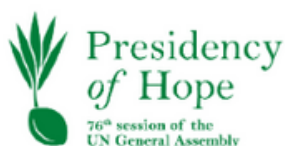# For Our Future

Best Practice for the Implementation of the UN Pact for the Future

INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNITIES
ORGANISATION

Foreword by Mr. James Holmes ICO Secretary General

I founded International Communities Organisation (ICO) in 2016 with the understanding that minority groups and peoples are often those most adversely affected by conflict. Across the world, many of these populations do not enjoy the same access to basic freedoms, public services and the ability to determine the future of their own communities. I am pleased that over nearly a decade of work ICO has grown into an organisation with Special Consultative Status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council, which has made considerable impact in supporting minority groups and peoples to protect and practice their own rights in conflict-affected settings, namely in our four core programmes in Cameroon, Cyprus, Kosovo and the Middle East.

The UN Pact for the Future adopted at the Summit of the Future, 22nd September 2024, represents an important milestone in global discussions and debates about how to achieve one of our most intractable goals - lasting global peace. ICO welcomes the renewed momentum to consider innovative methodologies and strategies as we work collectively toward this aim, and believes the work of our organisation can serve as a positive contribution as discussions shift to implementation of the Pact's actions and commitments on the maintenance of international peace and security.

As UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres reminded us at the opening of Summit of the Future in September 2024, "... 21st century challenges require 21st century solutions: frameworks that are networked and inclusive; and that draw on the expertise of all humanity." I firmly believe that ICO's model of working across its three pillars - Diplomacy; Communities and for Societies - is one that allows us to holistically and impartially support community-led reconciliation, conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts which centre the empowerment of minority rights.

The important work that ICO does would not have been possible without the dedication of researchers, practitioners and our team who have contributed their invaluable time and expertise. Special thanks are also extended to the UN and other institutions e as well as individual member states who have supported this endeavour with their valuable insights and analysis.

Looking ahead, I hope decisions to make tangible progress in implementation of the actions and commitments set out in the Pact for the Future can draw upon ICO's leading international best practice outlined within this report so we may more constructively work in our united endeavours toward global peace, for our future.

Mr. James Holmes
ICO Secretary General

Foreword by H.E. Abdulla Shahid
ICO International Ambassador

The United Nations Pact for the Future represents a defining moment in global governance, reaffirming the international community's commitment to multilateralism, sustainability, and peace. As the world grapples with complex and longstanding challenges, the Pact offers a clear and strategic roadmap for collective action – one that aims to ensure a more just, secure, and sustainable world for both present and future generations.

During my Presidency of the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, I committed to strengthening the General Assembly's role as the principal platform for international cooperation, and the ultimate expression of global solidarity and universal participation. My aim was to foster an inclusive environment where diverse stakeholders could convene, find common ground, and devise solutions to the pressing challenges of our time. Shaping a more equitable, sustainable, and peaceful future is the purpose of the Pact for the Future. Born out of the discussions on the "Our Common Agenda" Report, during the 76th session of the General Assembly, the Pact outlines our commitments across several key areas such as sustainable development, international peace and security, science, technology and innovation, youth and future generations, and global governance.

Today, as we work towards translating the Pact's vital commitments into tangible outcomes for nations and communities worldwide, it is imperative that policymakers, practitioners, and global leaders work collectively and demonstrate the required political will. The International Communities Organisation (ICO) exemplifies the kind of adaptive, resilient, and forward-thinking approach that will be critical to this collective effort.

Across their years of operation, ICO has made meaningful contributions to reconciliation, peacebuilding, and conflict resolution. These efforts are firmly anchored in the respect for the rights of minorities. As their International Ambassador, I have witnessed first-hand the impact of ICO's distinctive methodology: community-led initiatives driven by bilateral and networked collaboration; strategies that are innovative and dynamic; and a holistic model that integrates grassroots action with global engagement. Crucially, ICO addresses educational and economic disparities to enable minority communities to participate on equal footing, an essential contribution to realising the transformative vision of the Pact for the Future.

The United Nations Pact for the Future is more than a declaration of intent; it is a call to global action. The ICO stands ready to answer that call. Now, more than ever, we must commit not only to working together, but to learn from one another to achieve genuine and collective change, to build a peaceful, just, and truly inclusive world order.

H.E. Abdulla Shahid
President of the 76th UN General Assembly
ICO International Ambassador

Presidency
of Hope
76ᵗʰ session of the
UN General Assembly

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

APJ - Alliance for Peace and Justice Cameroon
CAP - Capacity Reinforcement to Local Anglophone Councils Programme
CPDC - Cyprus Peace and Dialogue Centre
CPI - Cameroon Peace Initiative
CSI - Centre for Social Innovation
CSO - Civil Society Organisation
GBV - Gender Based Violence
GCC - Gender Coordination Committees
ICO - International Communities Organisation
LC - Local Councils
MSME - Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
MIU - Management International University
NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation
PBC - UN Peacebuilding Commission
SDG - Sustainable Development Goals
The Pact / The UN Pact - The Pact for the Future 2024
UAE - United Arab Emirates
UN - United Nations
UNFICYP - United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus
UNGA - United Nations General Assembly

Executive Summary

This report seeks to extrapolate working methodologies and strategies to contribute to the implementation of the UN Pact for the Future ("the Pact") and its accompanying annexes (Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations), adopted through General Assembly resolution A/RES/79/1 of September 2024. The Pact represents an important milestone in reforming the international architecture and global governance to address systematic challenges in a holistic manner. The Pact's vital actions and commitments are deliberately ambitious and aspirational - necessitating well considered and coordinated approaches as we transition into the implementation phase.

International Communities Organisation (ICO) is a London-based international NGO working for the protection and empowerment of minority rights in conflict-affected areas (ICO, 2024). ICO has held Special Consultative Status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council since 2021. ICO works globally, via three pillars: supporting direct beneficiaries for Communities (facilitating cross-community activities); for Diplomacy (holding dialogue and reconciliation peace talks); and for Societies (addressing economic and political inequalities). ICO's three pillars, which are designed in respect and recognition of the interconnectedness of systematic global challenges, align with the UN's own three pillars of sustainable development, peace and security, and human rights (United Nations, 2024).

