

► Policy Brief

Decent Work in the Nexus

January 2024

How Skills and Employability initiatives contribute to peace in the framework of the Humanitarian, Development and Peace Nexus

Key points

- ▶ Skills development initiatives can help prevent conflict and strengthen peace in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. If designed or adapted appropriately, they can:
 - Strengthen inclusive social dialogue, mutual understanding and trust between groups;
 - Increase people's sense of inclusion and their resilience to disruption and violence, through increased employability;
 - Address grievances and perceptions of injustice (sections 2-3).
- ▶ Each of the building blocks of skills development processes can be harnessed to make a contribution to peace. This can be achieved by adopting peace and conflict analysis, conflict- and gender-sensitivity measures, a social dialogue- based approach, and a strong focus on fairness and inclusion (section 4).
- ▶ A checklist is provided to help navigate peace responsiveness in skills development programming.

Introduction

People's access to skills is an important contribution to resilience in crisis and post crisis situations, and thus to all three elements of the Humanitarian, Development and Peace Nexus (HDPN). An increase in skills can enhance development by contributing to the wider economy and to personal and household incomes, aspirations and progress. They contribute to humanitarian responses by improving resilience in affected communities and businesses and are integral to the 'building back better' approach. Moreover, they contribute to peace by strengthening social cohesion, reducing grievances and improving people's sense of fairness and inclusion.

Guided by the ILO's [Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017](#) (No. 205), this document is focused on how the ILO's Skills and Employability interventions can be designed and adapted to contribute to peace and resilience. It starts with a brief reminder of how the International Labour Organization (ILO) has chosen more broadly to contribute to peace, before explaining how skills can be utilised to mitigate conflict. It then shows how skills interventions can support peace, and how they fit into the ILO's wider peacebuilding theory of change. Finally, it outlines key steps in the development of peace-contributing skills interventions, with an accompanying checklist.

The ILO’s deliberate contribution to peace

Contributing to peace combines addressing known causes of conflict (such as grievances about unfairness and exclusion) and building the capacity within society to anticipate, manage and resolve future conflicts – sometimes known as ‘positive peace’. For the ILO, this means addressing drivers of conflict and strengthening capacities for peace as a deliberate part of its decent work initiatives. Meanwhile, all ILO initiatives in fragile and conflict-affected contexts also need to be conflict sensitive, i.e. avoid unintentionally exacerbating tensions and conflicts.

