in 2019 to 14,7% in 2020³⁹.

A limited strategic vision

Historically, Italy's international cooperation has struggled to become a qualifying and strategic part of Italian foreign policy, a point that still holds today. Formally, the strategic vision and the thematic and sectoral priorities of development cooperation, including any indications of the Triple Nexus, are contained in the programming documents drawn up every three years, as provided by Law 125/2014. It should be noted that the *Three-year Programming and Policy Document (Documento Triennale di Programmazione e di Indirizzo, or DTPI)* ratifies the *status quo* rather than plan evolutions. As noted by the OECD-DAC itself, in the Italian case “the legal obligation to submit a new DTPI every year undermines the strategic value of the document as a medium-term reference framework. It is unclear to stakeholders to what extent the indications provided for each triennium are certain [...]. The limited strategic value does not do justice to the consultative process, and the large amount of work required to prepare the three-year planning documents”⁴⁰.

³⁷ “[Development Finance Data](#)”, OECD (2023).

³⁸ Multilateral public aid is the flow of resources that the donor country allocates to international organisations, and which depends on binding commitments based on Italy's participation in some international organisation. This type of contribution is usually stable and more consistent in the long run, its fluctuation depends on the budgets of international organisations. On the other hand, the multilateral channel does not respond directly to the priorities of donors who, indirectly, choose to pursue the strategies of the international organisations to which they entrust their resources. Furthermore, there is a third form in which the donor state can allocate ODA funds; this is a hybrid of the two previous ones and allows funds to be allocated to an international organisation by specifying the countries that should receive the aid and, in some cases, also the actors and the methods through which they will pursue the implementation of projects (Source: [Openpolis](#)).

³⁹ “[Development Cooperation Profiles -Italy](#)”, OECD.

⁴⁰ “[Peer Review dell'OCSE sulla cooperazione allo sviluppo: Italia 2019](#)”, OECD (2020), p. 43.

In the document for 2016-2018, Italy affirmed its intention to strengthen its participation in multilateral coordination mechanisms, especially in geographic areas of fragility and in thematic areas that include the connection between peace, security and development as advocated by the 2030 Agenda. It is important to note how the connection between the three pillars is already made explicit in this document, within a logic in which humanitarian aid, for Italy, is identified as a priority, especially in the first emergency phase, to be implemented through coordination with international organisations present in the area (or areas) affected by the crisis and through collaboration with specialised NGOs present on site. In this context, the programming document explicitly links the intervention of Italian cooperation to the consolidation of peace and the restoration of socio-economic conditions. However, despite the reference to the Triple Nexus, the notions of humanitarian aid, development and peace are recalled in their singularity.

In the 2019-2021 programming document, however, the intention of Italian development cooperation to promote the Triple Nexus methodologies is reinforced in line with the *OECD-DAC Recommendation*. In this regard, Italy declared that it promotes the debate on the nexus between sustainable development, human rights, peace and security, supports interventions that work on the root causes of fragility and conflict and engages in issues concerning localisation, promoting a rights-based approach through both bilateral and multilateral channels. However, the role of humanitarian aid remains crucial, in continuity with the strategic lines of the previous three years, and possibly facilitating coordination between humanitarian actors and other partners.

According to the most recent three-year planning document (2021-23), then, the Italian cooperation system will continue to dedicate attention to an adequate and prompt humanitarian response in emergencies; at the same time initiatives that promote synergies in the humanitarian and development spheres will be promoted. Lastly, in line with the *OECD-DAC Recommendation*, the intention to complete the guidelines on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus is affirmed. The document remains generic overall, without providing any programmatic or operational indications, and thus represents a setback in terms of operationalisation the Nexus approach⁴¹.

⁴¹ The text states, "Synergies between humanitarian and development actors will be promoted, in line with the OECD-DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus of 22 February 2019. In this regard, the Guidelines on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus will be finalised" (p. 33).

Charting the Triple Nexus' path through institutions

Following the *OECD-DAC Recommendation*, MAECI and AICS immediately started a participatory process to arrive at an Italian approach to the Triple Nexus. In 2019, a working group was created composed of the Directorate General for Development Cooperation (DGCS), AICS, representatives of Italy's main CSO networks and relevant universities. The aim of the working group was to develop a set of strategic guidelines, to be officially adopted by the Italian cooperation system.

