



Guidance note on the use of Conflict Analysis in support of EU external action

1. Introduction

Conflict is an important part of social and political change. **Violent conflict is a problem** that the EU is committed to addressing (see annex for listing of extensive policy commitments in this area).¹

The purpose of this note is to set-out how conflict analysis can assist EEAS and Commission staff working in fragile and/or conflict-affected countries. Conflict analysis contributes to making an informed choice in articulating a comprehensive approach to the EU's objective of preserving peace, preventing conflict and strengthening international security across a wide range of mechanisms and tools, including public and quiet diplomacy, (high level) political dialogue, policy dialogue, trade negotiations, external assistance², mediation, CSDP missions and other interventions.

This guidance note has been developed jointly by the EEAS and Commission services.

2. Conflict sensitivity and why it is important.

Conflict sensitivity means ensuring that, to the best of its abilities, EU actions (political, policy, external assistance) **avoid having a negative impact** and **maximise the positive impact** on conflict dynamics, thereby contributing to conflict prevention, structural stability and peace building.

Central to the notion of conflict sensitivity is the idea that **all EU action in a conflict affected setting can, and is likely to, have an impact on the conflict**. Well-meaning support for reform or infrastructure can increase dependency, power and patronage of certain groups, and have a negative impact on coping mechanisms. Similarly, the failure to respond with timely political and/or development support to a peace accord due to, for example, concerns over fiduciary risk in a still fragile situation or misinterpretation of the situation due to lack of political insight could push a country to relapse into conflict that could have been prevented. Positive action could take the form of addressing the consequences of conflict (e.g. provision of basic services, reconstruction of critical infrastructure such as hospitals, supporting trade facilitation measures, etc.) or addressing the underlying causes of conflict (e.g. helping to reduce inequalities that fuel tensions). In short, by applying a pro-active conflict sensitive approach we **increase the EU's adherence to the “Do No Harm” principle**.

¹ An estimated 40 % of fragile and post-conflict countries relapse into conflict within 10 years.

² Throughout this note, the term 'external assistance' is meant to include development assistance and other instruments for external assistance.

The EU's ambition is to work more on³ conflict, by addressing the causes of conflict and promoting peace. This follows from article 21 of the Treaty on the European Union, which states the core objective to “preserve peace, prevent conflict and strengthen international security”, and various EU policy statements which have identified the need for the EU to “address root causes of conflict”⁴. The 2003 European Security Strategy and the 2005 European Consensus on Development acknowledge that there cannot be sustainable development without peace and security, and that without development and poverty eradication there will be no sustainable peace. The Council Conclusions of 2007 on security and development state that "conflict prevention should be pursued as a priority goal in particular by fostering and strengthening development cooperation"⁵. However, the recent comprehensive [thematic evaluation of EC Support to Conflict Prevention and Peace-building](#)⁶ shows that **political reporting, strategy development and programming of external / development assistance were insufficiently conflict-sensitive in the past**. The evaluation found that while the EU is investing heavily, its impact is often limited to addressing the consequences of crises and conflicts. Another key finding is that the connection between the EU's diplomatic and CFSP engagement (e.g. through political dialogue, or CSDP actions) and external assistance has often been weak, reducing the EU's leverage and effectiveness in the area of conflict prevention and peace building.

Given that countries that could be or are affected by violence and conflict are highly diverse there is **no easy check-list for “what works” or what should be priorities and sequencing**. EU actions in a third country have to **take account of and be adapted to the key dynamics of conflict** that are **highly context specific**.

Acknowledging the complexity and diversity of conflict situations, **emerging best practice** (e.g. as documented by the OECD/DAC) **highlights the importance of the use of conflict analysis in the assessment of the context**. EU planning and programming documents have often contained elements of a formal conflict analysis, but not always in a systematic and structured manner. There is a need to address these weaknesses. Positive experiences with the use of conflict analysis by Delegations / country teams, such as in Bolivia, Sri Lanka and Georgia point to an emerging practice, applicable to the EU.

The guidance presented in this document is applicable to EU action in a (post-) conflict (-prone) setting, as a diplomatic actor (political dialogue), donor (external assistance), security provider (CSDP), trade partner, etc. A conflict analysis which is jointly owned by all the relevant EU actors is the basis for an effective Comprehensive Approach to conflict and crisis situations addressing the security-development-political nexus. Across all these domains, conflict analysis can strengthen the ability of the EU to plan and implement EU action mindful of its potential impact, positive or negative, intended or otherwise.