ICO seeks to present action-orientated, inclusive and sustainable strategies from its core programmes in Cameroon, Cyprus, Kosovo, and Middle East as 'best practice' in implementation of the Pact's actions and commitments concerning the maintenance of international peace and security - in line with our thematic expertise and mandate.

This report is intended to outline specific examples of best practice from ICO's work, in the hope they are valued contributions, able to foster diplomatic consensus, within the evolving debates concerning the implementation of the UN Pact for the Future.

Introduction

2.1 The adoption of the UN Pact for the Future

Adopted in General Assembly resolution A/RES/79/1 at the UN Summit of the Future held in New York in September 2024, the Pact for the Future is an action-oriented inter-governmentally negotiated agreement, emanating from inclusive dialogue and collaboration aimed at modernising international cooperation (United Nations, n.d. [b]). The primary aim of the Pact is to equip international institutions with the mechanisms to adapt, respond and deliver in the face of emerging opportunities and challenges in the World (United Nations n.d.[c], United Nations 2024[a]). According to the United Nations, the Pact is the most comprehensive and wide-ranging international framework in decades, which covers long-standing issues where consensus has not previously been reached, as well as new areas that were a result of the changes in the world (United Nations 2024[a], United Nations 2024[b]).

The Pact was adopted by 193 member states (Peltz and Lederer, 2024) reaffirming the countries' alignment with multilateralism and delivering on its actions and commitments to a better world for all, while also accelerating implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2024, United Nations, n.d.[c]). The resolution proposing the Pact was initiated in September 2022 during the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly. The 76th session was encapsulated by H.E. Abdulla Shahid's *'Presidency of Hope'* which sought to 'deliver for people, for the planet and for prosperity.' (Shahid, 2021). ICO is privileged to have H.E. Abdulla Shahid as its International Ambassador and continues to work to deliver the vision of the *Presidency of Hope,* noting efforts to realise the commitments of this agenda, as central to meaningfully engage with the UN Pact for the Future.

The Pact outlines 56 actions focused on sustainable development and financing for development, international peace and security, science, technology innovation and digital cooperation, youth and future generations, and transforming global governance (United Nations, 2024)..

The Pact also includes a Global Digital Compact and a Declaration on Future Generations as annexes (United Nations, 2024). This report only focuses on the Pact's actions and commitments concerning international peace and security, in line with ICO's thematic expertise.

The Pact sets out seven priorities under its international peace and security cluster to ensure people live in a safer and secure world. These are (United Nations, n.d.):
- Preventing conflicts and addressing their root causes.
- Striving for the peaceful settlement of disputes through diplomacy and mediation.
- Promoting building and sustaining peace.
- Countering terrorism.
- Furthering disarmament and non-proliferation.
- Promoting the responsible use of new technology, including AI in military and security contexts.
- Fostering and peaceful use of outer space.

The UN Pact calls for innovative ways to achieve these priorities, which include (United Nations, 2024):
- Developing new approaches to strengthen national prevention strategies and address the root cause of conflict.
- Creating innovative conflict resolution mechanisms to leverage them for new diplomacy and mediation techniques, including early diplomatic efforts and preventive diplomacy.
- Developing innovative and inclusive strategies to integrate women, children, girls and other marginalised groups into peacebuilding, including capacity building for these groups.
- Developing innovative ways to enhance peace efforts, including fostering strategic partnerships, encouraging collaboration with civil society and private sectors, and leveraging new financial and political support.
- Transforming peace operations, including building stronger partnerships with regional and international stakeholders and bridging the digital divide to ensure states can fully reap the benefits of technology.

Figure 1: The Pact's actions for international peace and security

Action 13	• WE WILL REDOUBLE OUR EFFORTS TO BUILD AND SUSTAIN PEACEFUL, INCLUSIVE AND JUST SOCIETIES AND ADDRESS THE ROOT CAUSES OF CONFLICTS
Action 14	• WE WILL PROTECT ALL CIVILIANS IN ARMED CONFLICT
Action 15	• WE WILL ENSURE THAT PEOPLE AFFECTED BY HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES RECEIVE THE SUPPORT THEY NEED
Action 16	• WE WILL PROMOTE COOPERATION AND UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN MEMBER STATES, DEFUSE TENSIONS, SEEK THE PACIFIC SETTLEMENT OF DISPUTES AND RESOLVE CONFLICTS
Action 17	• WE WILL FULFIL OUR OBLIGATION TO COMPLY WITH THE DECISIONS AND UPHOLD THE MANDATE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE IN ANY CASE TO WHICH OUR STATE IS A PARTY
Action 18	• WE WILL BUILD AND SUSTAIN PEACE
Action 19	• WE WILL ACCELERATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF OUR COMMITMENTS ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY
Action 20	• WE WILL ACCELERATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF OUR COMMITMENTS ON YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY
Action 21	• WE WILL ADAPT PEACE OPERATIONS TO BETTER RESPOND TO EXISTING CHALLENGES AND NEW REALITIES
Action 22	• WE WILL ADDRESS THE SERIOUS IMPACT OF THREATS TO MARITIME SECURITY AND SAFETY
Action 23	• WE WILL PURSUE A FUTURE FREE FROM TERRORISM
Action 24	• WE WILL PREVENT AND COMBAT TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME AND RELATED ILLICIT FINANCIAL FLOWS
Action 25	• WE WILL ADVANCE THE GOAL OF A WORLD FREE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS
Action 26	• WE WILL UPHOLD OUR DISARMAMENT OBLIGATIONS AND COMMITMENTS
Action 27	• WE WILL SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITIES ASSOCIATED WITH NEW AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND ADDRESS THE POTENTIAL RISKS POSED BY THEIR MISUSE

Source: United Nations, 2024

According to the UN Pact for the Future, the rapid advancements in technology and science and the fast-changing world have led to new emerging risks and challenges. These new challenges include one out of two children aged 2 – 17 suffering from some form of violence annually, the increase in the adverse impact of climate change and the increase in global military expenditure, which reached a new high of USD 2.24 trillion in 2022 (SIPRI 24/04/2023, United Nations 2024). Furthermore, there is a rise in armed conflicts, which reached an unprecedented high in the present millennium in 2024 with women, girls and other vulnerable groups being disproportionately affected, particularly in conflict-affected, post-conflict and humanitarian emergency settings (United Nations n.d., United Nations 2024). These armed conflicts had a detrimental effect on the civilian infrastructure and culture and resulted in one-quarter of humanity being in conflict areas (United Nations n.d., United Nations 2024).

