UNESCO and Peaceful Coexistence: *Building peace in the minds of men and women*

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PART I: Why UNESCO and how it is organized

UNESCO's Origins

UNESCO **Constitution** was adopted on 16 November 1945:

❑ "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in **the minds of men** that the defences of peace must be constructed"

❑ "**Ignorance** of each other's ways and lives has been a common cause of war throughout the history of mankind"

❑ "Peace based exclusively upon **the political and economic arrangements of governments"** could not be sustainable

❑ "Lasting peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon **the intellectual and moral solidarity** of mankind"

❑ UNESCO was "created to advance the objectives of international peace" through **education, sciences, culture and communication**

16 November 1945

UNESCO is **a successor** to the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, created under the League of Nations (1922)

UNESCO's Structure and Budget

General Conference

- **194** Member States

- **12** Associate Members

- (Meets every 2 years)

Executive Board

- **58** Member States

- (Meets twice a year)

Secretariat

- **Over 2,200** staff members from 158 countries in HQs

- **53** Field Offices

- **10** Specialized Institutes (such as IBE in Geneva)

Total revenue in 2024
US$ 916.7 million (38% AC; 51% VC; 11% OR)

Director-General: Audrey Azoulay
Director General-nominated : Khaled El-Enany (Egypt)

- **UNESCO has 5 Programme Sectors**: Education, Natural Science, Social and Human Sciences, Culture, Communication and Information

- And **2 Global Priorities**: Africa and Gender Equality

UNESCO is a universal platform for peace building

UNESCO's Functions at Global, Regional, National Level

Serving as a laboratory of ideas and knowledge-sharing, generating innovative proposals and policy advice

Developing and reinforcing the global agenda through policy analysis and benchmarking

Setting norms and standards, supporting and monitoring their implementation

Strengthening international and regional cooperation, intellectual cooperation, and operational partnerships

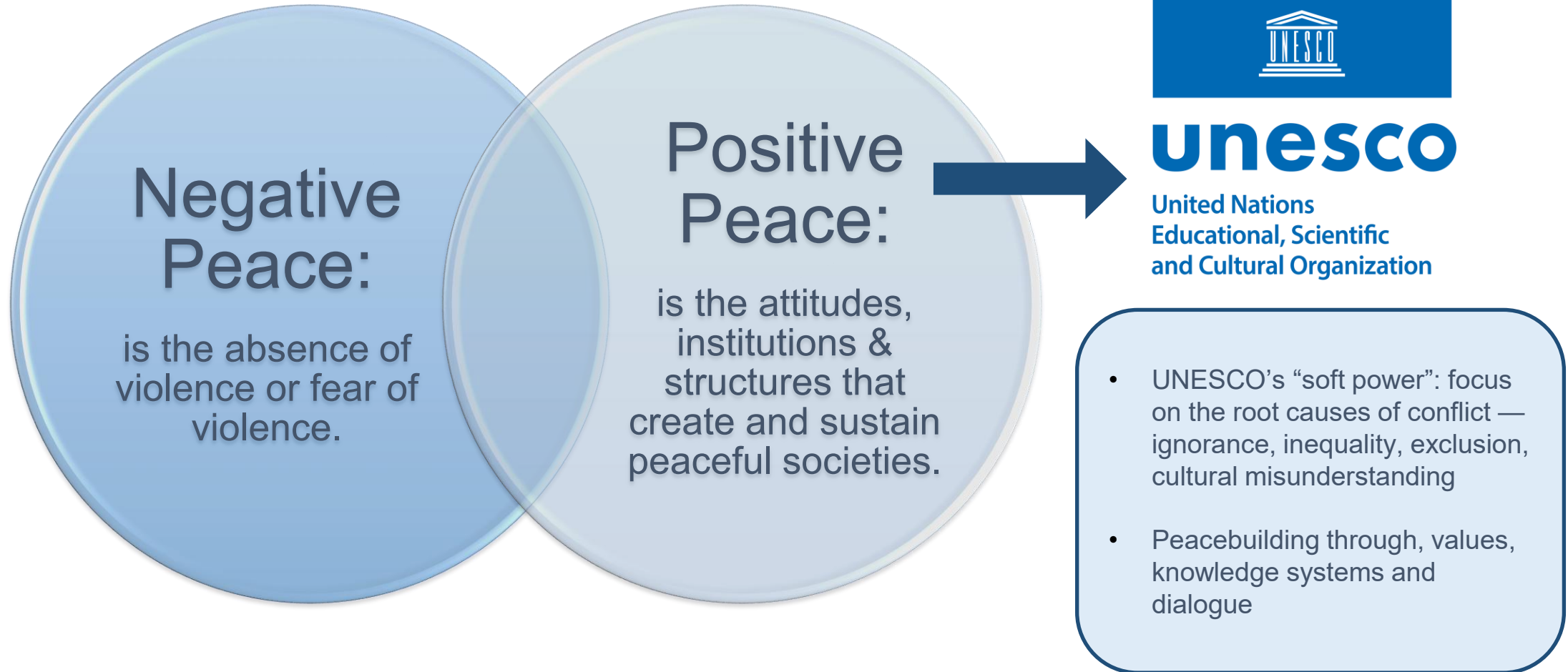Providing technical advice for developing institutional and human capacities

