



Conference report

---

The Micro-Level Analysis  
of Poly-Crises  
*(20th Annual Households in Conflict  
Network (HiCN) Workshop)*  
Berlin, 1. – 2. October 2024

Prof. Dr. Tilman Brück (lead)  
Prof. Dr. Patricia Justino  
Prof. Dr. Philip Verwimp

---

06/24-FB2-TG

# Tagungsbericht / Conference Report

## 20th Annual Households in Conflict Network (HiCN)

### Workshop: The Micro-Level Analysis of Poly-Crises (1-2 October 2024, Berlin)

4 February 2025

## 1 - Goals and Results

### 1.1 - Event Goals

The 20th Annual Households in Conflict Network (HiCN) Workshop took place on 1-2 October 2024 at Humboldt University of Berlin's main building (Unter den Linden 6) in Berlin-Mitte. Organised by ISDC - International Security and Development Center under the leadership of HiCN Co-Director Prof. Tilman Brück in cooperation with the HiCN Co-Directors Prof. Patricia Justino and Prof. Philip Verwimp, the event brought together international experts on the micro-level analysis of violent conflict and peace, with a special focus on the micro-level analysis of the form and impacts of poly-crises. This topic bridges the fields of peace, conflict and development research, areas that have been studied separately, yet whose intersection remains largely unexplored at the micro-level.

The overarching goals of the 20th HiCN Annual Workshop were:

1. To review the state of the art and accomplishments over the last twenty years in the field of the empirical micro-level analysis of peace and violent conflict;
2. To present quantitative micro-level analyses in the field of peace and conflict studies;
3. To assess developments in how to collect and analyze data to generate rigorous study designs;
4. To exchange lessons on how to infer causal mechanisms between interventions and outcomes in conflict-affected settings to strengthen policies and programs; and
5. To connect researchers from different disciplines, regions of the world, and levels of seniority.

### 1.2 - Target Audience and Resonance

The core target audience for the 20th HiCN Annual Workshop was, as in previous years, researchers studying the micro-level impacts of violent conflict. The tradition of hosting

interdisciplinary contributions — including peace and conflict studies as well as development economics and political science and related disciplines — is a mainstay of HiCN, as is the tradition to invite and host both more junior (typically PhD students) and more senior researchers.

Beyond the academic attendees, ISDC utilised its network to invite participants from UN agencies, government ministries, NGOs, and development institutions. The goal was to foster exchange among experts and ensure that the academic advancements informed practical applications, with policymakers and practitioners offering useful feedback, creating reciprocal discourse between various actors in the peace research sphere, as well as researchers learning about ‘the real world’ and finding new opportunities to study peace and conflict at the micro-level. Berlin, being a hub for many such actors, was an attractive location for this event.

More information about how we achieved this inter-sectoral collaboration can be found in the section entitled ‘1.4 - Overall Results of the Event.’

### 1.3 - Summary of Contributions

Given the important role at the heart of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, the [call for papers](#) prioritised themes encompassing this so-called ‘triple nexus’ in crisis contexts. Specifically, we sought to investigate how poly-crises shape and are shaped by key areas such as agriculture and food security; private sector and employment; preferences and behavior; and climate shocks and violent conflict.

After the HiCN Co-Directors and ISDC research staff reviewed all the submissions, we organised nine thematic workshop sessions, curated by the HiCN Co-Directors and ISDC research staff, to facilitate pertinent discussions in nine thematic sessions, which are summarised in the sub-sections below.

A full list of workshop sessions (as well as the presenting authors and abstracts of each paper) can be found on the [program of the conference](#). The relevant workshop sessions for this report are labeled ‘HiCN’.

#### 1. *Conflict and Gender*

This session focused on the critical intersections between gender norms, conflict dynamics, and empowerment in post-conflict and fragile settings, with a regional focus on Kosovo and Likouala, a remote area in the northern Republic of Congo.

The papers employed rigorous methodologies to explore diverse research areas including political participation in post-conflict reconstruction, societal practices influencing conflict dynamics, and the role of social protection in women’s empowerment.

Key findings included evidence that wartime violence, including sexual violence, increases political participation but with significant gendered nuances. Societal practices like polygyny were shown to heighten conflict risks by undermining social cohesion. Safety net programs in fragile settings

demonstrated potential to reduce spousal disputes and intimate partner violence, though their impact varied by intervention design and local contexts.