In addition, an unprecedented number of people are affected by humanitarian emergencies, including those suffering from acute food insecurity, hunger, famine-like conditions, and forced or protracted displacement. By June 2024, the number of forcibly displaced people reached an all-time high of 122.6 million, with conflict being a major contributor to the displacement (United Nations n.d., United Nations 2024, UNHCR 2024). Moreover, peace operations face increasingly complex challenges, with rising inequalities, mistrust and escalating geopolitical challenges (United Nations n.d., United Nations 2024).

These new global challenges have rendered traditional ways of addressing them obsolete. As a result, the Pact calls for new and innovative ways of addressing these challenges. The Pact states that in order for the member states to uphold their commitments, they should reaffirm the recognition of the interconnectedness of the UN's three pillars of sustainable development, peace and security, and human rights (United Nations, 2024). In addition, the member states are called upon to abide by international law and the UN Charter, which includes upholding the principles of political independence and self-determination and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity (United Nations, 2024).

Although the Pact is viewed as the most comprehensive and wide-ranging peacebuilding compact in decades (United Nations, 2024), the scale of aspiration presents challenges, particularly when considering implementation (Motamedi, 2024). Such challenges include, but are not limited to: Varied socio-economic and political contexts across UN member states; Consideration of sustainable financing; Adaptation of global frameworks to local contexts vs. integration of local frameworks into global contexts; Evolving future contexts which may present unforeseen challenges to the Pact's implementation.

In light of this, drawing together best practice from a wider cross-section of stakeholders based on their respective thematic expertise, appears to offer a realistic approach to mitigate these potential future obstacles.

2.2 Methodology

This report relied on two main research instruments: document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Document analysis is a research instrument that entails collecting, reviewing, analysing and evaluating data found in documents (Bowen 2009, O'Leary 2017). Meanwhile, semi-structured interviews are conversations between a researcher and the interviewee around specific themes aimed at interpreting and understanding the interviewee's experience regarding a particular phenomenon (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018).

Lessons from ICO's work

3.1 ICO's Mission and Model

The creation of the International Communities Organisation (ICO) was inspired by the Liechtenstein Institute work and conference, which explored ways of reconciling self-determination principles and territorial integrity, as well as innovative ways of leveraging the right to self-determination as a tool for conflict prevention and resolution (United Nations, n.d. [a]). ICO is a London-based international NGO and holds a consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council on empowering and protecting minority rights in conflict-affected areas (ICO, 2024). ICO works globally, via three pillars: supporting direct beneficiaries for Communities (facilitating cross-community activities); for Diplomacy (holding dialogue and reconciliation peace talks); and for Societies (addressing economic and political inequalities).

Core to ICO's mission is ensuring communities have access to their political, social and economic rights (ICO 2022[b]), combining development strategies and human rights resolutions and principles to empower communities (United Nations, n.d.[a]). ICO employs a peacebuilding model of bottom-up consultation, empowering women and young people and disadvantaged minority communities, economic revitalisation and diplomatic continuity (Holmes 2025, ICO 2024[a]).

ICO focuses on addressing the root causes of conflict by addressing economic inequalities and creating more inclusive peacebuilding processes; it does this by combining the ability to finance peace agreements with discreet behind-the-scenes dialogue facilitation and community-centred capacity-building projects and programmes (ICO 2022[a]).

Further cornerstones to ICO's work are the utilisation of best practices and tailoring context-specific solutions. ICO combines its model, methodologies and strategies with evidence of similar successful global case studies. ICO subsequently leverages these case studies to develop transferable strategies tailored to the political, social, cultural and legal landscapes and contexts (ICO, 2025), aligned with the Pact's approach to internal peacebuilding and security, specifically Action 21.

This aspect of working across three dimensions or pillars underscores ICO's holistic approach. As the founder of Cyprus Peace and Dialogue Centre, and a local ICO partner attests: "Protracted conflicts are complex; they can be simultaneously dire and comfortable for parties. As peace builders, we must be prepared to engage leaders as well as grassroots communities; to unpack narratives and provide meaningful incentives. ICO's approach supports us in combining both the high-level diplomacy and the transparent dialogue for communities needed in this context." (Samani cited in ICO 2024: p.7).

Table 1: ICO strategies and methodologies by Communities, Diplomacy and Societies dimensions

Dimension	Methodologies and Strategies
Communities	• Building bridges at the grassroots. • Collaborating with local stakeholders. • Organising events, activities and meetings to strengthen the capacities of grassroots organisations. • Employing a cross-community approach to peacebuilding and reconciliation. • Cross-community language learning in conflict settings with linguistic diversity. • Fostering networks of co-learning, co-fundraising and joint implementation via civil-society consortia.
Diplomacy	• Renewing high-level political negotiations. • Dispute mediation and dialogue. • Providing a closed-door private environment for individuals to hold conversations and build trust. • Capacity building programmes for minority and disadvantaged groups, and then advocating for their inclusion/ input within negotiation processes. • Taking a low-profile approach and maintaining this low profile. • Drawing on the policy expertise of ICO's network to develop new innovative ways for peacebuilding and diplomacy. • Operating as an impartial and neutral arbiter within conflict resolution. • Providing a space for minority groups to access and provide input into diplomatic debates in written and oral submissions to the UN. • Meeting with high-level diplomatic officials at the UN to raise the agenda of minority groups in conflict.
Societies	• Addressing inequalities between groups through funding of projects that help the community. • Providing free education content. • Empowering both traditional and non-traditional local governance mechanisms through capability building. • Providing marginalised communities with better access to services, including legal and academic sources and services. • Ongoing research that seeks to answer society's most intractable problems. • Partnering with local governments. • Innovative finance for peacebuilding, through partnering with financial organisations to source investment opportunities.

Source: ICO (2022[d]), ICO (2022[e]), ICO (2022[b]), ICO (2022[c]), ICO (2023[d]), Sawjani (2025)

3.2. ICO Case studies

This chapter comprises four sub-chapters demonstrating examples of ICO's core programmes in Cameroon, Cyprus, Kosovo and the Middle East. Each case study considers a) the context of conflict; b) ICO's work; c) the outcomes of each programme; and d) projections of future work. ICO's work in each context extends beyond the highlighted case study, however these select examples have been chosen due to the particular best practice they provide:

- The Cameroon case study seeks to illustrate best practice in delivering capacity reinforcement and capacity building in conflict affected settings.