PART II: How UNESCO Promotes Peace and Peaceful Co-existence

The Conceptional Basis: Johan Galtung's "Peace" Theory

Negative Peace:

is the absence of violence or fear of violence.

Positive Peace:

is the attitudes, institutions & structures that create and sustain peaceful societies.

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Educational, Scientific
and Cultural Organization

- UNESCO's "soft power": focus on the root causes of conflict — ignorance, inequality, exclusion, cultural misunderstanding

- Peacebuilding through, values, knowledge systems and dialogue

Conceptual Approach:
The "Defences of Peace" model through "soft power"

Structural Peace:

Addressing the *systemic* and *material* root causes of conflict.

What it fixes: Inequality, lack of access to education, resource scarcity, political exclusion.

UNESCO's role: e.g., ensuring education for all, promoting scientific cooperation for shared water resources; building cultural institutions, etc.

Cultural/Moral Peace:

Addressing the *ideational* and *symbolic* root causes of conflict.

What it fixes: Prejudice, historical grievances, dehumanization of "the other," loss of identity.

UNESCO's role: e.g., revising biased history textbooks, safeguarding intangible cultural heritage; promoting intercultural dialogue, etc.

Key Programmatic Areas Contributing to Peaceful Coexistence

Education

The Problem it addresses : Ignorance, indoctrination, and a lack of critical thinking

The goal: Not just "literate" populations, but "thinking" populations

Key Mechanisms:

- **Flagship programmes:** Global Citizenship Education (GCED) or Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

- **The role of UNESCO Associated Schools Network**: over 12,000 schools promoting human rights, tolerance, and intercultural dialogue

- **The UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace**, which works on socio-emotional learning and AI-based peace education

- **UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development** (2023)

Case Study: UNESCO in South Sudan – Education for Peace and Resilience

Context: Since independence in 2011, South Sudan has faced recurring conflict and mass displacement. Millions of children and youth have been deprived of education.

The immediate need: To restore access to learning in conflict-affected areas, UNESCO partnered with stakeholders to re-establish safe schooling and teacher training.

The Peacebuilding Aspect:

- **Prevents a "Lost Generation"**: UNESCO helped reopen schools in IDP camps and border areas, reaching thousands of children with basic education and skills training.

- **Curriculum as a "Tool for Unity"**: UNESCO supported the development of a national curriculum that integrates peace education, citizenship, and conflict resolution skills.

- **Building human capital**: UNESCO teacher training programmes trained hundreds of educators in psychosocial support, inclusion, and peace pedagogy.

Culture and Intercultural Dialogue

The problem it addresses: Cultural destruction, identity-based conflict, and historical animosity.

The goal: Use culture and heritage as a platform for dialogue and mutual understanding.

Key Mechanisms:

- **World Heritage:** UNESCO's World Heritage Convention (1972) as a platform for cultural understanding.

- **Intangible Cultural Heritage:** Safeguarding traditions, rituals, and knowledge.

- **Cultural Diversity:** The Convention on the Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) and International Decade for approchement of Cultures (2013–2022).

- **UN Security Council Resolutions on Culture:** 2019 (2015) and 2347 (2017)

Case Study: Rebuilding Mosul — Culture as a foundation for peace

Context: Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, suffered devastating destruction during the conflict with ISIS (2014–2017), including the loss of major cultural landmarks and historic buildings.

How it builds "Peace":

- **Shared responsibility:** In 2018, UNESCO launched the flagship initiative "Revive the Spirit of Mosul" to restore Mosul's cultural heritage and revive its human and educational life.

- **Deterrent to destruction**: This made cultural preservation a global concern, stressing that cultural destruction is not only a local tragedy but an attack on humanity's shared heritage.

