



Conference on the Socio-economic Ramifications of Conflict: A Life Cycle Approach Recent Research and Implications for the Arab Region

Location and date

West Hall Auditorium A, American University of Beirut, Lebanon
16 September 2016, h 09:00 - 18:00

Background and objectives

Virtually all aspects of sustainable development are disturbed by conflict and violence. Cross-national, quantitative research suggests that the violence that arises from armed conflict and civil unrest affects livelihoods, damages physical and human capital and reduces the prospects of economic growth in the short- and long-term. Conflict is also correlated to worsening social indicators, an increase in poverty and a generalized environmental deterioration.

Even beyond what the aggregate, nationwide figures suggest, conflict has a devastating impact on individuals, families, communities, and society. Violence affects all sources of income, interrupts food and water security, puts a strain on the provision of basic social services, forces people into displacement, raises health concerns and disrupts skills formation. As such, it has a differentiated impact along the stages of life, from early childhood and the formative period, through youth and economically active life and into mature adulthood. Furthermore, these lifelong detrimental consequences are likely difficult to remediate and carried from one generation to the next through a variety of channels.

Therefore, a life cycle approach could provide a comprehensive picture of the extent to which conflict affects the population and the main mechanisms at play. In the past decade, the quantitative study of civil conflict has shifted from macro-level, cross-national, or cross-conflict

methodologies to a greater use of micro-level approaches that look at individuals, households, and groups. Recent research has taken advantage of the rich information provided by household-level surveys, carried out in countries that are in conflict or that have recently emerged out of it, to shed light on the specific impacts of violence on the different periods of life. The objective of this conference is to present some of the most recent literature on these topics, unifying it into a life-cycle narrative.

The Arab region is one of the most affected by conflict in the world. Half of its countries have directly experienced at least one episode of armed conflict since 2011. Other countries have experienced an indirect impact or are at risk of falling into violence themselves. Conflicts are increasingly becoming protracted, recurrent, more intense and contagious. In addition to the loss of life, conflicts have led to massive displacement and catastrophic consequences for the socioeconomic development and the living conditions of the affected communities. Understanding the main channels through which conflict harms the different population groups could help in identifying fragile situations and designing policies that better protect them, that attend to their most urgent needs and that target the most pressing issues in the immediate post-conflict phase. These topics will also be covered in the conference.

Organizers

Division of Emerging and Conflict Related Issues of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN ESCWA) and the Department of Economics of the American University of Beirut (AUB). This conference also benefits from the financial support of the Institute of Financial Economics of AUB.

Contact

For additional information, please contact Fernando Cantu (cantu@un.org) and Valentina Calderon (calderonmejia@un.org) from UN ESCWA and Pierre Mouganie (pm10@aub.edu.lb) from AUB.

Structure of the conference

08:30 – 09:00 Registration

09:00 - 09:15 Welcoming remarks and introduction

Tarik Alami, Director, Division on Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues, UN ESCWA

Simon Neaime, Director, Institute of Financial Economics, AUB

09:15 - 10:00 Session 1: The life cycle approach

An initial panel will present the importance of studying the consequences of conflict from a life cycle perspective, using individual- and household-level data. Instead of focusing on disconnected impacts or considering different groups of the population separately, this is a comprehensive approach that considers how even a discrete event can have lifelong consequences. Central to this approach is skill formation and the potential impact that nutrition, education, housing conditions and displacement shocks caused by conflict could have in future productivity and labor market prospects. It also considers long-term impacts and how the effects of these shocks can be transmitted across generations.

Sergio Urzúa, Associate Professor, University of Maryland

10:00 - 11:00 Session 2: Health, nutrition and food security

Civil conflicts affect all the major contributors to health: exposure to disease, availability of medical care, public health interventions, and overall socioeconomic conditions. In addition, they also affect nutrition and food security because they disrupt food markets, leading to supply cuts, lower product quality and inflation. Even if this impacts whole communities and affects all family members, these effects may be particularly troublesome during early childhood since deficient health and nutrition at early ages has been linked to impairments in cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical development. This has devastating and irreversible lifelong consequences because it impacts all other aspects of the life cycle, from educational attainment to productive employment.

With civil strife increasing in the Arab region, a growing number of children are becoming vulnerable to a lifetime of disadvantage and poverty. This session will focus on the impact of conflict on health and food security at the household level, and the implications for the Arab countries directly or indirectly affected by violence and conflict.

Marinella Leone, Research Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex

Jean-François Maystadt, Senior Lecturer, Department of Economics, Lancaster University

Discussant: **Fernando Cantú**, Economic Affairs Officer, Division on Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues, UN ESCWA

11:00 - 11:30 Coffee break

11:30 - 12:30 Session 3: Education, employment and the risks of radicalization

This session will cover three interlinked subjects. First, universal and good quality education as the foundation for sustainable development. Education is often disrupted as a consequence of conflict, with entire cohorts likely remaining out of school or receiving only intermittent, poor quality education, leading to poorer skills and grim prospects for their future. In addition, not only those children directly touched by conflict suffer from its detrimental impact: the disproportionately large shares of children and young adults among the displaced populations could, in fact, crowd local children in host communities out of schools.

