



COVID-19 pandemic

SEPTEMBER 2020

- The pandemic undermines global peace and security through the erosion of trust in public institutions, exacerbating inequality, and weakening of the social fabric—which in turn hinders vital health and humanitarian efforts.
- Responses to the pandemic must address immediate consequences but also the medium- and longer-term dimensions; how we respond will determine how fast and how well the world recovers.
- The PBF reacted quickly, working with UN Resident Coordinators and partners to understand emerging risks and opportunities, adjusting ongoing programmes welcoming specific proposals to mitigate violent conflict risks from the pandemic.
- Nearly half of all PBF-funded programmes required adjustments while the Fund receives an increasing number of targeted proposals as partners identify new peacebuilding needs to address divisions and tensions fuelled by the pandemic or the economic downturn as a result of confinement measures.

“Collective security and our shared well-being are under assault on many fronts, led by a relentless disease and abetted by global fragilities. Our challenge is to save lives today while buttressing the pillars of security for tomorrow.”



ANTÓNIO GUTERRES
SECRETARY-GENERAL

JULY 2020

Rising Risks to Peace and Security

The [Secretary-General](#) highlighted three key areas of concern to the Security Council: the erosion of trust in public institutions where authorities are perceived as ineffective or have not been transparent about its impact; the tremendous inequality exacerbated by the global economic downturn; and the weakening of the social fabric, a narrowing of civic space and the closing of democratic process, the spread of misinformation, hate speech and stigmatization.

The risks are very real. The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated lives, communities and economies, adding pressure on the poorest and most vulnerable populations and the institutions who are meant to serve them. Gender inequalities are exacerbated, with alarming spikes in gender-based and domestic violence. Fragile peace processes are derailed by the crisis, especially as the international community is distracted. Hard-won development and peacebuilding gains are threatened: evidence shows that as space to express grievances shrinks, the potential for instability and violence grows. At least 23 countries have postponed national elections or referenda, and almost twice as many have postponed subnational votes. Proceeding with elections while some groups cannot vote safely raises problems, too. And in a number of countries, COVID-19 has been an excuse for state repression in the context of protests.

The disruption caused by the pandemic can also create opportunities for peace. The Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, supported by [Security Council Resolution 2532](#), led some conflict parties to suspend hostilities. Opportunities for peace can be realized where responses to COVID-19 are conflict-sensitive and people centred,

where the focus is on measures to increase social cohesion and trust in government, through participatory and gender-responsive dialogue mechanisms. Inclusive dialogues on healthcare policies and response measures or joint outreach activities on COVID-19 risks can transcend conflict lines and contribute to social cohesion, particularly when they bring different groups together to mitigate the situation.

Seizing these opportunities is challenging when many peacebuilding initiatives face severe logistical restrictions and lack funding.

This is why the Secretary-General set out four principles to integrate peacebuilding in the COVID-19 response.

- **CONFLICT-SENSITIVITY**
Responses are informed by multidimensional risk analysis and a do-no-harm approach
- **INCLUSION**
Dialogues with communities and marginalized groups help build trust and enhance social cohesion. Strong engagement with women's groups is essential
- **INTEGRATION**
The approach is integrated and coherent through collaboration across the humanitarian, development and peace nexus
- **FLEXIBILITY**
The peacebuilding approach is adaptable and tailored to the pandemic context