These insights highlight the importance of gender-sensitive strategies in fostering resilience, equity, and stability in vulnerable regions.

## *2. Economic Impacts of Conflict I*

This session explored the multifaceted impact of conflict on economic and social outcomes, focusing on firm dynamics in Turkey (2006-2021), intra-household resource allocation in Nigeria, and development trajectories after civilian victimization in Peru.

Research highlighted several dimensions of the aftermath of conflict. In Turkey, conflict exposure led to reduced sales and customer numbers for affected firms. In Nigeria, conflict reshaped household resource allocation, with responses varying by the type of conflict experienced. In Peru, patterns of civilian victimization were shown to influence local development, with communities targeted collectively during conflict experiencing faster post-conflict development due to sustained mobilization capacities.

Key findings underscore how exposure to conflict can reshape household sharing dynamics and decrease the influx of customers from areas unaffected by conflict. Additionally, conflict influences development trajectories depending on victimization patterns, underscoring the critical role of mobilization in promoting resilience and recovery.

## *3. Economic Impacts of Conflict II*

This session focused on the complex relationship between economic policies, conflict dynamics, and societal stability across different regional and thematic contexts.

The presented studies addressed issues including how oil price fluctuations and armed conflicts impact macroeconomics, the economic consequences of political restrictions, and the interplay between education investment and military expenditures in fostering social peace.

Key findings revealed that declining oil prices, particularly when combined with armed conflicts, lead to a decrease in real GDP, driven by increased military expenditure, reduced net exports, and diminished oil rents. Additionally, the papers highlighted the severe economic impacts of political restrictions, which can cause significant declines in consumption expenditure and other economic dimensions. Regarding the relationship between education and military expenditures, one study employed an instrumental variable (IV) approach using a global panel dataset spanning 85 countries (1990–2020). This rigorous methodology demonstrated that education investment can serve as an effective economic policy instrument to promote health, living standards, institutional quality, and reduced violence, revealing a strong positive relationship between education spending and social peace.

## *4. Migration and Security*

This session explored the complex interconnections between migration, perceptions of security, and resilience in fragile economies and conflict-affected regions, focusing on Kyrgyzstan, Mali, and Nigeria. The studies focused on examining the economic, social, and environmental drivers of migration and security.

Key findings showed that remittances improve security perceptions and reduce violence in Kyrgyzstan, particularly for wealthier households and small-town residents. In Mali, conflict and road insecurity increase migration costs, but households adapt by seeking alternative destinations, though droughts limit new seasonal migrations. In Nigeria, weather shocks drive household mobility by reducing agricultural production, worsening living conditions, and escalating conflict risks.

These insights underscore the critical role of migration as a coping strategy in fragile and conflict-prone regions while highlighting the need for policies that address the intersection of economic, security, and environmental challenges to enhance resilience and stability.

### *5. Agriculture and Conflict*

This session examined the interplay between conflict, social assistance, agriculture, and environmental challenges in fragile and conflict-affected settings, focusing on regions like rural Amhara in Ethiopia, colonial Mozambique, Burkina Faso, and post-war Kosovo.

Key findings revealed that during the Tigray crisis, social assistance programs like Ethiopia's PSNP and humanitarian aid mitigated some adverse impacts of conflict on food security and poverty, highlighting the importance of complementary support mechanisms. In colonial Mozambique, coercive cotton cultivation had long-lasting effects on risk aversion and agricultural behaviors, disproportionately affecting women. In Burkina Faso, violent conflict significantly reduced productivity on female-owned agricultural plots, underlining the need for gender-sensitive agricultural policies. Finally, in Kosovo, wartime bombings and inadequate waste management were linked to increased infant mortality near landfills, while the conflict eroded local trust, compounding recovery challenges.

These findings underscore the multifaceted impacts of conflict and the importance of integrating social assistance, gender, agriculture, and environmental strategies in conflict recovery efforts.

### *6. War, Transition and Peace*

This session examined diverse aspects of conflict dynamics, focusing on the strategic use of violence, media interventions, and attitudes toward transitional justice in post-conflict contexts.