The guidelines on the Nexus between humanitarian aid, development and peace have been ready in final draft since early 2022. It is a general outline that will then need to be implemented with operational guidelines⁴². Although AICS already recognises and promotes the spirit and intent of the guidelines, at time of printing this report the final draft of the document is still awaiting approval by the CICS. Interviews indicated that the extended timeframe for approval is mainly due to the national general elections that took place in September 2022 and the subsequent change of government. The last meeting of the CICS was, in fact, in October 2021, but at that time the Nexus guidelines were not yet finalised.

While the guidelines are waiting for the final green light, questions related to how Italy's institutional governance can and might potentially support the Triple Nexus were explored through interviews with several institutional and non-governmental stakeholders. In the picture that emerged, the lack of programming and innovation were identified as the major obstacles with respect to the tools to be adopted for a Nexus approach.

Overall, in fact, **a fragmented picture emerges, composed of very different perspectives and interpretations of concepts and instruments, which might lead to adherence to the Nexus more on paper than in implementation.** Moreover, on the operational aspects, an orientation emerges more towards adapting existing instruments rather than trying to create new ones, potentially more suitable for the Triple Nexus. On the one hand, this approach shows a great ability to make virtue of necessity, even in a more "artisanal" way, with the tools available and without waiting for major reforms; on the other hand, however, it risks to emerge as an expedient that makes the full implementation of a Nexus approach possible only on the surface. In this, Italy's faces challenges similar to those of all other actors. It must be said, in fact, that the Nexus is an open construction site for all countries, as well as for NGOs and international agencies. The operational difference in the long-run will be made by the ability to renew the instruments without creating new organisational or bureaucratic burdens.

⁴² Research Interview, March 2023.

The Triple Nexus approach requires, first of all, a commitment to joint programming, among the many actors involved in cooperation, and this, according to some NGOs, is an aspect that could be complex, as well as a topic that has seen a wide-ranging exchange within the working group on the guidelines. At the structural level, according to Law 125/2014, MAECI coordinates the joint programming, whereas the technical management and the operational level in the countries are practically handled by AICS. The current draft guidelines say that the country analysis should be made in coordination with AICS in consultation with CSOs, under the MAECI umbrella. According to the interviewed NGOs, at the operational level, it is indeed desirable that AICS drives the programming and MAECI gives the official political approval. Overall, these mechanisms certainly need fine tuning.

At the structural level, within MAECI the Unit for International Humanitarian Emergency Interventions of the DGCS is the office in charge of the Nexus. This responsibility is currently more formal than operational, however, and operationally it is more common to think in terms of “double nexuses” rather than a Triple Nexus. For this reason, the Ministry could benefit from a horizontal working group like the one currently in place on human security. It should also be remembered that there is no office or focal point within the Ministry on peacebuilding and conflict prevention, and this could make the implementation of the Nexus even more complicated, particularly given the importance of the “peace” pillar, as this was described in the previous section.

Within AICS, the Nexus approach is coordinated by the Task Force on Emergencies and Fragile States. So far, no new instruments have been promoted, but more work has been done on how to use and adapt existing ones. The starting point is that “the Nexus approach disregards instruments” and that “Italy has flexibility in the field that other countries do not have”⁴³. This allows the adaptation of existing mechanisms to changes in crisis areas in terms of timing and activities. At the same time, however, AICS is already working together with the regional offices on the operational tools to be used in the countries because of the screening of the operational lines.

In this framework, the use of the concept of Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) in some calls for proposals is emblematic⁴⁴. From AICS’ perspective, this approach, within the humanitarian framework, allows for greater flexibility in fragile contexts. This strategic model was created in an attempt to bridge the funding gap between disaster relief and long-term development initiatives, but it is not a concept that overlaps with Nexus in terms of operational meaning and project timing.

Additionally, for some consulted NGOs the concept of LRRD represents outdated language no longer used by their main international partners. Its use would therefore be more a sign of the system's

⁴³ Research Interview, March 2023.

⁴⁴ See, as an example, this [call for application](#), from April 2023.

slowness to embrace change, which could slow down the implementation of the Nexus approach itself. Overall, there would also be a lack of financial planning tools to enable organisations to work concretely on these issues. Without the tools and the respective indicators, it would not be possible to pursue the Nexus approach. As discussed in the first part, the international debate on Nexus shows that it can only be applied if the programming tools change. In the first part it has been analysed how an established tool such as the logical framework is, in its rigidity, unsuitable for the Nexus approach. Additionally, the lack of joint funding or appropriate indicators risk disconnecting action on humanitarian, development and peace.