Second, unemployment has been found to be both a trigger and a ramification of conflict. Having an effective labor market that provides dignified jobs to all segments of the population is fundamental to reducing the likelihood of conflict. But as conflicts intensify, economic growth falls, resources are reallocated and frequently diverted from employment-creating activities (at least in the formal markets), and job security falls. Furthermore, an important share of the labor force may be forced to migrate. This could result in long-term unemployment or underemployment, leading to reduced household income, loss of human capital and a difficult re-insertion in the labor markets once the violence subsides.

In addition to the importance of education and quality jobs for family livelihoods and nationwide economic development, unemployment and poor labor market prospects for the youth could be linked to radicalization and incentives to rebel. Proximity to violence could lead to radicalization, fuelling more violence, threatening peace once the conflict comes to a standstill and leading to a generalized conflict trap. Despite over a decade of intensive research, there remains no consensus in the social science literature about the origins of and pathways to radicalization and violent extremism, indicating the utility of bringing new and better data to this research program.

These issues are of acute concern for the Arab region. Not only is unemployment high, particularly among the youth, but the region's education system is also lagging behind in producing skills that match labor market demands, relative to other parts of the world. Although evidence remains inconclusive, these factors have been linked to civil discontent, escalating violence and radicalization. Consequently, this stands as an important challenge currently facing the region.

Philip Verwimp, Associate Professor, Solvay Brussels School of Economics and Management, Université Libre de Bruxelles

Valentina Calderón, Economic Affairs Officer, Division on Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues, UN ESCWA

Discussant: **Neil Ferguson**, Research Affiliate, International Security and Development Center, and Senior Researcher, BIGS Postdam

12:30 – 13:30 Lunch

13:30 - 14:30 Session 4: Poverty, living conditions and coping mechanisms

As with most other areas of socioeconomic development, poverty and inequality have a two-way relationship with conflict. The Arab region was making a relatively good progress towards the goal of eradicating poverty, but recent episodes of conflict have undoubtedly reversed some of these gains. At the extreme, war has set back development and living conditions of the population for decades. This session will study the channels through which violence affects poverty and living conditions: loss of sources of income, reduced transfers and insufficient coping mechanisms, crumbling social safety net, forced migration, resource degradation, and others.

Tilman Brück, Director, International Security and Development Center, and Visiting Professor, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)

Jad Chaaban, Associate Professor, Department of Agriculture, AUB

Discussant: **Khalid Abu-Ismaïl**, Chief, Economic Development and Poverty Section, UN ESCWA

14:30 - 16:00 Session 5: Monitoring conflict and its impacts

An important challenge for the research on conflict and its consequences is the availability of opportune and reliable data. Recent efforts, such as the collection of survey data in conflict contexts, the availability of real-time event databases, the increased availability of perception surveys on a multitude of topics, or the exploitation of existing technology for innovative data collection, have greatly contributed to fill this data gap. In addition, the development of databases with detailed geographical information has allowed the study of the dynamics of conflict and its impacts at the local level. However, most of these innovative data sources have yet to be fully expanded to the Arab countries in conflict, so they become important priorities to gather information about the population affected by conflict in this region.

Clionadh Raleigh, Professor of Political Geography and International Studies Coordinator for the School of Global Studies University of Sussex

Tilman Brück, Director, International Security and Development Center, and Visiting Professor, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)

Rabie Nasser, Researcher and Co-founder, Syria Center for Policy Research

Ghassan Baliki, Research Affiliate, International Security and Development Center

16:00 - 16:30 Coffee break

16:30 - 18:00 Session 6: Policy roundtable

The last session of the conference will translate the conclusions from the research presented in the conference into policy implications for affected countries and the international community working therein. This could help to identify the population groups that are most affected by the violence. It could also include policy options to protect the most vulnerable segments of the population and attend to their most urgent needs. It could also be integrated into a comprehensive damage and needs assessment that could be used to target the most pressing issues in the immediate post-conflict phase. Finally, it could propose innovative data collection solutions to obtain the information most required to study the affected population and the impact they have suffered as a consequence of conflict.

Samuel Rizk, Country Director for Syria, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Frank Hagemann, Deputy Regional Director, Regional Office for Arab States of the International Labor Organization (ILO)

Haneen El Sayed, Project Leader and Human Development Coordinator for Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, World Bank

Nader Kabbani, Director of Research and Policy, Silatech

Chairperson: **Nasser Yassin**, Director of Research and Assistant Professor, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, AUB