- The Cyprus case study aims to exemplify best practice in delivering cross-community dialogue and inter-ethnic exchanges in divided settings.

- The Kosovo case study endeavours to highlight best practice in delivering non-majority representation and forums for engagement with government institutions.

- The Middle East case study seeks to demonstrate best practice in facilitating confidential peace negotiations and post-conflict agreements.

Case study 1: Cameroon: Capacity Reinforcement Project to Anglophone Local Councils in the North-West and South-West regions

ICO focused its work on capacity building in the Anglophone Region, aimed at preparing the Anglophone community for decentralisation; addressing the issues of exclusion and marginalisation they are facing (ICO, 2024), and strengthening the capacity of local councils to deliver essential public services. ICO's approach was informed by the successful example of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), which was used as best practice, in line with **Action 21** of the Pact. The CLGF was established in 1994 to promote democratic local governance, facilitate experience sharing among local authorities and build the capacities of local governments across Commonwealth countries (Slack, 2008).

ICO partnered with the Cameroon Peace Initiative (CPI) to develop the Capacity Reinforcement to Local Anglophone Councils Programme (CAP) - a multi-phase pilot programme operational in five councils in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon, which collectively represent over 1 million people (ICO, 2023[b]). The North-West regions are: Nkambe and Bamenda, while the South-West Regions are: Upper Bayang and Kumba 2 and 3 (ICO, 2023[b]). The content and priority themes for the pilot programme were determined based on a needs assessment carried out by ICO, via consultations, surveys and interviews with the Anglophone community (ICO and CPI, 2023).

Phase 1 Pilot Programme - The Best Practices for Local Governance Workshop:

Based on the above assessment outcome, ICO and CPI designed the first phase of the activities, "The Best Practices for Local Governance Workshop", a three-day workshop with selected councils in the North-West and South-West regions (ICO and CPI, 2023). The workshop aimed to support the training needs of local councils and consisted of participatory discussions on key thematic areas such as transparency, community engagement, effective budgeting, sound public financial management, mobilising resources and Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) (ICO and CPI, 2023).

Twenty local council representatives (Mayors, Deputy Mayors, Chief of Cabinet, Secretaries General, as well as technical experts such as Community Development Officer, Social Affairs Officer, Financial Officer and Communication Officer) attended the workshop. (ICO and CPI, 2023).

Phase 2 Pilot Programme- Capacity Building and Decentralisation:

Based on the workshop outcomes (Phase 1), lessons learnt and the councils' expectations, the second phase of the pilot programme aimed to implement solutions and best practices identified by workshop participants (ICO and CPI, 2023). 1) Increased engagement of Women and Girls: Strengthening LCs capacity to engage with vulnerable members of the community, identified as women and girls. 2) Increased Institutional Capacities: Strengthening the LCs institutional capacity by assessing digital e-governance, human resource management and the implementation of decentralisation.

To achieve these capacity-building needs, ICO implemented a dual-track strategy. Firstly, to create the Gender Coordination Committee (GCC), a tool that would enable LCs to sustainably engage with women and girls, in order to create a framework for gender-responsive programmes and policies (ICO and CPI, 2024). Secondly, institutional capacity strengthening, which aimed to uncover the root causes of capacity issues and subsequently create a framework to address these gaps over time. This strategy focused on human resource management, digital transformation and decentralisation, which were the three capacity gaps identified in Phase 1 of the CAP (ICO and CPI, 2024). The outputs for this strategy were:
Both phases of the Capacity Reinforcement to Local Anglophone Councils Programme (CAP) are aligned with **Action 13** and **Action 19**.

Programme Outcomes: Cameroon
Capacity-Building Workshop
- Increased confidence and feeling of empowerment and ability to take action among participants.
- Increased comprehension of the key areas discussed in the workshop - Deputy Mayor of the Kumba 2 council, explains: *"I am going back empowered and with more capacity to serve my community. As I always say, you don't need to light a thousand candles, you need to light one candle, and that one candle will light a thousand."* (Aigona cited in ICO and CPI, 2023 p.10).
- Creation of a capacity-building and co-learning network of local councils.
- Development of needs assessment for planning future activities.

Gender Coordination Committees
- Creation of Gender Coordination Committees (GCC), aligned with **Action 19** of the UN Pact.
- Increased capacity to address related and interdependent issues - GCC's sought to address the needs of women and girls in the community, which strengthened response to other minority communities. *"...in that programme also it extensively treated issues linked to gender-based violence and in some cases issues of child molestation and other related issues."* (Shey, 2025).
- The GCC brings together local community groups and civil society groups and gives them a platform to work together by providing a mechanism to coordinate among the different stakeholders.
- Improved community responsiveness - *"The main lesson we have learnt from our partnership with ICO and for similar projects is the fact that in all you do, capacity building, awareness, needs assessment and involvement of the communities through what you call the participatory approach is key to substance."* Mayor of Nkambe council (Shey, 2025)
- Official issuance of a decision to establish and operationalise five GCCs.
- Agreement on and development of Stakeholder Mapping Toolkit.
- LCs assembled and formed partnerships with local stakeholders as members of the GCC.
- GCCs agree on Committee Priorities and Tasks, Bylaws, Operating Policy Procedures, Information Management Policy, and Principles of Cooperation.
- Establishment of Gender Focal Points in Each Council.
- LCs issue public statements on launching GCC.
- GCCs launch five Awareness & Communication Campaigns in 5 municipalities.
- Established a reporting mechanism for Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and gender-related issues.

Institutional capacity strengthening and decentralisation
- The LCs, ICO and the CPI drafted a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in five councils.
- Institutional Assessment Report (IAR): The assessment team produced an institutional assessment report, including recommendations.
- 40 LCs local staff participated in workshops on capacity skills, needs and technical challenges.
- Institutional Capacity Development Plan (CDP): The assessment team, with the support of ICO, developed a 6- month capacity development plan with a detailed work plan of activities aimed at improving councils' capacity, including monitoring metrics for five councils.
- Advocacy Plan: ICO developed an advocacy report aimed at influencing policy and increasing the allocation of resources to councils for five councils.