This discrepancy shows a different way of working in relation to the Nexus approach, at least at this “pre-guideline” stage. AICS believes that it is indeed already implementing a Nexus approach, at least in part. This is possible, on the one hand, through management flexibility within its humanitarian programming framework, and on the other by encouraging AICS’ regional offices to implement and monitor the implementation of development cooperation projects in line with the principles of the Nexus approach. This effort is commendable and shows the willingness to work on the Triple Nexus right away and make it operational. At the same time, the OECD-DAC principles on the Nexus require dedicated and innovative tools and resources that the current structure cannot provide. For instance, the principles in the *OECD-DAC Recommendation* about “predictable, flexible and multi-year funding” or on “joined-up programming” or with reference to prioritising “prevention, mediation and peacebuilding”, which require specialised skills and capacities. Therefore, the requests of the main Italian NGOs go in this direction.

Despite these difficulties, two recent good practices relate to WeWorld's toolkit on the Triple Nexus and to the mainstreaming approach the NGO has implemented in Libya. The toolkit was developed in parallel with the guidelines, thus capturing and integrating some elements that are within the draft guidelines developed by MAECI and AICS. The toolkit is divided into modules and each one addresses a component of the project cycle in its practical and theoretical components. In particular, the part dealing with the analysis of how the various entities should integrate in the field and at headquarters to realise joint programming at the Italian system level. The toolkit was presented to various actors in Libya and can be more easily adapted to other contexts taking into account the different specificities. In Libya, WeWorld applied the guidelines by adapting existing tools. The toolkit, at least in some parts, will now also be used by AICS’s country office.

A general test for the Triple Nexus

Opportunities and Challenges of the Triple Nexus Guidelines

While there is an existing tendency for CSOs to adopt a Nexus approach and to promote a project vision that tends towards the inclusion of the three pillars, the approval of the Nexus guidelines would clarify some key strategic issues.

Despite their relevance, the Triple Nexus guidelines outline what are the strategic cornerstones of the approach in line with the Law on development cooperation, but at the same time they do not yet provide specific operational tools. For this reason, as suggested by many CSOs, the next step will be the drafting of operational guidelines that should be developed in a coordinated manner between AICS and CSOs, and which are capable of linking the current strategic guidelines with some of the operational mechanisms already identified, making concrete the theoretical awareness gained so far⁴⁵. Some of the key issues identified by the CSOs, which will have to be implemented in the operational guidelines, include the training on Nexus principles of personnel in local and international organisations, the development of operational tools that would enable in-depth area studies, and the creation of flexible funds that can finance multi-mandate projects.

One of the main assets of the strategic guidelines under approval is their explanatory intent. For example, the guidelines conclude with a glossary that aims to define certain terms by focusing on key concepts of the Triple Nexus such as joint analysis. Indeed, the document makes clear that the programming of development cooperation actions at the country level must be done based on a joint analysis, specifying which are the factors that have to be considered. Furthermore, the guidelines outline the responsibilities and define the roles of the actors that should deal with joint programming. Specifically, it emerges that the joint analysis is the result of the coordinated work of AICS through the consultation of Italian civil society, under the umbrella of MAECI. If the Italian guidelines were applied, the mechanisms of dialogue and consultation between the various actors would be enhanced. In this sense, it seems that so far, the guidelines have been much more useful in giving roles between actors than in setting up the Italian system. Lastly, for the strategic guidelines to be positively implemented and for a new operational sensibility to be formed in accordance with the Nexus approach, it will be necessary to wait for a medium to long period of time. This is because each actor has different reaction times to changes. There should be changes both at the Italian institutional level, which often has rigid processes and limited inter-ministerial dialogue, and with external donors, who will have to adapt their cooperation funding methods to new standards.

⁴⁵ Research Interview, March 2023.

The current Triple Nexus approach in NGOs

Italy's main NGOs are already familiar with the Nexus approach and an attempt is already underway to apply its principles according to different interpretations of the OECD-DAC guidelines.

In some cases, in fact, internal working groups have already been set up within some organisations focusing on the meaning of Nexus, and questioning which indicators and frameworks are appropriate for developing a Nexus strategy⁴⁶. This work has resulted in, for example, the WeWorld toolkit mentioned above and cited as a good practice by AICS itself⁴⁷.

The working groups developed internally by some CSOs have resulted in strategic plans, and sometimes even operational applications. From these documents, it emerges that the organisations have identified the following as elements to be emphasised: the concept of localisation, the area approach, and, more indirectly, the concepts of conflict sensitivity and community protection.