This guidance applies to all possible stages of (potential) violent conflict, including where violent conflict is ongoing. Crisis interventions will, for example, also have to take into account impact on future peace-building and the prevention of renewed conflict. The diagram below illustrates this and underlines how conflict sensitivity requires both a short term and a longer term approach.

³ Working “on” conflict entails active policies to address causes, support peace etc; this is to be distinguished from working “in” a conflict, where conflict is the context but there is no intention for a direct peace building/conflict prevention effect, and working “around” a conflict, where actor may seek to avoid conflict, and focus on unaffected areas. The EU does not advocate working around a conflict.

⁴ See list of policy references in annex to this note.

⁵ Council conclusions, 15097/07, p. 3

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/evaluation/evaluation_reports/2011/1291_docs_en.htm

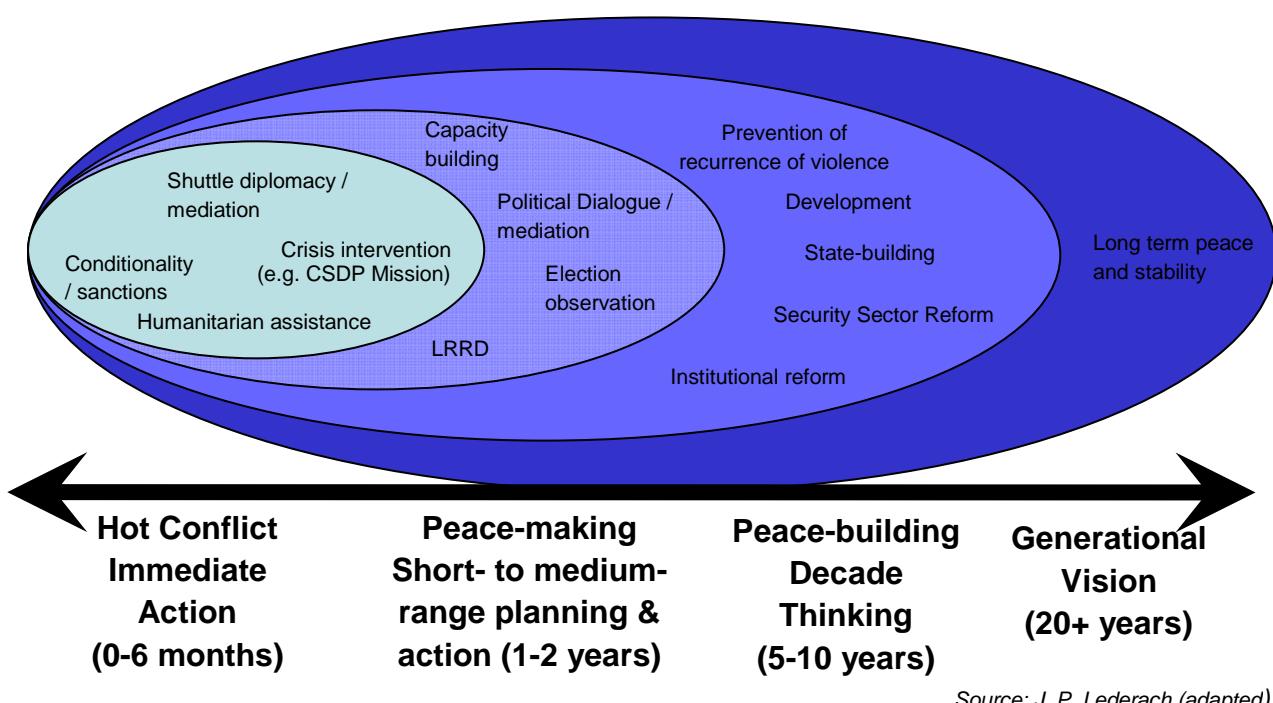


Figure 1: The Transformation Timeline

3. What constitutes EU conflict analysis?

A conflict analysis uses a **structured framework** as the basis for information gathering, analysis, interpretation, appreciation of the realms of the possible and prioritisation of responses. A range of conflict analysis frameworks and tools have been developed, and can be tailored to the specific needs of EU Delegations. The EU has two frameworks which can be used to generate a conflict analysis; a light-touch Conflict Analysis Tool currently being piloted by the Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Mediation Instruments Division in the EEAS, and conflict sensitive political economy analysis, developed in DG DEVCO (see chapter 4 below).