Key findings revealed that Russia's attacks on healthcare in Ukraine are driven by retaliatory motives following battlefield losses, targeting both civilian and military health infrastructure far from the frontlines, exacerbating public health risks. In Mali and Niger, community radio broadcasts promoting peace were linked to reduced violence and improved outcomes. Meanwhile,

in a study of Syrian refugees in Turkey, war exposure was found to influence transitional justice preferences, with more extensive violence increasing support for retribution, while in-group bias diminished when individuals attributed violence to in-group perpetrators.

These insights underscore the complex roles of violence, media, and justice in shaping conflict recovery and societal rebuilding.

### *7. Conflict and Trust (HiCN)*

This session explored various dimensions of conflict and its societal impacts, focusing on political trust, intergroup relations, and democratic resilience in war-affected regions. Key findings highlighted how Armenia's trust in government surged after the Velvet Revolution but collapsed following military defeat, revealing the lasting effects of institutional shocks. Among Iraqi and Syrian refugees, war exposure shaped altruistic behaviors, with blame attribution influencing empathy toward in- and out-groups. In African democracies, conflict exposure reduced perceptions of government effectiveness but reinforced democratic support in more open regimes. Finally, experimental evidence from Yemen demonstrated how prolonged civil war deepens intergroup mistrust, particularly in regions where sectarian divisions are most pronounced.

These insights provide a deeper understanding of how conflicts shape trust, social cohesion and governance especially in post conflictual scenarios.

### *8. Impacts of Aid*

This session explored various dimensions of aid in conflict and post-conflict settings, focusing on its impacts on social outcomes, conflict dynamics, and peacebuilding efforts. Researchers studied three different conflict settings: Syria, Iraq (2000-2013) and Colombia.

Key findings from post-conflict Syria revealed that targeted agricultural aid significantly reduced child labor and child marriage among recipient households, highlighting the critical role of aid in alleviating poverty-related vulnerabilities and improving child welfare.

In Colombia, the study demonstrated that increased international assistance reduced conflict events, including war actions and sexual violence. The mechanisms included rising labor wages, discouraging insurgent recruitment, and enhancing trust in state institutions, although unmet aid commitments risked reversing these gains.

In Iraq, analysis of development aid found that while aid projects did not influence conflict onset, they increased conflict incidence and intensity during crises. However, programs aimed at poverty reduction and institutional strengthening showed a mitigating effect on conflict, emphasizing the importance of aligning aid objectives with peacebuilding goals.

These insights demonstrate the nuanced and context-dependent effects of aid, underscoring its potential to reduce conflict and promote stability when strategically designed and implemented.

### 9. Risk of Climatic Shocks

This session explored the interplay between environmental shocks, conflict dynamics, and social outcomes, focusing on pastoralist violence, long-term conflict risks, and early childhood development.

In Nigeria, research revealed that droughts significantly exacerbate pastoralist violence in areas with inter-religious tensions between Muslim herders and Christian communities, while droughts alone had no impact in predominantly Muslim regions.

A study on desert locust swarms showed a 43% increase in the likelihood of violent conflict over 14 years following these shocks, driven by reduced incomes and agricultural productivity, which lowered the opportunity cost of fighting.

Research on early childhood development revealed that conflict exposure increased non-cognitive skills thanks to greater parental investments, while drought reduced them. The findings emphasized the compounded challenges of multiple crises and the need for resilience-building strategies.

## 1.4 - Event Results

To achieve the goals set for this project, we took several steps in the planning and execution of the workshop. These will be summarised in the following sub-sections.

### 1. *Collecting high-quality submissions from researchers from around the world*

We were very pleased to see a large amount of interest in our workshop from the academic community, receiving 42 submissions to the HiCN call (out of 119 submissions in total). From the submitted proposals, we invited 36 presentations but 3 presenters had to cancel due to competing commitments, an inability to obtain visas or ill health. In the end, we hosted HiCN 33 presentations and discussions across two days. Most of these were part of the sessions described in 1.3, while a few presentations were integrated into sessions from other workshops, provided these were thematically better suited.

While the host institutions of presenters are primarily based in Europe and North America, we were able to welcome 20% of our attendees from institutions based in Africa and Asia.