Future work: Cameroon

Phase 3 of the CAP programme will be implemented between March 2025 and December 2025. This Phase, entitled "Local Council Governance & Institutional Capacity Building" which will focus on five key areas: Human resource manual development & workshop, Digital transformation, Strengthening the GCCs, Fiscal decentralisation (including planning, budgeting and reporting) and Digital Administration (Civic registration) (ICO and CPI 2025, Shey 2025). The activities for this phase will include workshops, digital skills training, dialogues, meetings and the publication of reports, documentation and strategies (ICO and CPI, 2025). During and towards the end of this phase (Phase 3), based on the outcomes, lessons learnt and the councils' needs, ICO would explore the possibility of scaling and expanding the CAP programme beyond the five local councils (ICO and CPI, 2025).

Case study 2: Cyprus: Cross-Community dialogue and programmes

ICO collaborated with its partner, the Cyprus Peace and Dialogue Centre (CPDC), a cross-community grassroots organisation in Cyprus (CPDC, 2022[a], CPDC 2022) on the facilitation of inter-communal dialogue to foster cross-cultural understanding. These projects and programmes were inspired by the "European House Vukovar" initiative in Croatia, which brought together ethnic Croatian and Serbian children for seminars and creative activities. These activities were designed and implemented to help promote interethnic understanding and foster a culture of communication (Kosic and Tauber, 2010).

ICO, CPDC and the Bilingual Association delivered a year-long, beginner-level language course. The course ran from September 2022 to May 2023, providing 30 weekly lessons, each 1.5 hours long, and offered Turkish language to predominantly members of the Greek Cypriot community and Greek language to predominantly members of the Turkish Cypriot community (ICO 2023[c]). In addition to the language classes, every three lessons, there was an hour and a half session focused on reconciliation activities and themes aimed at bringing the two communities together. The themes included: the basis of shared cultural elements, the foundational history of Cyprus' multiculturalism, national holidays across the island, media representations of communities, curiosity questions for inter-communal contact and imagining a bilingual future in Cyprus (ICO 2023[c]). This language programme is aligned with **Action 13** of the Pact.

ICO and CPDC additionally worked with the UNFICYP, Cyprusinno and the Center for Social Innovation (CSI) on a series of cross-community events between businesses and entrepreneurs to address the barriers to business faced by Turkish Cypriot SMEs (ICO 2023, ICO 2024). One of these events was the Building Bridges: Business and Network fair in 2022, which brought together SMEs, who could and wanted to trade products and services across the Green Line trade from across the island, together with inter- and cross-communal businesses and social entrepreneurs.

The event aimed to provide a scope for collaborative partnerships and deepen cross-community linkages, specifically between businesses and entrepreneurs, and as a result, enrich the discourse on economic conditions for inter-communal relations, in line with Action 18 of the Pact. (ICO and UNFICYP and Cyprusinno and CSI and CPDC 2022, ICO 2022[f]).

Programme Outcomes: Cyprus

It is pertinent that both cross-community exchanges successfully facilitated inter-community and cross-community dialogues across different segments of the society, namely, communities and businesses, to decrease the polarisation and aid reconsolidation (ICO, 2024[d], CPDC, 2022[a]), with over 400 facilitated shared encounters between Greek and Turkish Cypriots (ICO, 2023).

Language exchange and inter-ethnic project
- Enabled 30 students to achieve better cross-cultural understanding and empathy and build cross-community relationships.
- Equipped students with the introductory skills and knowledge necessary for reconciliation (ICO 2023[c]).

Business and Networking Fair
- More than 200 people from all communities of Cyprus attended the event. These included entrepreneurs, civil society representatives, policymakers, and international stakeholders (ICO 2022[f]).
- The event was a step towards fostering inter-communal business collaboration and promoting economic integration across the Green Line (ICO 2022[f]).
- The fair also identified key takeaways and next steps to further the reconciliation, which are: 1) Research Initiative on Green Line Trade; 2) Digital Banking Initiative; 3) Workshops for Civil Society Peacebuilders; 4) International engagement; 5) Diaspora Involvement.

- The event helped demonstrate that a peaceful solution to the Cyprus issue is possible - *"Our collaboration with ICO has been instrumental in showcasing the potential for a peaceful resolution to the Cyprus problem. Through innovative dialogue and inclusive initiatives, we are committed to building bridges between our communities and fostering a culture of peace. We believe that working together can pave the way for a united Cyprus that embraces diversity and promotes harmony for all its citizens."* – Dr Meltem Onurkan Samani, Founder and General Coordinator of CPDC (CPDC, 2024).
- The Business fair also had an impact on the relationships between the Island and external stakeholders - *"It was a fantastic event. I hope it's the beginning of a series of similar activities. It was an opportunity to discuss practical business matters with members of the other community and not just in abstract. Let's keep it up and continue the discussion. Trade can lead to peace."* - Vice-president of the Board of Oxygono (Kyriakides cited in CPDC, 2022).
- Following the event, the ICO sponsored the meeting between the Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus, Colin Stewart, and Meltem Onurakan Samani, the Founder of the Cyprus Peace and Dialogue Centre (CPDC, 2022).

Their discussions strengthened the relationship between the Secretary-General's good offices mission, the UNFICYP, and technical experts across the Island (ICO, 2023).

Future work: Cyprus

In 2025 ICO will focus on the 'EMBRACE Project: Rights for Reconciliation.' The first bi-communal multi-stakeholder civil society partnership project in its second year that addresses discriminatory human rights violations arising from the Cyprus conflict as a means to foster reconciliation (ICO 2025, ICO 2024[d]). The focus areas include:
- Anti-discrimination training for civil servants.
- Best-practice sharing with other human rights organisations.
- Trust-building workshops for civil society organisations.
- A public session to share the project's findings.

Consequently, ICO and CPDC are studying the possibility of a cross-island economic collaboration. The proposed project aims to boost Cyprus' economy by advising on and facilitating investment across the island, promoting trade and stronger ties between communities (ICO, 2025).

Case study 3: Kosovo: Creation of the Forum for Non-Majority Communities

In line with **Action 21** of the Pact, ICO's project and approach to address this issue drew from the successful work of North Macedonia's Agency for the Rights of the Non-Majority Communities. The Agency for the Rights of Non-Majority Communities in North Macedonia is a government body that protects and promotes the rights of minority communities. Established under the Ohrid Framework Agreement (which ended a 2001 conflict) (OSCE, 2001), its mandate includes ensuring equal representation, preserving cultural identities, and integrating these communities into society (Memeti and Binaku, 2021). The agency provided funding to support smaller national minorities, including cultural activities (2 million MKD, equivalent to €32,500 in 2021) (Council of Europe, 2022). It also published a strategy for inter-culturalism and social cohesion from 2024 to 2026 to further promote an inclusive multi-ethnic society.