A useful [reference guide to conflict analysis frameworks](#)⁷ - including those produced by some EU Member States, USAID, and the World Bank amongst others - is available on-line. In line with most conflict analysis frameworks, key elements for an EU conflict analysis framework are:

⁷ <http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/sites/default/files/Conflict-Sensitive%20Approaches%20to%20Development,%20Humanitarian%20Assistance%20and%20Peacebuilding%20Resource%20Pack.pdf>

Key elements of EU conflict analysis⁸

1. An analysis of the **context** – leading to a profile of contentious issues and conflict-prone areas
2. An analysis of the (possible) **causes of conflict** – distinguishing between **structural (root)** causes, **proximate** causes and the more immediate **triggers** of violent conflict. Where applicable, this should include an analysis of factors (including grievances) which contribute to and facilitate radicalisation and violent extremism. Analysis of conflict causes should also be complemented by an analysis of **factors providing for resilience** to violent conflict, which enable some communities/parts of a country to remain peaceful when others are in conflict.
3. An analysis of the **actors** – exploring their interests, goals, positions, capacities and relationships.
4. An analysis of the **conflict dynamics** – understanding the interactions between context, causes and actors, the distribution of violence, its nature and triggers.
5. An outline of potential scenarios – possible future directions of conflict.
6. The identification of **existing and planned responses** to the conflict, internal and external – taking into account all actors, including development, military and security, diplomatic, trade, migration;
7. The identification of **key gaps, options and realistic strategies to respond to the conflict**, being mindful of the risk that any of these interventions might actually further increase the likelihood of violent conflict.

Analysing the causes of conflict, informs political dialogue, mediation, public and quiet diplomacy as well as external assistance and policy dialogue. It can also inform strategic planning, strategic reviews as well as follow-on work on CSDP interventions. Conflict analysis can help the EU make better-informed strategic and operational choices, to manage risks and potentially assess impact at a later stage.

Conflict analysis can be applied at the regional level (e.g. Horn of Africa), national level, sub-national level (e.g. north eastern Nigeria) sector level (e.g. agriculture, infrastructure, private sector development, education) and at the level of a particular intervention (assistance project, CSDP mission etc.). It recognises that **achieving a high degree of certainty and predictability is often not possible** in complex environments, and adaptation to an evolving context is essential (see also section 4.1 on when to conduct conflict analysis).

An EU conflict analysis should involve the active participation of all the EU stakeholders who need to own and use its findings. Typically, this will include the Delegation(s), the EEAS and DG DEVCO, and other Commission services such as DG ECHO and FPI.

To sum up, **conflict analysis uses a collaborative process to develop an understanding of a conflict context**. It complements political understanding and human judgment, and builds upon and strengthens the understanding of the context analysis that staff in EU Delegations and Brussels develop through their daily work.

⁸ Based on: International Alert et al. 2004, Conflict-sensitive approaches – a Resource Pack - Chapter 2, which draws on 15 conflict analysis frameworks including those developed or used by the European Commission, EU member-states, USAID, and World Bank.

4. Key “Who, When & How” questions

4.1 Who can initiate a conflict analysis and when should conflict analysis be undertaken?

Processes of conflict analysis can be initiated by a variety of actors, such as an EU Delegation, country desks or management at headquarters in the Commission or EEAS, an EUSR, one of the CSDP structures and / or the head of a specific CSDP mission / operation. Analytical support and options for developing conflict analysis can be provided by the EEAS Division for Conflict Prevention, Peace building and Mediation Instruments and the DEVCO Unit for Fragility and Crisis Management.

If a situation in a country changes, the EU's engagement might need some adapting. The EU's diplomatic engagement must always be flexible and adaptive. In relation to external assistance, the EU's new approach to programming allows more ad-hoc re-programming of allocations and a re-assessment of the context, particularly in the case of evolving or emerging conflict. Likewise, proposing new CSDP missions and/or strategic reviews of ongoing CSDP missions / operations can be informed by (updated) conflict analysis.

While **good enough conflict analysis is better than no conflict analysis**, it is important to update the analysis when significant changes occur. Integration of conflict analysis into political monitoring can strengthen understanding of the context. Little and often is generally preferable to infrequent and lengthy analysis – particularly in a fast changing, dynamic situation.