- **Platform for dialogue**: The reconstruction of the Al-Nouri Mosque, Al-Tahera Church, and Al-Saa'a Church involves Christian and Muslim communities working side by side.

- **Impact for peace:** These joint restoration projects foster reconciliation, civic pride, and social cohesion among Mosul's diverse residents.

Science for Peace

The problem it addresses : Resource scarcity that impacts on scientific capacities and environmental degradation as drivers of conflict.

The goal: Use "Science" as a neutral ground for building trust and solving common problems.

Key Mechanisms:

- **Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme (IHP):** Helps countries cooperatively manage shared water resources (aquifers, rivers).

- **Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme:** Creates "Biosphere Reserves" where conservation and development go hand-in-hand, often across borders.

- **UNESCO's Open Science Recommendation** (2023) aims to make scientific research accessible to everyone for the benefit of scientists and society

Case Study: Science Diplomacy in the Lake Chad Basin – water cooperation for peace

Context: The Lake Chad Basin in Africa lost over 90% of its surface area since the 1960s due to climate change, unsustainable water use, and desertification, deepening poverty and migration.

The immediate need: To address intertwined environmental and social crises, UNESCO mobilized its IHP to strengthen scientific collaboration and data-sharing.

The Peacebuilding Aspects:

▪ UNESCO helped establish **a shared scientific platform** for monitoring water levels and climate variability. This reduced mistrust among and enabled collective decision-making.

▪ Through training, national environmental officers were equipped with tools to assess water stress and manage competing demands — **transforming science into dialogue**.

▪ UNESCO-supported initiatives promoted sustainable irrigation, women's access to water, and ecosystem restoration, resulting in **reduced tensions and improved cooperation**.

Social Sciences and Human Understanding

UNESCO

The Problem It Addresses : Social fragmentation, inequality, exclusion, and the lack of dialogue between communities that can lead to mistrust and violence.

The Goal: Use research, dialogue, and inclusive social policies to strengthen cohesion, equality, and mutual understanding within and among societies.

Key Mechanisms:

- **MOST Programme:** Bridges research and public policy to address social challenges: youth inclusion, migration, and gender equality

- **Ethics of Science and Technology Programmes**: Promotes human rights–based approaches to AI, bioethics, and scientific progress

- **International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures** (2013–2022): promoted intercultural dialogue through research and education

Case Study: UNESCO in the Western Balkans – Youth as Agents of Peace and Reconciliation

Context: Decades after the conflicts of the 1990s, societies in the Western Balkans continue to face deep social divisions, mistrust, and competing historical narratives. Youth, who did not experience the war directly, often inherit prejudice and polarized views through media, education, and family narratives.

The immediate need: Sustainable peace requires addressing intergenerational divides through social dialogue, civic education, and youth participation. among young people.

The Peacebuilding Aspect:

- UNESCO launched initiatives fostering **intercultural understanding, critical thinking, and community engagement.**

- Through the "Youth as Researchers – Western Balkans" initiative, UNESCO trained young people to **investigate issues like discrimination, hate speech, and identity**.

- Community projects brought together youth from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds to co-design **local actions promoting inclusion and shared values**.

Communication and Information

The Problem it addresses: Misinformation, hate speech, and media manipulation that fuel conflict.

The Goal: Foster free, independent, and pluralistic media environments.

Key Mechanisms:

- **Promoting Media and Information Literacy**: Teaching people to critically assess information.

- **Safety of Journalists**: Protecting those who speak truth to power.

- **Internet Universality**: Advocating for an internet based on Human Rights, Openness, Accessibility, and Multi-stakeholder participation (R.O.A.M.).

- **New Battlefield**: Algorithms and Polarization: AI algorithms can create "echo chambers" and spread disinformation at scale.

UNESCO's Response: The Recommendation on the Ethics of AI (2021) and the Guidelines for Regulating Digital Platforms (2023) to counter hate speech and disinformation.

Case Study: Action against hate speech in the Sahel – building Media and youth Resilience

Context: Across the Sahel region, hate speech and misinformation intensified communal tensions and violence, particularly through social media. Ethnic and religious stereotypes have been exploited.

The immediate need: UNESCO identified that addressing hate speech requires more than censorship; it demands strengthening media ethics, youth resilience, and digital literacy.

The Peacebuilding aspects:

- UNESCO **trained hundreds of journalists and community radio professionals** to counter hate narratives, promoting conflict-sensitive and inclusive reporting.