Taking North Macedonia as a best practice case study, in 2023 ICO conducted a survey with 200 individuals (18 years or older) living in North Mitrovica. The survey aimed to understand and identify the opinions, attitudes, experiences and needs of community groups towards their statute of self-management in the country, specifically in the fields of economic and social development, sport, language, culture, heritage and education (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Kosovo) and ICO, 2024). The survey highlighted the need to promote inter-community cooperation, tackle issues related to discrimination, culture, heritage and education and address economic challenges (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Kosovo) and ICO, 2024). Based on the findings of the survey, ICO, in collaboration with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Kosovo) established a Working Group called the Forum for Non-Majority Communities in late 2023.

This Forum, led by the Deputy Prime Minister (Kosovo) and facilitated by ICO, aims to provide a platform for non-majority communities to engage with the government and participate in governance and policy development (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Kosovo) and ICO, 2023). These representatives include central and local government representatives, the private sector, civil society organisations (CSOs) and other relevant local and international stakeholders (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Kosovo) and ICO, 2023).

The mandate of the Forum is to identify problems faced by non-majority communities in Kosovo and to address or find practical solutions and policies to these problems in the areas of political, social, economic, institutional, educational and cultural life (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Kosovo) and ICO 2023). In addition, the mandate also stipulates that the Forum will conduct regular monitoring and reporting of the project and its implementation, as well as develop tools to implement and disseminate the policy roadmap (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Kosovo) and ICO, 2023). In order to develop these practical solutions and policies, the Forum will rely on ICO to conduct research studies and collect data from non-majority communities on an ongoing basis, to assess the relevant information pertaining to the issues faced by these communities in Kosovo (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Kosovo) and ICO, 2023). In addition to its role in conducting research, the agreement stipulates that ICO would also encourage the engagement of international and local experts to assist in furthering the Forum's success (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Kosovo) and ICO, 2023).

The key duties of the Forum Secretariat are shown below.

Figure 2: Key duties of the Forum Secretariat

Logistical Coordination:	Manage and coordinate all logistical aspects of Forum events, including venue arrangements, equipment setup, and participant accommodations.
Communication Hub	Serve as the central point of communication, facilitating information flow between the Forum organisers, participants, and relevant stakeholders.
Documentation and Reporting	Maintain accurate records of the Forum proceedings, prepare minutes of meetings, and compile comprehensive reports summarizing key discussions and decisions.
Speaker and Agenda Management	Collaborate with relevant parties to coordinate the participation of speakers, finalise the agenda, and ensure the timely dissemination of information to all parties concerned.
Delegate Support	Provide assistance to the Forum participants, addressing queries, guiding them through the event schedule, and ensuring a positive experience for all attendees.
Administrative Support	Handle administrative tasks, such as managing registrations, handling paperwork, and overseeing any necessary documentation for the Forum.
Follow-up Activities	Execute post-Forum activities, including sending out thank-you notes, collecting feedback, and contributing to the formulation of recommendations or action plans arising from the Forum discussions.
Adaptability	Remain flexible and responsive to the evolving needs of the Forum, making adjustments to plans and schedules as necessary.
Collaboration	Work closely with other Forum stakeholders, committees, and relevant teams to foster a collaborative and cohesive approach to the Forum organisation.
Problem Resolution	Address any unforeseen challenges or issues that may arise during the Forum, employing effective problem-solving skills to ensure the event's success.

ICO's engagement in Kosovo is focused on dialogue and inclusion. This report does not take a position on the status of Kosovo

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Programme outcomes: Kosovo

- By the end of 2024, two Non-majority Community Forums were successfully held, marking a significant step in increasing the political participation and policy recommendations from non-majority communities (ICO, 2025, Kosova Press, 2024). The second Forum meeting held at the end of 2024 included representatives from the Serbian, Ashkali, Turkish, Bosniak and Roma communities.
- The Forum addressed and discussed pertinent community issues, including education, women's empowerment, access to healthcare and high female and unemployment amongst young people (ICO, 2025).
- As a result of this dialogue there has been more responsiveness and space to exercise agency in non-majority communities (Kalaja, 2025).
- The most significant output of the Forum is the establishment of a dialogue for non-majority communities in a space where previously there was very minimal to no dialogue between parties. - *There was no official dialogue before the Forum; they were very ad hoc and for specific projects only. For the first time in history, we established an official dialogue with non-majority communities and the government to conduct open and transparent dialogue."* (Kalaja, 2025)
- In addition to facilitating the Forum, ICO, through consultation with non-majority leaders, established the infrastructure needed to enable non-majority communities to revive proposals, identify priorities and make recommendations to influence policy - a member of the NGO Advocacy Center for Democratic Culture (ACDC) in North Mitrovica, who said: *"As a CSO, we have been waiting to participate in this Forum for really long time. Thank you for listening to the demands of CSOs and including minorities in this programme."* (Rapajić cited in ICO Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Kosovo) and ICO, 2024: p.15)
- This project is aligned with multiple actions from the Pact, including **Action 13, Action 16, Action 19.**

Future work: Kosovo

ICO has developed a strategy document outlining a structured approach to ensure that non-majority communities can effectively contribute to shaping policies that are impacting them (ICO, 2025[b]). The strategy objectives and their respective deliverables, (ICO, 2025[b]), are shown below.