The body of work presented at the workshop was geographically diverse. The countries and regions of studies break down roughly as follows:

Sub-Saharan Africa:	38%
MENA (Middle East and North Africa):	24%

South Asia:	12%
Central Asia:	6%
Eastern Europe & the Balkans:	9%
Latin America:	6%
Other:	5%
Total:	100%

The geography of the studies reflects a strong focus on conflict-affected regions, with many papers addressing the intersection of climate change, conflict, and development, as well as the role of international aid and policy in these settings.

## *2. Submitting a special issue proposal to a journal based on workshop submissions*

A selection of submitted papers were collected and submitted as a special issue proposal. See more under '2.2 - Planned Publications'.

## *3. Connecting HiCN with other academic networks*

The key innovation around the HiCN Annual Workshop was the integration into the larger Fragile Lives 2024 conference. The umbrella event Fragile Lives 2024 was an international expert conference on the use of rigorous, scientific evidence for the development of knowledge-based policy interventions in fragile, conflict-affected and under-developed settings. It focused specifically on how poly-crises shape individuals, institutions, and interventions at the micro-level and on the policies that can boost resilience and coping capacities in the context of these shocks.

In addition to a range of policy-focused discussions with partners from key government ministries, research institutions, and international organizations, Fragile Lives 2024 brought together three separate yet related academic workshops. Alongside the HiCN Annual Workshop on which we report here, Fragile Lives 2024 also hosted the Leibniz Environment And Development Symposium (LEADS) and the Methods Working Group of German Association for Peace and Conflict Studies (AFK Methods), enabling a unique level of interaction between experts from international donor organizations, practitioners, and cutting-edge academic research.

By hosting these events simultaneously, we were able to give attendees from all backgrounds access to a much wider array of sessions and topics than a traditional HiCN workshop, allowing them to put together a personalized conference agenda more closely aligned with their individual interests. At the same time, HiCN presenters were able to get input from a wider range of attendees than they normally might have done.

## *4. Inviting globally leading experts*

A diversity of expertise and background was something we wanted to represent through our keynote speakers as well. The two keynotes were given by Dr Agnes Quisumbing, Senior Research Fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in Washington DC, USA, and Dr



Ibrahim A. Elbadawi, Cairo, Egypt, Managing Director of the Economic Research Forum and former Sudanese Finance Minister.

Dr Quisumbing spoke on gender, assets, empowerment, and resilience, offering evidence-based insights into how gender and asset ownership foster resilience in fragile communities. Dr Elbadawi spoke on the Arab Spring, highlighting the diverse recovery trajectories in the MENA region and offering valuable lessons for future peacebuilding efforts.

Beyond the keynotes, we organised a third highlight plenary session on the evening of 1 October. The panel was dedicated to celebrate the first 20 years of HiCN and look towards the future of research, policy, and programming. Chaired by Anke Hoeffler (Professor of Development Research, University of Konstanz), the high level panel consisted of Anne-Claire Luzot (Director of Evaluation, World Food Programme), Gilles Carbonnier (Professor of Development Economics, Geneva Graduate Institute and Vice President, International Committee of the Red Cross), Marie Gaarder (Executive Director, International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)), and Scott Gates (Research Professor, Peace Research Institute Oslo).

With these three plenary sessions, the HiCN Annual Workshop managed to set a specific focus on three different types of research discussions: A thematic research priority (through Agnes' keynote on gender), specific developments of an ongoing, regional crisis (through Ibrahim's keynote on Sudan), and a bird's eye view on the field as a whole (through the evening panel). We believe these sessions to have been cornerstones of the event, setting the tone for the individual presentations.

Finally, we were very proud that Fragile Lives 2024 was opened by Julia von Blumenthal (President of Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin), Martina Brockmeier (President of the Leibniz Gemeinschaft), Deike Potzel (Director General for Crisis Prevention, Stabilisation, Peace Building, and Humanitarian Assistance of the German Federal Foreign Office), and Christine Toetzke (Director General Asia, Latin America, Middle East, Eastern/South Eastern Europe of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development).

#### *5. Supporting underrepresented voices*

In addition to enabling the keynote speakers to attend the workshop, DSF funding made it possible for five early career and/or so-called 'Global South' presenters to travel to Berlin and participate in the HiCN Workshop. The purpose of this funding was to enable access to researchers who would otherwise find it difficult to attend such spaces and thereby increase the diversity of thought at the event. The feedback we received from these awardees was very positive, each emphasising how attendance to the event would have otherwise been difficult or even impossible, financially.