Conflict analysis could be used by:

- Delegations and the EEAS and Commission headquarters in response to rising conflict risk, as registered in the Early Warning system [currently under development]
- ECHO Offices and ECHO headquarters for the preparation of Humanitarian Implementation Plans
- CMPD with regards to work on CSDP missions / operations (e.g. during both planning and conduct as well as strategic reviews)
- Delegations or headquarters when preparing political strategies and/or EU programming of external assistance (i.e. the drafting of MIPs/NIPs/RIPs and CSPs where relevant)
- EEAS and DEVCO headquarter country team meetings when assessing EU programming proposals
- EU Delegations/EEAS headquarters considering potential responses to violent extremism/terrorism.
- Delegations and EU Member States embassies (and other donors) when consulting on Joint Programming
- Delegation and missions when producing reports on best practices and lessons learnt (e.g. Results Oriented Monitoring)
- Desk officers and other entities in headquarters when synthesising reports from the field (e.g. as basis for feed back into programming)
- By the EEAS and DG TRADE when preparing and conducting bilateral trade negotiations with countries affected by / at risk of violent conflict
- Delegations and headquarters when designing, and implementing specific (sector) actions.
- Delegations when engaging in political and policy dialogue with partners
- Project / programme managers / teams seeking to develop conflict sensitive approaches

The needs for conflict analysis may vary over time, and will be dependent on the user(s) or the situation. **The EU employs two tools that can be tailored to address these varying needs for conflict analysis:**

- light touch conflict analysis
- conflict sensitive political economy analysis

They are explained in the sections below.

4.2 Light-touch conflict analysis

Light touch conflict analysis can often be the timely and commensurate response that is appropriate for the situation. Conflict-affected settings are often characterised by developments that move at a quick pace. Provided that EU-actors involved already have a lot of knowledge and information on the situation, a light touch conflict analysis may inform critical decision making at a time when it is needed. The light-touch approach allows a broad range of very busy EU staff to participate in it and therefore own its results. The final product of the light touch exercise must be adapted to the needs of its audience. An executive summary can help brief senior management to support their decision making; and a more detailed text for those engaged in practical responses. Due care should be taken to go beyond a technocratic exercise and address the political dimension of the conflict as strongly as possible. The result of a light-touch conflict analysis may need to be complemented by additional analysis with an increased focus or depth. This would involve carrying-out a political economy analysis.

The process of conducting a light-touch conflict analysis assumes that the minimum requisite knowledge and expertise on the conflict context is available (e.g. tacit knowledge of participants, reports of relevant assessments). Where this minimum level of knowledge and expertise is not readily available, a political economy analysis can deliver this.

An interactive conflict analysis workshop is the key element of a light-touch approach. It can be organized at the Delegation or at Headquarters and can be undertaken in 1-2 days. This analysis seeks to draw on the perspectives and knowledge of a broad range of EU actors, and, where possible, include a few external experts (academics, civil society, etc). In sensitive cases, the inclusion of external experts may not be appropriate.

During the workshop a conflict analysis framework is used to map out the key actors and causes of conflict and to discuss possible EU responses. Participants usually receive a short document synthesizing existing conflict and other forms of analysis undertaken by others⁹ in advance.

The workshop approach provides analysis that is generated and therefore owned by the participating EU actors. It establishes a common understanding of the conflict, enabling comprehensive measures to be put in place. These workshops are recommended when events on the ground require quick responses, or in order to initiate the discussion on overall conflict trends and possible responses. **The output of a conflict analysis workshop will be a short and structured conflict analysis report,** summarising the analysis conducted during the workshop.

The EEAS Conflict Prevention, Peace-building and Mediation Instruments Division (CPD) can help organise and facilitate these light touch processes/workshops upon request from country teams or

⁹ The organisers of the analysis may commission a consultant to prepare this, or do it themselves.

others. A reference guide on the methodology for EU conflict analysis workshops will be forthcoming.

As the light-touch analysis is limited in time and depth, it may in fact conclude that a more in-depth analysis is required. The light touch exercise will then provide a scoping for this follow-up exercise.

4.3 Conflict sensitive political economy analysis

Where in-depth analysis is required, political economy analysis can be employed. **Political economy analysis provides a framework to understand key aspects of the political and economic processes, relationships and dynamics at work in a given country or sector.** Political economy analysis investigates how political and economic processes interact in a given society, and support or impede the ability to solve problems that require collective action. It takes particular account of the interests and incentives driving the behaviour of different groups and individuals, the distribution of power and wealth between them, and how these relationships are created, sustained and transformed over time. These relationships are crucial in explaining how politics works, how wealth is created, and how change happens. The framework is intended to help deepen EU staff's understanding of the country context or of specific sectors, and to promote discussion of how the EU can best interact with national political economy dynamics.