Table 3: Proposed strategy for developing policy proposals for non-majority communities in Kosovo objectives and deliverables

Strategy objectives	Strategy Deliverables
1. Strengthen collaborative relationships among participants, fostering a shared commitment to social change.	*Enhanced collaborative relationships among participants, fostering a shared commitment to social change.*
2. Support the development of effective, sustainable policy proposals.	*All groups in the workshops will deliver a comprehensive policy proposal, which will include:* • *An evidence-based narrative explaining the need for the policy.* • *A detailed policy draft aligned with government strategy and priorities.* • *Recommendations for phased implementation and monitoring and evaluation.*
3. Build the capacity of members to advocate for and influence policy decisions by equipping them with the necessary skills to engage constructively within the Forum over the long term.	*Increased capacity of members to advocate for and influence policy decisions by equipping them with the necessary skills to engage constructively within the Forum over the long term.*

Source: ICO, 2025[b]

To achieve these objectives, four 2-hour workshops will take place, consisting of 5-10 participants from each of the seven non-majority communities represented in the Forum. These are Serbian, Roma, Ashkalia, Egyptians, Bosniaks, Turks, and Gorani. To ensure representation, inclusivity, and credibility in the workshop composition, each group should include diverse representation from: Private sector, Civil Society, Public Sector and Community Leaders, in addition to ensuring the inclusion of women and young people (ICO, 2025[b]). These workshops will be held within each community and are scheduled to take place in a span of four months: April, May, June and August, each spanning two days at the beginning of each of the allocated months (ICO, 2025[b]).

Beyond 2025, ICO aims to conduct a monitoring and evaluation assessment to understand how the issues are being addressed. This would then form the basis upon which ICO would create and adapt strategies to ensure the effectiveness of non-majority communities' participation in the policy and decision-making process going forward (Kalaja 2025). *"Now I am very optimistic for the future, we have compiled different elements that are very important. For example, one agreement between the ICO and the government of Kosovo each party has its own responsibilities, this is the first time there is an agreement to support non-majority communities in Kosovo...I think there will be huge improvements that are a direct result of the non-majority Forum."* (Kalaja, 2025).

Case study 4: Middle East - Israel and Palestine: confidential peace agreement facilitation between former leaders

As part of ICO's model of peacebuilding, specifically Diplomatic continuity, the ICO seeks to revive and re-engage in previously stalled negotiations. In this case, the Good Friday Agreement 1998 and the process leading up to it for the peaceful resolution of sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland were used as a best practice case study for the Israel-Palestine conflict. In Northern Ireland, peaceful resolution was achieved through a combination of top-down negotiations and grassroots initiatives that engaged marginalised groups (Mac Ginty et al., 2024). The legitimacy and inclusiveness of negotiations were enhanced by involving previously excluded groups in peace talks. Additionally, establishing consociational political institutions provided a framework for power-sharing, addressing the deep-seated divisions within the society (Todd, 2023).

The dialogue between Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Former Palestinian Foreign Minister Nasser Al-Kidwa was facilitated by ICO partners in Israel and Palestine Dr. Gershon Baskin and Mr. Samer Sinijlawi - who sought to devise an innovative plan for peace between the two parties and counter the narrative that frames peace between both parties as elusive (Baskin and Sinijlawi, 2025). The Plan is supported by civil society actors committed to Palestinian self-determination and a just resolution to the conflict.

The outcome of this dialogue was the formulation of a joint plan, the Olmert-Al-Kidwa Plan, which seeks to provide a pathway to peace and establish a permanent ceasefire (ICO, 2025, Vatican News, 2024, CNN 2024). The plan is based on mutual recognition, respect for the 1967 borders and the establishment of two independent states (ICO, 2025, Vatican News 2024). A summary of the main points of the plan is provided below (ICO, 2025[a], CNN 2024, AlHurra, 2024, Olmert and Al-Kidwa 2024).

The Plan reflects discussions between former leaders and seeks to reignite dialogue on pathways to a two-state solution, grounded in mutual recognition and international law.

The Plan outlines proposed elements for consideration:

- Immediate Ceasefire: The first priority is the cessation of hostilities, including the return of Israeli hostages held by Hamas and the release of Palestinian prisoners held in Israel.
- Gaza Withdrawal and Governance: Israel's withdrawal from Gaza will be followed by the creation of a new, legitimate governing body in Gaza. This will not be a faction-based administration but will instead be linked to the Palestinian Authority, ensuring both independence and recognition from Palestinians and international stakeholders.
- Territorial Adjustments: In order to address the reality on the ground, the plan proposes that 4.4% of the West Bank, particularly areas with large Israeli settlement blocs (including in Jerusalem), will be annexed to Israel. In return, an equivalent area within Israel will be annexed to the State of Palestine.
- Jerusalem: The heart of the conflict, Jerusalem, is to be placed under a unique arrangement. The Old City, which houses key religious sites, will not be under exclusive control by either Israel or Palestine. Instead, it will be managed by a trusteeship involving five countries, including both Israel and Palestine. This arrangement seeks to reflect the city's unique religious and cultural significance to all parties involved.
- Long-Term Vision: While the above outlines the contours of a potential peace agreement, the implementation of this vision will be entrusted to future generations of Israeli and Palestinian leaders who will need to negotiate the finer details and cement this framework into reality.

These proposals are intended to further dialogue and do not represent a negotiated agreement.

ICO additionally launched the Alliance for Two States, which seeks to show a genuine partnership between both parties for peace (ICO 2024[e], Baskin and Sinijlawi, 2025). This seeks to work in parallel to the Global Alliance for a Two-State Solution which is being led by Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud.

ICO's involvement was limited to facilitating dialogue and supporting regional partners committed to peaceful engagement. The plan reflects the views of the participating individuals and does not constitute an official position or endorsement by ICO.

The Alliance for Two States will leverage both bottom-up and top-down approaches to achieve its three objectives, which are:

- Goal 1: Renewing Confidence in the Feasibility of a Two-State Solution.
- Goal 2: Shaping Public Opinion among Israelis and Palestinians.
- Goal 3: Advocating for International Actions Supporting a Two-State Solution.

The principles reflected in the Plan are consistent with the spirit of the Arab Peace Initiative, reaffirming the right to statehood, mutual recognition, and a regional role in facilitating sustainable peace. The actions ICO took for the confidential dialogues, the resulting plan and the global alliance's establishment and expansion are aligned with multiple UN Pact actions, most significantly **Action 13, Action 16, Action 18** and **Action 21.**

Programme Outcome: Middle East

- High-level meetings among prominent world leaders, including His Holiness Pope Francis, French President Emmanuel Macron, and Foreign Ministers from Spain, Italy, the UAE, Morocco, and Germany (Baskin and Sinijlawi, 2025). Including one organised by High Representative Josep Borrell at the Council of Foreign Ministers of the European Union, which saw 26 countries discussing the Olmert-Al Kidwa vision (ICO 2025, ICO 2025[a], Vatican News, 2024).
- Public support and coverage of the Plan including CNN, Financial Times, Al Hurra, The Times of Israel, Universal Peace Federation (UPF) to name a few (CNN 2024, AlHurra, 2024, Olmert and Al-Kidwa 2024, The Times of Israel, 2024, Vatican News, 2024, Harris, 2024).