## **2 - Publications**

Each paper that was presented at the workshop is intended to be submitted to an academic journal once the authors deem it ready. Those publications will represent the bulk of discussions and knowledge generation that took place during the workshop. Beyond those, you can find

recordings of both of the keynote speeches on the [ISDC youtube channel](#) and a summary of the entire event as a [news item](#) on the ISDC website. We have also invited all papers to submit their work once at the right stage to the HiCN Working Paper series.

## 2.1 - Potential Follow-Up Projects

At its core, this project has shown two things:

- 1) The HiCN Annual Workshops are as important and timely as ever and the network continues to play an important role in both peace and conflict research as well as development studies.
- 2) The concept behind Fragile Lives fills a valuable niche in enabling both interdisciplinary and intersectoral connections that other events in our field do not cover.

As such, there is huge potential to continue to invest and expand in these event formats. Specifically, the plan is to integrate the HiCN Annual Workshop into the Fragile Lives conference format as a permanent fixture going forward.

There are several benefits to this. First, HiCN will get an institutionalised location and organisational team that will alleviate the risks of changing hosts and locations every year. Second, as Fragile Lives becomes a fixture in the annual conference calendar of academics, practitioners, and policymakers, the synergies between these events and their respective communities will continue to grow. Third, the institutionalisation of the workshop in this way will lead to stronger connections to funding channels that will go beyond the workshop itself. The hope is that this will lead to further investment in the network itself, which will in turn allow us to leverage the many opportunities we see for improvements in its activities, including the relevance and range of the Working Paper Series.

## 2.2 - Planned Publications

In late January 2025, we received confirmation that our special issue proposal was accepted for review at World Development. The special issue is titled 'Households in conflict: The next generation of research in the microeconomics of development,' and is made up of suitable submissions to the workshops at Fragile Lives 2024. The 18 total papers submitted (including the introductory article to the special issue) cover four relevant themes:

- Trust, inter-group, and citizen-state relations
- Climate and conflict
- Human development and intra-household bargaining
- Peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance

The next step of the process is that the authors now submit their manuscripts at World Development for review, as part of a special submission window for this special issue. This special issue is an exciting development as it will represent the state of the art in studying peace and development using microeconomics, reflecting on the progress that has been made in the 20 years

since the founding of HiCN. It will also provide a cross-cutting and deep insight into many of the topics presented and discussed during the workshop. We are very grateful to DSF for having made possible the workshop which in turn made this special issue possible.

### **3 - Abstract**

For 20 years, the Households in Conflict Network (HiCN) has been fostering research on the micro-level impacts of violent conflict on lives and livelihoods, thus bridging a gap between the fields of peace and conflict research and development economics and related disciplines. It does this mostly through two methods: a series of working papers and an annual workshop.

The 20th HiCN Annual Workshop took place on 1-2 October 2024 at Humboldt University of Berlin's main building in Berlin. Organised by ISDC - International Security and Development Center under the leadership of HiCN Co-Director, Prof. Tilman Brück, in cooperation with the HiCN Co-Directors, Prof. Patricia Justino and Prof. Philip Verwimp, the event brought together experts researching the micro-level impacts of poly-crises, spanning violent conflict, humanitarian emergencies, and the climate crisis.

Participants were able to present their cutting-edge research and garner valuable input from their peers. They were also able to engage with distinguished researchers via two plenary keynote sessions.

Dr Agnes Quisumbing (Senior Research Fellow, International Food Policy Research Institute) gave the first keynote address on Gender, Assets, Empowerment, and Resilience, offering evidence-based insights into how gender and asset ownership foster resilience in fragile communities. The second keynote of the conference was held by Dr Ibrahim Elbadawi (Managing Director, Economic Research Forum), focusing on the socioeconomic impacts of the Arab Spring, highlighting the diverse recovery trajectories in the MENA region and offering valuable lessons for future peacebuilding efforts.

Overall, workshop sessions were held on a range of crucially important topics and themes that intersect with violent conflict, including (but not limited to): gender, economics, migration, agriculture, aid, and climate change.