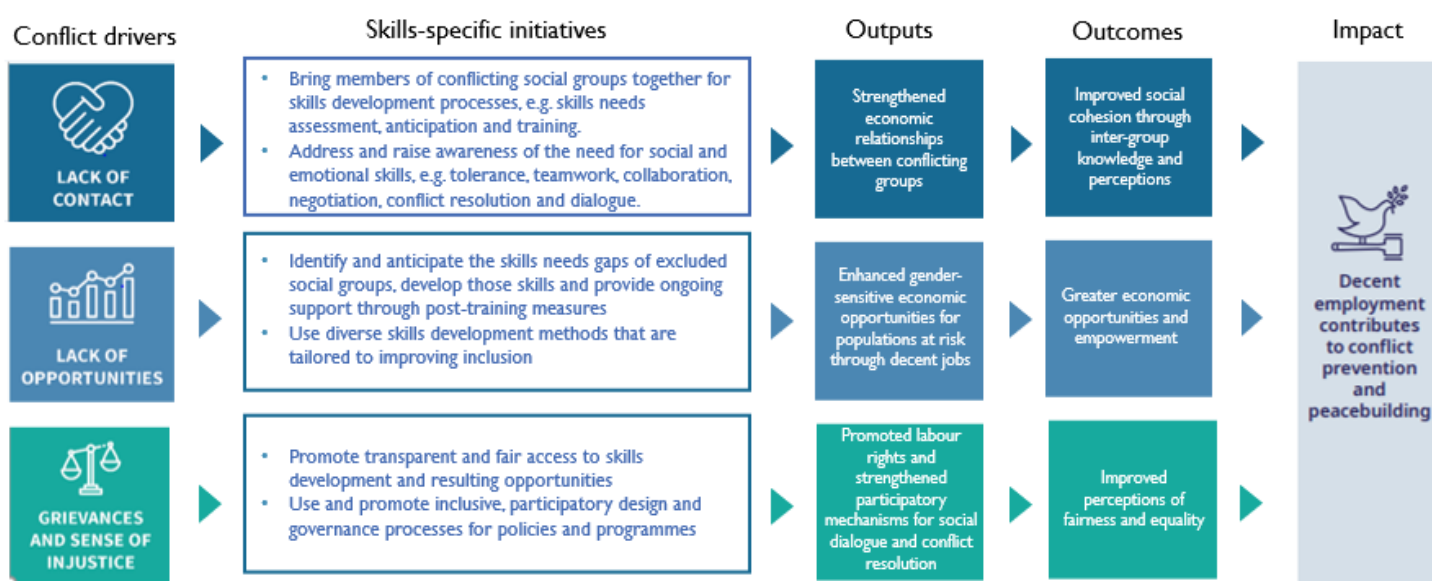
The ILO, the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), the World Bank and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) issued a joint statement on employment for peace in 2016.¹ On this basis, the ILO adopted a theory of change (ToC) showing how its programming can contribute to peace by addressing three broad conflict drivers. This shows how access to decent work can contribute to peace in at least three ways if programmed to do so: improving social cohesion, increasing access to economic opportunities and empowerment, and improving perceptions of fairness and equality (Figure 1).

How ill-adapted skills interventions can undermine peace

Instability, tensions and conflict reduce economic activity and therefore the availability of decent work. They also undermine ILO constituents’ ability to plan and implement skills development interventions, due to insecurity and uncertainty. Further, they obstruct people’s access to education and training, including informal and non-formal learning, thus undermining their employability.

Meanwhile, skills policies and practices can sometimes contribute to instability, tensions and conflict. At a broad level, ill-matched supply and demand for skills can reduce morale, weaken the economy, increase unemployment, affect job placement and job creation, decrease productivity, lower wages, increase inequalities, increase public expenditures and lower tax revenues. In fragile contexts, this contributes to instability. In addition, where people feel excluded from learning opportunities, and therefore jobs – whether intentionally or not – this can create or deepen frustration and grievances. This perception, alongside low income and status, may nurture instability and violence for those who feel excluded. They may therefore be more susceptible when political leaders incite them to take part in disruption and violence, especially if they perceive their exclusion as being related to their group identity. Training provision and workplaces can reinforce tensions and the lack

► **Figure 1. Theory of change on how skills development contributes to peace.** *Figure adapted from theory of change on how decent work contributes to peace, in: Handbook. How to Design, Monitor and Evaluate Peacebuilding Results in Jobs for Peace and Resilience Programmes, ILO (2019).*



¹ ILO, PBSO, UNDP, World Bank, 2016. [Employment Programmes and Peace. A Joint Statement on an Analytical Framework, Emerging Principles for Action and Next Steps.](#)

of mutual understanding between communities if they fail to reflect the diversity of the population, fail to address the need for core skills, or fail to provide an environment where people of different social groups, genders or ages can get to know one another and collaborate.

Policies and practices that are conflict insensitive can also contribute to tensions. An affirmative action skills policy may -if poorly designed, adapted and communicated - create or worsen tensions. In cases where previously included groups perceive that new policy, designed to be more inclusive for others, is effectively biased against them, it can create new grievances and worsen tensions.