- Through "*Social Media 4 Peace*", UNESCO **supported young influencers** to use online platforms to promote tolerance, empathy, and fact-based communication.

- UNESCO worked with governments and regional bodies to **integrate anti-hate speech measures** into national communication policies and education curricula.

UNESCO Flagship Initiatives Promoting Peaceful Coexistence

- **Education for Peace Flagship Programme.** This new flagship programme reflects a comprehensive UNESCO strategy to transform education systems, enabling education to become a beacon for peacebuilding, human rights awareness, intercultural understanding, and sustainable development worldwide.

- **Campus Africa (Priority Africa Flagship)** – building peace through higher education transformation, including through UNESCO Chairs.

- **Gender Equality Global Priority** – reducing inequalities through UNESCO's mandate areas to empower women.

- **Youth and Peacebuilding programmes** (e.g., Youth Forum, #Unite4Heritage).
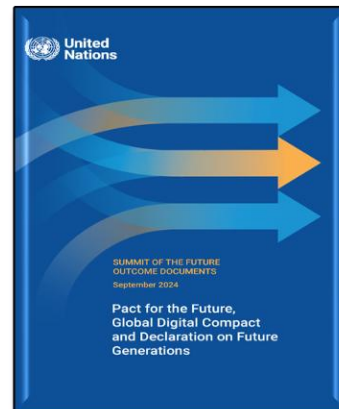
Part III Fostering a Culture of Peace

UNESCO's cooperation with the UN System to promote Peace

UNESCO Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace (1999)

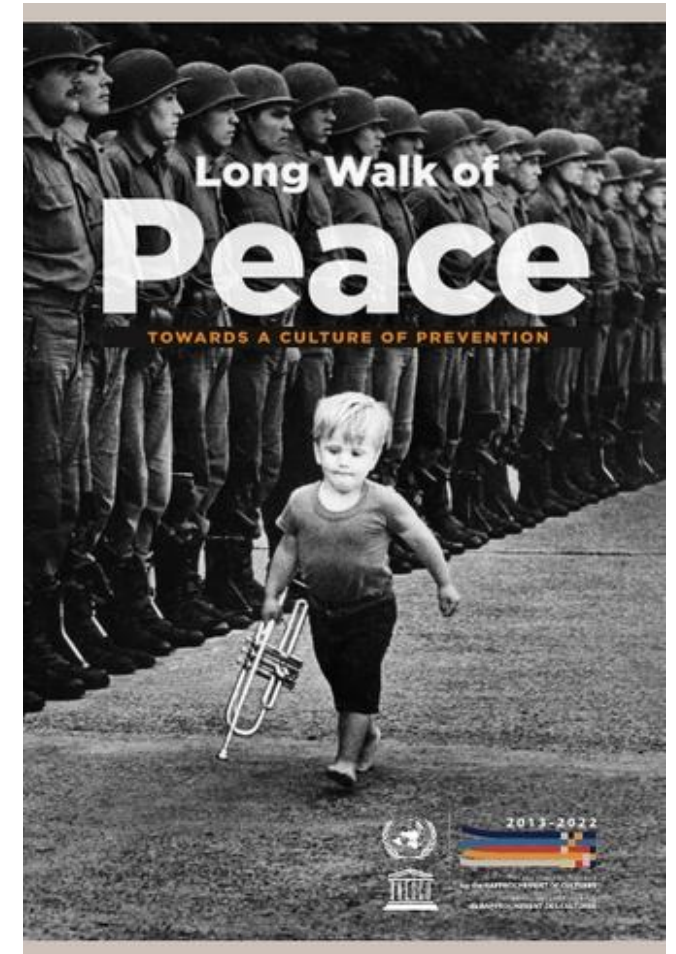UNESCO's contribution to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions)

UNESCO's role under the "Pact for the Future" by promoting culture as a driver of social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, global citizenship and international cooperation

Case Study: "Long Walk of Peace: Towards a Culture of Prevention"

❑ A comprehensive book published in 2018 by UNESCO which emphasizes the importance of a culture of peace and prevention in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

❑ It contains an analysis of the work of 34 UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes in sustaining peace.