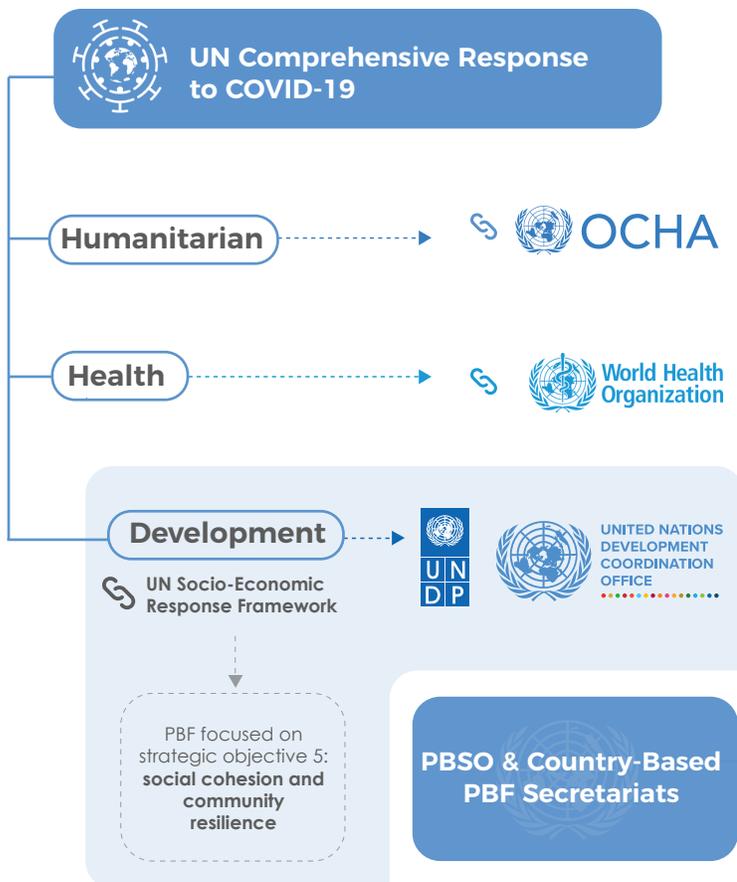


PBF's response to the pandemic

The PBF acted quickly to determine arising peacebuilding and prevention needs as well as innovative ideas through consultations with the UN's Resident Coordinator network and mission leadership. The Fund identified five key areas of support within its particular niche. They focus on mitigating and preventing risks of conflict by supporting inclusion, social cohesion and community resilience - critical areas that need to be addressed alongside humanitarian, health and development efforts. On this basis the Fund worked with partners to adjust ongoing projects as required, and to develop new proposals targeted at mitigating or preventing new conflict risks exacerbated by COVID-19.

The PBF aligns with the [UN Multilateral Response](#) to the pandemic. It funds initiatives under the development strategy led by UNDP and DCO while fostering coherence with the humanitarian and health response dimensions. The PBF also uses its established coordination mechanism with other UN central funds to ensure complementarity and avoid any duplication.

The Fund's approach recognizes the best chance to prevent conflict relies on inclusive and nationally owned processes informed by gender equality and respect for human rights, supported through well-coordinated partnerships, and enabled by adequate, predictable financing.



KEY AREAS OF PBF SUPPORT TO ADDRESS PEACEBUILDING DIMENSIONS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

1. Reinforce crisis management capacities and communications
2. Ensure inclusive and equitable response and recovery
3. Strengthen inter-community social cohesion and border management
4. Counter hate speech and stigmatization and address trauma
5. Support the SG's call for a global ceasefire



PBF in practice

The immediate response has largely been about adjusting ongoing PBF projects, for example changing in-person activities to virtual formats or tackling new risks and opportunities arising in the specific project areas. By summer 2020, at least 46% (or a total of 87) of active PBF projects in 29 countries made such adjustments. In the initial response phase, a majority of adjusted activities supported governments' crisis management capacities, including data management, awareness raising and outreach to communities. Efforts to reduce tensions, counter stigmatization and disinformation or hate speech have also been common areas of adjustments.

In a second response phase, as the capacity gaps and needs become clearer, for instance through the socio-economic impact assessments, the PBF is receiving new proposals that either include dedicated COVID-19 response components in their design (the Fund has asked that all new project proposal explicitly consider COVID-19 related risks), or that have been designed with a primary emphasis on addressing COVID-19 related conflict risks and peacebuilding opportunities. The Fund expects approximately 20% of its planned portfolio of new investments in the latter part of 2020 to be readjusted to meet COVID-19 related peacebuilding demands, and a further increase in 2021 as and when more medium-term response and recovery initiatives have to be delivered in an inclusive, conflict-sensitive manner.

DISTRIBUTION OF PBF RESPONSE

AS OF AUGUST 2020



ADDRESSING GENDER AND PEACEBUILDING DIMENSIONS OF THE PANDEMIC

 In **Guatemala**, the UN rapidly supported the Public Prosecutor's Office to implement awareness-raising and protection activities for women who have become at higher risk of domestic violence in the context of lockdown measures. The Office also launched interventions to counter discrimination and hate speech targeted against migrants. Moreover, ongoing psychosocial services to victims of violence at the community level were rapidly adjusted to incorporate issues related to the pandemic.