Harnessing skills development policies and programmes to support peace

It follows, therefore, that skills policies and programmes can contribute to peace if they are well-designed. Improving the alignment between skills supply and demand improves the economy broadly and on a sustained basis, which can strengthen stability. Policies and practices that emphasise inclusive and fair access to skills improvement, and facilitate access to decent work, can help improve people's sense of belonging, and thus foster social cohesion. They can also reduce the prevalence of grievances and therefore the risk of instability. Where they help create more inclusive education, training and work environments, this can improve mutual knowledge between and among social groups, further improving social cohesion. Lastly, where skills development includes core skills such as tolerance, teamwork, collaboration, negotiation, conflict resolution and social dialogue, this can also improve social cohesion in the form of effective and trusting vertical and horizontal relations.² These strengthen the capacity of all parties to empathize with others and anticipate and resolve future tensions and conflicts. Integrating skills initiatives into the peacebuilding theory of change (ToC) illustrates their contribution to peace, as illustrated in figure 1. Using this adapted ToC as a guide, skills development can be leveraged to contribute to peace at all levels: in projects on the ground, in building the capacity of governments, employers, workers' organizations and training providers, in supporting national policy development, and in promoting peacebuilding approaches to skills development internationally through the ILO's international leadership role in the world of work.

In practical terms, developing skills initiatives in fragile contexts involves:

- **Conducting conflict-sensitive and peace-responsive analysis:**

Integrate a peace and conflict analysis (PCA)³ into the planning process to highlight the links between skills, peace, and conflict, and thus build conflict sensitivity and peace responsiveness into skills initiatives. Using a PCA helps planners identify and target specific sections of the population whose exclusion is contributing, or may contribute, to instability. For example, if it is known that young men from a particular ethnicity feel structurally excluded from the kinds of jobs that are available, and research confirms that they typically lack the skills to apply for these roles, then their skills development can be targeted as part of an economic approach to peacebuilding. Similarly, a PCA might suggest concentrating skills development initiatives on a geographic area hitherto left behind by economic development. As outlined in the ILO guidance, a PCA can be tailored to the time and resources available and can be done rapidly, using secondary sources where necessary.

All policies, strategies and other initiatives should be conflict sensitive. They should be aware of any likely interactions with peace and conflict dynamics and take steps to avoid or mitigate the impact of any actions likely to exacerbate tensions. For example, an initiative to develop the skills likely to be needed in newly evolving economic sectors would need to consider the impact on people engaged in existing sectors these are expected to displace and adopt mitigation measures accordingly.

- **Social dialogue-based planning and governance:**

Support the use of participatory, social dialogue-based processes for developing policy, strategy and programmes with governments, employers, workers and other stakeholders. Doing so helps model and build capacity for the diversity and inclusion that is so essential to peace. Using PCAs in participatory planning also helps build understanding among partners of the links between peace, conflict, and the world of work, strengthening their capacity to respond appropriately. It is also helpful to use diverse and participatory governance processes, so policies and strategies are steered and monitored by teams representing a range of perspectives, including men and women from relevant stakeholder groups. For example, including [Skills for Trade and Economic Diversification](#) (STED) processes when setting up a steering group for sectoral or regional skills needs anticipation or assessment activities.

² ILO, 2021. [Promoting Social Cohesion and Peaceful Coexistence in Fragile Contexts through TVET](#).

³ ILO, 2021. [Peace and Conflict Analysis. Guidance for ILO's Programming in Conflict-Affected and Fragile Contexts](#).

- **Gender:** Gender should be considered from two angles. First, it is important to ensure that all policies, strategies and initiatives contribute to gender equality, since this is a fundamental aspect of sustaining peace by improving perceptions of fairness and equality. Second, these efforts should also be gender sensitive, i.e. they acknowledge and work on an understanding of the different ways that people’s gender shapes their particular opportunities and responses to conflict, peace and peacebuilding. For example, skills development initiatives in rural areas might need to be cognisant of women and girls’ security risks, and of young men’s vulnerability to recruitment by armed groups.