The strengthening of relations with local actors, both institutional and non-governmental, aims at reinforcing local systems rather than replacing them, and this process is facilitated where Italian CSOs have a historical presence in the area that allows them to work starting from deep relations with the local community. At the moment, however, especially in areas of first emergency or protracted crisis, where political sensitivity is strong, localisation processes should be strengthened so that the effective joint programming required to implement the nexus approach can be developed.

Among the greatest challenges to implementing projects with a Nexus approach there is **the lack of flexibility of funds**. As a consequence, the design of interventions with a Nexus approach is possible through a 'mosaic' financial planning in which individual projects in the same geographical area, financed by different donors with specific priorities, contribute to an overall intervention that aims to encompass all three pillars. This method clearly adds complexity to the implementation of projects that include the three pillars of the Nexus depending on the conflict cycle in a certain area.

The understanding of conflict dynamics and the challenges and priorities of local CSOs – as envisaged by the OECD-DAC guidelines and presented in the first part of this report – should be promoted starting from joint programming and not from mere coordination made based on a virtuous dialogue among actors. To date, coordination on the humanitarian side is advanced; however, there is a lack of capacity to make an effective joint analysis of the context, this kind of analysis would derive programming and instruments capable of contributing to collective outcomes.

⁴⁶ Research Interview, March 2023.

⁴⁷ Research Interview, March 2023.

Overall, joint programming remains difficult to implement because there are rigid systems both at the institutional level and in CSOs, although for CSOs their internal procedures make them more flexible.

Furthermore, another challenge to the implementation of projects with a Nexus approach is the length of the interventions. **The length required for Triple Nexus interventions to have an impact is a relevant factor and requires a long-term view.** This is because, while humanitarian interventions take place in the short to medium term, the peace pillar needs a long-time frame.

Finally, **organisations working in the peace field often use different definitions and this creates a lack of clarity in what the peace pillar really is.** The concept of peace, and its applications, becomes declined depending on the different conflict contexts and the different organizations working on it. The difficulty in defining the third pillar also emerged in the working group on the Italian guidelines on the Triple Nexus and a clearer definition, starting from the approach presented in the first part of this report, may bring operational benefits.

Transversal interventions related to the peace pillar that are implemented by some organisations are the adoption of conflict sensitivity standards in the analyses and actions, the implementation of social cohesion elements considering the power dynamics within communities, and the adoption of a needs-based approach to local territorial realities.

In this framework, joint programming and joint analysis are key tools of the Nexus approach that would allow, if implemented, peacebuilding actors to act consistently with other actors present in crisis or emergency situations. However, at present, the use of the financial instruments of the Italian cooperation system privileges the humanitarian and development channels, and it is rarely possible to go beyond development. To strengthen the peace pillar, it is therefore desirable to promote a top-down process that creates a structured system of dialogue capable of linking local NGOs with diplomatic and political actors, and, at the same time, a bottom-up process that allows NGOs present in the country to re-organise themselves internally so as to be able to identify the processes that allow peace elements to be built into projects.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With the Italian strategic guidelines on the Triple Nexus approaching, their implementation offers a unique opportunity for the Italian cooperation system to best apply the tools available in areas of fragility. As other international actors who took fast action to outline the Nexus approach, Italy faces some challenges, but a full and tangible implementation of the Nexus approach can improve the efficiency and impact of the Italian cooperation system.

While the Triple Nexus has gained momentum in international cooperation, its understanding and implementation remain a work in progress. For example, this report shows how, at the international level, despite the emerging general support for the Nexus, the operationalisation of the approach at level of programmes and projects remains limited. Furthermore, funding sources per Triple Nexus programming are extremely rare.

How “peace” is defined and, consequently, which actors and actions are involved, makes a crucial difference in implementing the Triple Nexus. The most relevant distinction for the Nexus is between civilian and military approaches to peace work. While civilian approaches are conciliable with humanitarian work, military instruments can generate more fatigue and lead to clear incompatibility. From this study it has emerged that “civilian” peacebuilding, as per the OECD-DAC category, could reduce the fear, on the part of several NGOs, related to the introduction into the system of logics based on security and coercive methods, which would conflict with the principles of humanitarian action and the participatory development methods.

Against this backdrop, the analysis of the situation in Italy shows a fragmented picture, composed of very different perspectives and interpretations of concepts and instruments, which might lead to adherence to the Nexus more on paper than in practice. Chiefly, one of the main assets of the strategic guidelines under approval is their explanatory intent.