A Political economy analysis can deliver an assessment of the key elements of conflict analysis outlined in chapter three. Political economy analysis methodology combines in-depth desk and field research with interactive workshops that help ensure ownership of the analysis by the EU actors involved. Also in conflict and fragile situations, an iterative approach to Political Economy analysis can be important, as a first in-depth analysis may only uncover certain causes of conflict and a 'light touch' review can be useful. This may be especially relevant for countries which have remained more closed towards external actors. DEVCO's Fragility and Crisis Management unit can, together with the Quality of Delivery Systems unit, provide advice on how to conduct political economic analysis.

4.4 How does conflict analysis relate to other tools/approaches and guidance for analysis?

In addition, the EU uses also uses other analytical tools to understand the country and sector context such as governance assessments, human rights assessments, actor mapping, public policy, public financial management and macroeconomic framework analysis¹⁰ and political reporting to ensure monitoring of the EU's political objectives. Conflict analysis complements these methods and can draw on them primarily for information. Relevant EEAS and Commission Divisions can advise on the use of these respective tools.

Conflict analysis and the planning / review of CSDP actions can mutually inform and reinforce each other. Early coordination with CMPD is necessary, starting with the integrated strategic planning Unit. This will be essential when a CSDP mission or operation is envisaged as part of an EU crisis response.

¹⁰ A number of these assessment types can be found in the PPCM guidelines.

A system for early warning of conflict risk is currently under development. Once such a system becomes operational, the system may trigger conflict analysis and / or an in-depth political economy analysis for countries identified as having increased conflict risk.

4.5 How do we engage other stakeholders (national governments, EU Member States) in conflict analysis?

While in general, close cooperation with partners is encouraged, joint conflict analyses, in particular with collaboration of the partner country government(s), tend to be more politically correct and less critical. Joint analysis can lead to shared ownership and collaborative responses, but these advantages have to be weighed against possible drawbacks.

It is important to note that **asking actors in partner countries, in interviews or consultations, about conflict risks in their country can be highly sensitive and lead to misinterpretations**. In these circumstances, it may be advised to focus the discussions on transition, resilience or promotion of stability, rather than conflict risks.

In the context of the New Deal, fragile states committed themselves to conducting their own fragility assessments, in cooperation with international partners. The EU is committed to supporting these assessments, while this does not obviate the benefit for the EU to conduct its own conflict analysis.

4.6. Are there specific policy documents or guidelines on the above-mentioned issues? Whom should I contact if I need support?

There are official policy documents on many of the above-mentioned issues, including guidelines, Commission communications, Council conclusions, etc. An indicative, non-exhaustive list of these documents (with their references) can be found in Annex II. In other cases, there are useful reference documents from the United Nations or other international organisations (also included) or those generated by EU-funded initiatives.

Contacts:

- **EEAS:** Conflict Prevention, Peace-building and Mediation Instruments Division: K2@eeas.europa.eu
- **DEVCO:** Fragility and Crisis Management Unit: EuropeAid-07@ec.europa.eu

5. Linking Conflict Analysis to EU External Action

A conflict analysis should facilitate the development of **context specific options for an EU response at different levels** that target key conflict dynamics (conflict dynamics being the link between causes, context and actors). These options should be defined in light of an assessment of actions undertaken by other international actors. These options will generally relate to various fields of EU action, each with its own priorities and decision making processes.

Once the outcome of a conflict analysis has been agreed by the relevant EU services in charge of the country / countries concerned, and based on the findings and options suggested, the geographic departments, Delegation(s) and other relevant services **need to decide where and how the follow-up takes place**. It will depend on the results how follow-up action needs to be defined and formulated. It could simply be a list of recommended follow-up in the conflict analysis report that is

taken up by each relevant actor using established processes / procedures. It may be necessary to develop an options paper for senior management and/or for discussion with member states in PSC or FAC. The results of the conflict analysis could also be the basis (or trigger) for developing a Joint Framework Document. It is furthermore possible to follow-up by developing a specific options matrix or logical framework that addresses action across various domains of EU Action. Certain aspects of the follow-up may be delegated to the country level (Delegation but possible also CSDP mission/operation etc.) while others need headquarters involvement / decision making.