- **Inclusive methods:** For skills development opportunities to be genuinely accessible and inclusive, they need to be tailored to the ability and prior experience of targeted social groups. This may influence factors such as opportunity cost, learning methods, timing, duration and location. In some contexts, cultural factors may also need to be considered. See [Guide and assessment tool on the inclusiveness of TVET and skills development systems for all](#)

Applying peace-responsiveness through the skills policy cycle

Broadly, the following checklist helps clarify whether peace and conflict dynamics are taken into account through the skills policy cycle.

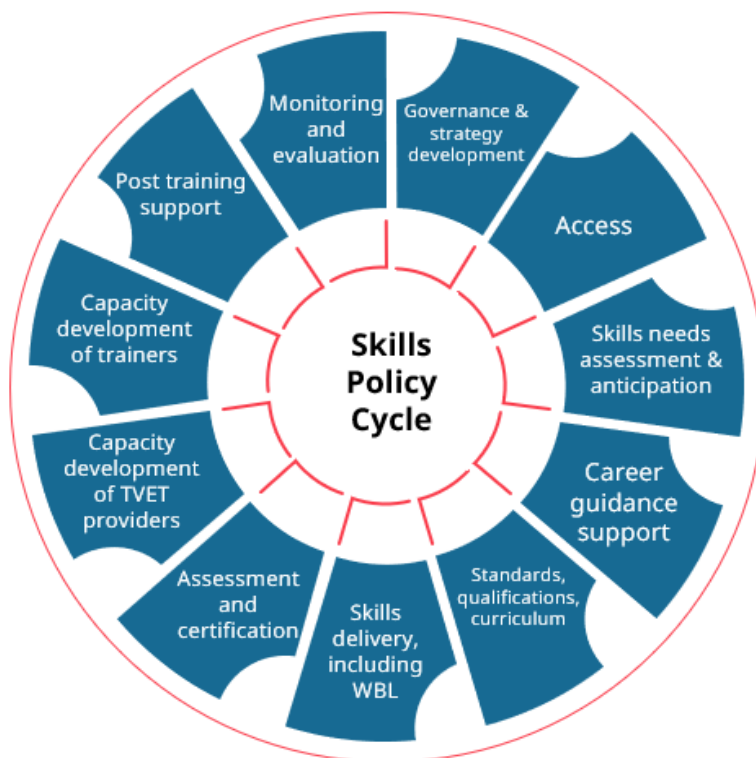
- Has a Peace and Conflict Assessment been done?
- Is the skills development initiative led/overseen/advised by a diverse, inclusive and objective group?
- Has a peacebuilding contribution been identified and integrated into the design, including goals and indicators? E.g. opportunities to use skills development policy and practices to:

- Strengthen inclusive social dialogue, mutual understanding and trust between groups
 - Increase people’s sense of inclusion through training and employment
 - Offer pathways away from disruption and violence
 - Address grievances and perceptions of injustice
- Does the design identify skills development content and methods tailored to target beneficiaries whose inclusion will reduce grievances and improve stability?
 - Have conflict sensitivity risks and mitigation measures been identified? For example:
 - Might insecurity threaten programme implementation, or place staff, partners, participants or others at risk?
 - Might some people feel their interests will be undermined by the programme? Might they react by disrupting the project, fuelling tensions, or provoking conflict? How influential are they?
 - Might the choice of sector, geography or beneficiaries be perceived as exacerbating grievances or perceptions of exclusion?
 - Might armed actors, or other interests on one side of an existing conflict be perceived as benefitting disproportionately, tangibly or politically, from the programme?
 - Might some secondary impacts of the programme undermine peace, or be perceived as such, e.g. by reinforcing exclusion or tensions, fuelling existing conflicts, and undermining social cohesion?