Given the insights developed above, the following recommendations are offered to help guide future programming:

To all Italian actors working on international cooperation:

- **Define a common understanding of what the peace pillar means.** How “peace” is defined and, consequently, which actors and actions are involved, makes a crucial difference in implementing the

Nexus. At this aim, what the OECD-DAC defines as “Civilian peacebuilding” should be the component of the pillar, while military instruments can generate incompatibility with humanitarian standards. The distinction between “big p” and “small p” is helpful, but, at the same time, it can also downgrade the political dimension of the Nexus and deny the relevance of the connection between “top-down” and “bottom-up” peacebuilding.

- **Develop a specific gender and intersectional perspective for the Nexus approach.** The inclusion of a standing agenda item on women, peace and security and intersectional issues in all processes around the Peace-Development-Humanitarian Nexus is paramount and should be combined with attention to strengthening national and local systems and capacities for inclusion.
- **Define intermediate objectives and instruments to reach the Nexus approach.** To work in terms of “collective outcomes”, the Italian institutional system should develop a full array of processes and instruments (including, for example, dedicated internal training, joint programming, flexible funding, capacities for peacebuilding, etc.). To reach this capacity, defining intermediate objectives can contribute to steadily moving forward.
- **Provide training on the Nexus to relevant staff.** MAECI, in synergy with AICS and Italian CSO networks, should promote specific workshops and trainings on the so-called “Nexus skills” for diplomats, civil servants (including from embassies and AICS’ regional offices) and NGO staff.

To the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation:

- **Adopt the Italian Guidelines on the Triple Nexus and start to operationalise them.** The Inter-ministerial Committee for Development Cooperation should be conveyed at the earliest convenience and it should approve the guidelines on the Triple Nexus. Their approval should be followed by an operational plan with a clear schedule and responsibilities.
- **Strengthen the Italian capacities for peacebuilding and conflict prevention, and ensure that these are effectively integrated with the Guidelines on the Triple Nexus.** In order to fully support and implement a Nexus approach MAECI and AICS should strengthen their internal capacities and structures on the peace pillar. This could be possible for example through the creation of a specific desk or task force within the Directorate General for Political Affairs (DGAP). Furthermore, an inter-directorate working group within the Ministry could be created as the current one on human security (or the Nexus could be included in that group). At the same time, specific experts can be identified

within AICS that are not only specialised in operations in crisis-affected areas but also more specifically in conflict dynamics and peace processes.

- **Strengthen the political work on the Nexus.** The Nexus approach includes a political dimension and can benefit from the involvement of a diverse group of units from within MAECI. In the Italian context, DGAP should closely work with the Directorate for Development Cooperation (DGCS), also exploring synergies with other relevant policies, such as the Italian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.
- **Define pilot projects for the implementation of the Nexus.** The approval of the Italian guidelines on the Triple Nexus should be followed by pilot countries and projects in order to assess the principle in practice and fine-tune instruments through a detailed learning plan.
- **Encourage the donor community to make funding more flexible.** Funds should be more flexible to allow the full adoption of the Nexus approach and to adapt to changes and crises. They should be flexible in deadlines, and in adapting objectives and they can also play a key role in providing incentives for CSOs to work together across the Nexus.

To Italian Civil Society Organisations:

- **Prioritise and mainstream conflict sensitivity across programmes.** Conflict sensitivity and the Do No Harm principle should be applied throughout the entire process of designing, planning and implementing the Triple Nexus approach to minimise negative impacts and, where possible and appropriate, maximise positive impacts.
- **Support the adoption of new models to manage, monitor and evaluate projects.** Donors and implementing agencies should elaborate and support the adoption of new models of project management, monitoring and evaluation, also in terms of rethinking the use of logical frameworks. They should therefore find alignment in finding new, Nexus-appropriate monitoring and evaluation tools, including ensuring adequate financial resources for transitioning beyond logical frameworks.

APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research used a methodology that was mainly qualitative, while also informed by some quantitative data and analyses. The study also relied on comparative analyses, in particular with other OECD members. Overall, the redaction of the findings in the present report went through two distinct phases, the first focused on a comprehensive literature review (using both primary and secondary sources), and the second dedicated to interviews with key informants. A total of 13 were conducted between January and March 2023, with different experts and stakeholders from governmental institutions, CSOs and universities.

The initial literature review was focused on official government documents, as well as documents from international organisations, reports from think tanks and NGOs, and studies and analyses relating to specific contexts and sectors. AP also relied on primary sources made available from MAECI, NGOs and others.

Quantitative analyses are based mostly on the re-elaboration of data mined from the OECD-DAC and other international organisations. The research also built on previous analysis conducted as part of AP's report "Italy and Peacebuilding", which was published in 2022.



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