Key Themes from "Long Walk of Peace"

Promoting Education for Peace

Empowering Youth and Women

Cultural Approaches to Peace
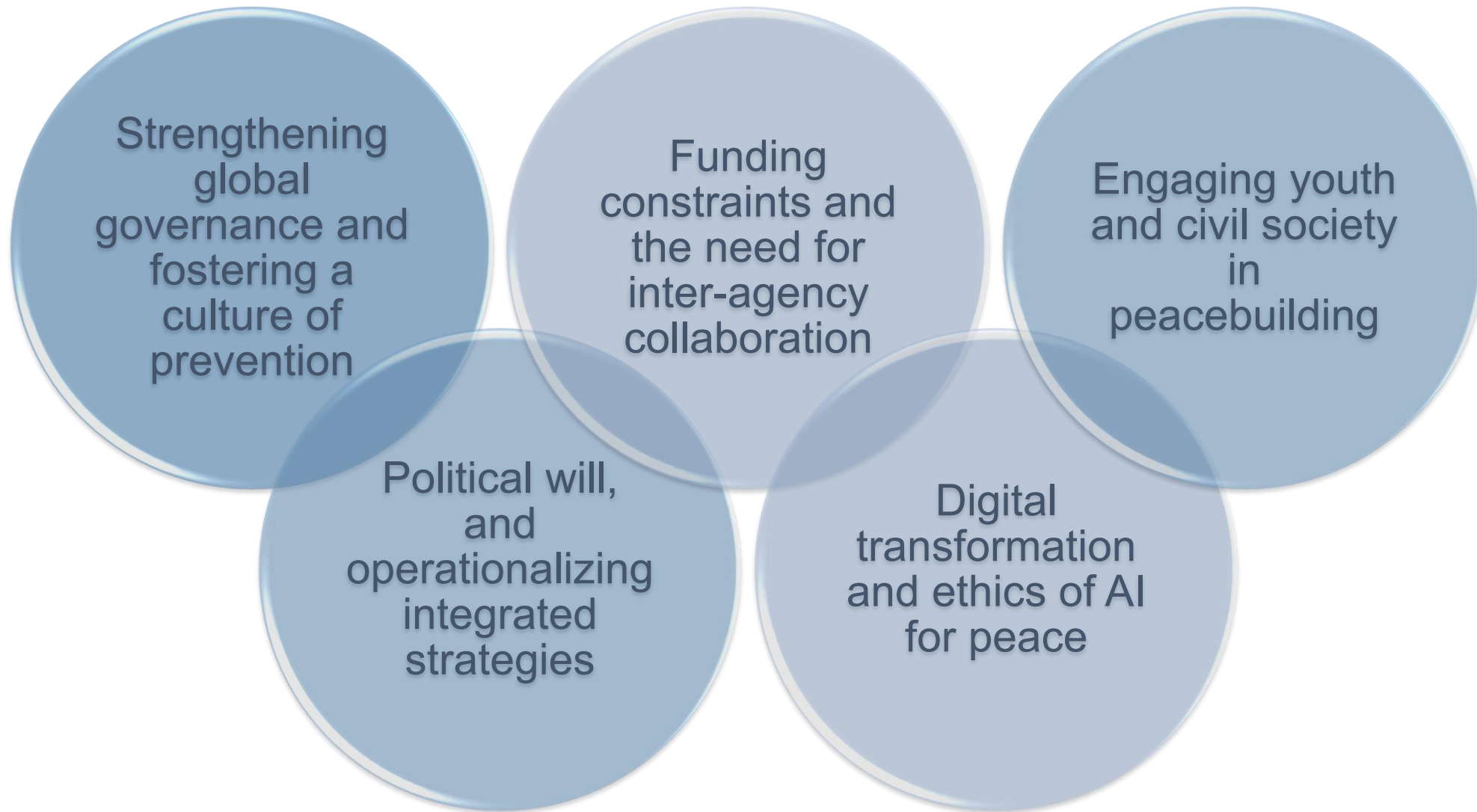

Building Inclusive Societies

Collaboration Across Sectors

Impact and Significance

- **Complementing UN efforts:** Demonstrates a culture of peace aligns with UN's broader strategies of peacekeeping, peacemaking, peacebuilding, and sustaining peace.

- **Long-Term Vision**: Presents peace not just as the absence of war, but as a continuous process that involves education, social justice, dialogue, and human rights.

- **Linkage to the "New Agenda for Peace":** Cals for investing in peace prevention and peacebuilding to address the root causes of conflict, build social cohesion, and integrate marginalized youth, thereby strengthening inclusive and resilient societies as a foundation for lasting peace.

Challenges and the way forward

Strengthening global governance and fostering a culture of prevention

Funding constraints and the need for inter-agency collaboration

Engaging youth and civil society in peacebuilding

Political will, and operationalizing integrated strategies

Digital transformation and ethics of AI for peace

Thank you!