Going into more detail, table 1 indicates how the peace responsiveness lens can be applied by posing key questions at each relevant building block of skills development systems (figure 2). The peace and responsiveness lens has already been incorporated into relevant ILO tools, for example guidance for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) providers,⁴ and recently adapted versions of the guidance for [Training for Rural Economic Empowerment \(TREE\)](#) and [Skills for Trade and Economic Diversification \(STED\)](#), for use in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

⁴ ILO, 2021. [Promoting Social Cohesion and Peaceful Coexistence in Fragile Contexts through TVET.](#)

► Figure 2: The building blocks of skills development



Key peace-responsiveness checklist related to each building block of skills development systems

► Table 1. Key questions for peace-responsiveness at different stages of the skills policy cycle

Stage	Key questions for peace-responsiveness
Governance and strategy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are key population groups represented in governance and strategy development, and is the skills cycle transparent? • Is strategy developed through facilitated social dialogue? • Is a peace and conflict analysis included? What are the main causes of conflict and openings for strengthening peace? • Is financing secured for the strategy and is it unbiased towards conflict parties and drivers? • When there is a specific sectoral focus, how do economic sectors under consideration interact with peace and conflict dynamics? For example, are they strongly linked to the interests of particular factions or social groups? Is there a history of conflict in the sector? • Is gender fully taken into account? • How will the project contribute to peace and stability? For example, through increased employment, strengthened social dialogue, mutual understanding and trust between groups, or by reducing grievances and perceptions of injustice. • What issues beyond the normal scope of skills development initiatives also need to be addressed for the peace contribution to be realised? • What conflict sensitivity issues need to be taken into account? How might different groups or parties perceive/react to strategic choices? What are the mitigation measures? • During implementation, are the peace-responsive aspects of the plans being maintained, including in M&E?
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What accessibility issues are suggested by the peace and conflict analysis? For example, is there a need to include particular social groups affected by grievances or conflict?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does their inclusion require in terms of strategic choices (e.g. geography and economic sector) and tactical choices such as training methods and providers?
Skills needs assessment and anticipation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is social dialogue among representative groups used to analyse needs? • Which current and future economic sectors/economic activities/value chains offer an opportunity to contribute to peace, and how? • What are the skills needs and gaps preventing this contribution being realised? • Will skills gaps be filled in a way that includes social groups with identified grievances linked to their exclusion? Is fairness a key criterion in selection? • What are the gender issues? How will they be taken into account? • How will core skills, including social and emotional skills, contribute to peace at all levels, including management roles, workers and employers? • What conflict sensitivity issues need to be taken into account? How will different groups or parties perceive/react to decisions? What are the mitigation measures?
Career guidance support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is career guidance support provided by organizations and individuals who understand and are aligned with the identified peace contribution goals? • Is it tailored appropriately to men and women from the identified social groups?
Standards, qualifications and curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the curriculum designed to enable inclusion as defined? For example, can excluded population groups with lower educational attainment, specific cultural or language needs can take part? • Do the curriculum, qualifications and standards include social and emotional skills?
Skills delivery, including work-based learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are trainees selected fairly and transparently? • Are delivery mechanisms tailored to the realities of those they are designed to serve? For example, do they take into account challenges such as insecurity? • Do delivery mechanisms and methods actively promote collaboration across social divisions, as a contribution to social cohesion?
Assessment and certification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are assessment and certification processes fair and transparent, with timely grievance mechanisms?
Capacity development of TVET providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do TVET providers demonstrate inclusion in their own staffing? • Are TVET providers aligned with the peace and conflict-sensitivity dimensions of the strategy?
Capacity development of trainers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are trainers themselves trained in core skills, including social and emotional skills? Do they display fairness and tolerance? Are they well sensitized on peace contribution goals of skills development?
Post-training support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does post-training follow up include counselling and support on workplace conflicts, intolerance or unfairness, and on the application of emotional and social skills?
Monitoring and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does M&E incorporate peacebuilding outcomes and indicators, e.g. levels of violence, tolerance and inclusion? • Is the M&E process participatory and transparent? • Are peace and conflict dynamics and conflict-sensitivity risks being monitored regularly as an integral part of the plans, and are new mitigation measures identified when necessary?

Key resources

ILO. 2023. [The ILO strategy on skills and lifelong learning 2030](#).

[Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017](#) (No. 205)

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