In general, when defining follow-up it is recommended to:

- **Be goal and objective driven, rather than instrument driven.** One way to achieve this is to define an overall goal for the EU response to address the conflict or conflict risk and prioritise the key issues on which the EU may have some positive impact. These key issues (problems) can be turned into the specific objectives of the EU response.
- **Identify complementary measures needed to reinforce / support key elements** of the chosen response (e.g. to complement an SSR programme with support to civil society performing a watchdog role of the security services). Typically, a response package to a situation of conflict will require action across the domains of diplomacy, development/external assistance and Security & Defence, and can draw on a variety of the instruments and tools at the disposal of the EU.
- **Consider from the start the different time dimensions needed** to achieve the desired result(s), from immediate short term actions to initiatives that address medium to longer term needs.

An illustrative example of a response package is given in Annex I in the form of a simple planning matrix that connects specific objectives with the different types of EU action, that are needed to achieve them.

Annex I: Illustrative Planning Matrix with examples of linking conflict analysis to comprehensive EU External Action

Key conflict dynamics emerging from conflict analysis and corresponding strategic goal for EU Action	Domains of EU External Action		
	Political Dialogue / Diplomacy	External assistance	CSDP Action
Issue: One geographic and ethnic grouping has privileged access to education – undermining structural stability and being a source of grievance and conflict	EU HoD addresses very sensitive political blockages to education reform informally with Head of State	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education is proposed and agreed as focal sector; Geographic distribution of access to education forms part of EU policy dialogue with Ministry of Education EU programming with Ministry of Education seeks to promote more equitable access to education 	[Not applicable]
Objective: Structural stability is promoted by supporting equal access to education			
Issue: Citizen's do not feel safe and are directly targeted by the security sector (police/army/judiciary) which is a proximate cause of conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EU HoD enquires about windows of opportunity to engage in security sector reform with Ministers of Justice and Interior [and Defence in case of a military CSDP engagement]; Outputs of complementary but sensitive civil society measures to EU supported justice and security sector reform are regularly discussed with both ministries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Within the Governance focal sector, citizen access to justice is noted as priority area; EU support to civil society to promote access to justice and security services is programmed as part of wider justice reform and complements SSR mission. 	Options for a CSDP mission with SSR mandate are developed for consideration by PSC, with subsequent follow-up as decided
Issue: Political mobilisation is undertaken on very polarised identity grounds – has led to difficulties and violence in the past transfers of power – elections have been a trigger of conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EU HoD with other EU HoMs have robust private dialogue with President and Heads of Political Parties on political polarisation and incitement to violence Dialogue with National Election Commission and police, media about what capacity/incentives they need to acquire to prevent rumour and acts of organised or random violence; Accurate reporting of political issues before, after and during elections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governance focal area has strong conflict prevention focus going beyond elections to entire electoral cycle 2 years before national elections; Programming supports community reconciliation, mediation Policy dialogue by HoO follows up on technical aspects of political dialogue with election commission etc. 	[if so decided and/or at request of the UN a CSDP military mission could be fielded to support (confidence in) security around the actual elections]
Objective: The recurrence of electoral violence is prevented after the next election in 2 year's time			

Annex II: Key Policy commitments (to conflict sensitivity and comprehensive EU response to conflict and conflict risk)

Treaty on European Union (TEU) (in particular Article 21)

Communication from the Commission on [Increasing the Impact of EU Development Policy: an Agenda for Change](#), 2011

[Council Conclusions on Conflict Prevention of June 2011](#)

[Council Conclusions on ESDP, part II Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management Capabilities and Thematic Issues, 2009](#)

[Council Conclusions on an EU Response to Situations of Fragility, 2007](#)

[Council Conclusions on Security and Development, 2007](#)

Council Conclusions on a Policy framework for Security Sector Reform, 2006

[Communication from the Commission on Conflict Prevention](#) of 2001

[Communication from the Commission on Towards an EU Response to Situations of Fragility, 2007](#)

Article 11 - Peace building policies, conflict prevention and resolution, response to situations of fragility of the [Cotonou Partnership Agreement](#) 2010 Revision

[European Consensus on Development](#) (sections on conflict prevention and fragile states) of 2005

EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts by Gothenburg European Council, 2001

Key additional reference documents

World Bank, [World Development Report, Conflict Security and Development](#), 2011

[New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States](#), 2011

[Thematic Evaluation of European Commission Support to Conflict Prevention and Peace Building 2001 – 2010](#), 2011