 In **Colombia**, PBF projects supported the protection of female health personnel, women leaders and human rights defenders, and female Venezuelan migrants, who had become more vulnerable to attacks and sexual and domestic violence.

 In **Zimbabwe**, an ongoing PBF project implemented a gendered rapid assessment across 10 provinces to assess citizen perceptions of the impact of COVID 19 on gender and peacebuilding. 200 Peace Committees and Gender Champions from the 10 provinces engaged to monitor women's rights situation. Information obtained was analyzed and consolidated into the Gender Monitoring Survey reports and informed advocacy issues for government response. The project successfully contributed to the increased engagement with key duty bearers.



STRENGTHENING HUMAN RIGHTS DURING THE PANDEMIC

 In **The Gambia**, the ongoing PBF support to establish and build capacity of a new National Human Rights Commission integrated components to support the Commission in training police forces on how to protect the rights of citizens during the state of emergency.

 In **Guinea**, an ongoing programme to strengthen governance and quality of police services added a training for 35 NGO representatives from human rights groups to strengthen their capacity to monitor security forces' performance during the state of emergency and to document any potential human rights violations and prevent abuse of power.

 In **Togo**, following the declaration of the state of emergency due to COVID-19, a PBF project trained 15 human rights defenders of the central region—the first to experience confinement—on how to monitor human rights violations in a health crisis and a state of emergency. These human rights monitors also received technological tools to obtain and share information remotely and have so far reported over 30 cases.



SUPPORTING URGENT INSTITUTIONAL REFORM AND RULE OF LAW CAPACITIES

 In **Haiti**, the pandemic has exacerbated an already untenable situation of overcrowded prisons and pretrial detention centers. In an effort to mitigate the risk of escalating tensions, PBF support was requested to urgently facilitate legal arbitration for the release of detainees, accompanied by further awareness-raising measures.

 In **Yemen**, the marginalized and vulnerable populations of Juvenile Detention Centers were provided with COVID-19 protection and prevention items in a collaboration with the ICRC.

 In **Madagascar**, to strengthen the police's capacity for community engagement and crisis management during the pandemic a new initiative supports inclusive coordination efforts between local governments and communities and foster transparent communication and dialogue spaces to prevent potential conflict.



FACILITATING JOINT UN-WORLD BANK RISK ANALYSIS AND CONFLICT-SENSITIVE RECOVERY PLANNING

The **Humanitarian-Development-Peacebuilding** and Partnership (HDPP) Facility considers submissions from UN Resident Coordinators for grants to develop the **UN-World Bank partnership in crisis-affected situations** under the 2017 Partnership Framework between the two organizations. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the HDPP-Facility established in June a **fast track** that facilitates support for rapid UN-World Bank risk analysis in the context of COVID-19. Requests for up to USD 50,000 to fund remote or local consultancies can be approved in as little as 24 hours to support alignment of UN and World Bank efforts and facilitate conflict-sensitive recovery planning.

A **first wave of fast-track** grants by end August supported the mapping of risks faced by populations in North and North-east **Kenya**, and in **Niger's** Diffa and Tillabery regions; conflict-sensitive UN-World Bank recovery planning in **Sierra Leone**; and an assessment of the pandemic's impact on social cohesion and community acceptance in **Togo**.

Recent approvals include support to the stand-up of a nationally-owned data capacity for socio-economic impact assessment in **Afghanistan**, and to explore universal basic income as a potential solution for marginalized women in **Nepal**. With additional requests in the pipeline from Latin America and other regions hard hit by COVID-19, and with renewed donor support, the Facility's fast-track will be **extended until the end of 2021**.

About the Peacebuilding Fund

The UN Secretary-General's **Peacebuilding Fund** is the organization's financial instrument of first resort to sustain peace in countries or situations at risk or affected by violent conflict. The Fund may invest with UN entities, governments, regional organizations, multilateral banks, national multi-donor trust funds or civil society organizations.

The Fund works across pillars and supports integrated UN responses to fill critical gaps; respond quickly and with flexibility to peacebuilding opportunities; and catalyze processes and resources in a risk-tolerant fashion.

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