According to Dr Gershon Baskin and Mr Samer Sinijlawi, this raised awareness of the plan to prominent figures and world leaders, thus potentially revitalising the discussion on peacebuilding between the two parties (Baskin and Sinijlawi).

Future work: Middle East

ICO has created a 2025 strategy for future work addressing the Israel-Palestine conflict, focusing on launching projects and programmes that highlight the wider support for the two-state solution through expanding the global alliance's presence and increasing advocacy efforts. This will be achieved through four actions: 1) Public Engagement; 2) Grassroots mobilisation; 3) High-level diplomatic engagement; 4) Global Webinar Series. ICO recognises the complexity and sensitivity of the Israel–Palestine conflict and does not seek to prescribe a political solution. Rather, it supports dialogue initiatives grounded in justice, human rights, and the aspirations of affected communities. In addition, some members of the local affected community and ICO partners in Israel and Palestine stated that they are also working on arranging a high-level diplomatic and public engagement for 1,000 important Palestinian and Israeli individuals in a joint meeting in Paris, for which they already received an invitation from President Macron (Baskin and Sinijlawi, 2025). There continues to be belief in the potential for a sustainable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: *"There were very successful cases like the Emirates agreement, the ties were not even damaged, which proves that something positive can happen in the Middle East and it could become very strong on a solid basis that sustains for a long time."* (Baskin and Sinijlawi, 2025).

Best Practice for the implementation of the UN Pact for the Future

Theory of Change

Effective implementation of bottom-up led approaches:
ICO adopts a community-centred approach, where it works with marginalised communities at the grassroots level to upskill their capacities and equip them with the tools and skills to participate in the peacebuilding process (ICO 2022[d]. ICO's participatory approach involves working with stakeholders from these communities who have been engaged in peacebuilding for long periods of time and thus can share their knowledge and strategies and lead future direction (Shey 2025). As a member of the local affected community and ICO partner in Kosovo explains, the Forum for Non-Majority or minority Issues, a platform which enables dialogue between minority communities and public institutions, prioritises solutions that *"come from the communities"*, as a result the initiative has a more "*inclusive and sustainable approach*" (Kalaja, 2025).

Effective empowerment of marginalised groups:
ICO works with and for marginalised groups — especially women, children and girls — to enhance their ability to participate meaningfully in shaping their societies.

This includes: capacity- building for minority leaders, civil society organisations, and local institutions; legal empowerment and civic education to strengthen engagement; skills development and economic opportunity creation to build community resilience. By equipping minority groups with the tools to participate in governance, demand accountability, and advocate for their rights, ICO seeks to lay the groundwork for inclusive development and self-determination. ICO integrates the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on including women in peacebuilding into all aspects of its work (Holmes 2025). In conflict-affected settings, ICO works to bring women's voices to the peacebuilding table, allowing for gender mainstreaming within peacebuilding processes. ICO work on the inclusion of young people further supports the Youth, Peace and Security agenda of UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015).

Acknowledging that empowerment alone is only part of the solution, ICO also takes corresponding actions and works in parallel to reform and strengthen public institutions so they can accommodate diversity, protect rights, and support inclusive governance. This includes: supporting institutions such as public conciliators to better handle complaints and resolve disputes fairly; helping local and national bodies integrate gender-sensitive, inclusive, and transparent practices; and establishing sustainable mechanisms for minority inclusion in national political and peacebuilding dialogues — from permanent forums and councils to consultative platforms. By doing this, ICO does not just support access; it shapes structures that guarantee access — institutionalising participation as a norm, not an exception.

Effective support for socio-economic revitalisation:

One of the main aims of ICO is not only to provide solutions to current and existing peace and security issues, but to provide long-lasting, self-sufficient solutions that allow for the creation of sustainable peace. ICO recognises that one vital means to achieve this objective is socio-economic revitalisation - a purposeful goal that extends the frontier of traditional peacebuilding processes. ICO focuses on community-driven economic projects that sustain livelihoods and reduce economic inequalities, an issue which plays a significant role in sustaining conflict (ICO, 2022[e]). This is supported by evidence that shows that the economic situation in a country or community is a major influencing factor of conflict and insecurity in that environment (ICO 2022[e]). ICO has launched numerous innovative programmes to support economic revitalisation, including community-driven development projects and incubator programmes for communities where MSMEs, often the backbone of the economy in developing countries, can be strengthened and grown with the aim of increasing direct employment and economic inclusion and leadership. ICO has organised multiple business and entrepreneurship competitions, through its partner Management International University (MIU), in Cameroon, Kosovo, Lebanon and Nigeria. Students selected from the competition are given seed-funding as investment to start their business, as well as guidance from investor experts to support them in implementing their business plan (Grant, 2025). Ibrahima is a Nigerian student who managed to launch a lucrative vegetable farming business as a direct result of the courses he took at MIU (African Climate Reporters, 2024). He notes: *"As I reflect on my journey so far, I am incredibly grateful for the knowledge, skills, and experiences I gained at MIU. The education I received has empowered me to take bold steps in both journalism and business. I am eager to continue learning, growing, and expanding my ventures to create more opportunities for myself and others in the future."* (Yakubu, 2025).

ICO works on embedding minorities into the economic fabric of a community, to strengthen social cohesion and reduce grievance-driven conflict. To achieve this, ICO also champions: economic empowerment of minority communities through business support; funding mechanisms (e.g., the Economic Prosperity Fund in Kosovo), and access to markets; cross-community economic cooperation as a peacebuilding tool (e.g., in Cyprus' buffer zone initiatives and investment fairs). In addition to championing structural reforms that address geographic and ethnic disparities in opportunity and development.

Effectively diplomatic continuity within reconciliation initiatives:

ICO recognises that this type of peacebuilding work is a long-term endeavour that requires agility, adaptability, and continuous communication. The long-term nature of peacebuilding work produces a number of interdependent socio-political challenges, including distrust, lack of political will, intergenerational trauma, and divisive historical narratives which accumulate over time. The underlying issues of conflict are compounded by these 'secondary consequences' which present significant obstacles to peacebuilding progress. ICO's approach is to build on previous progress by bringing key stakeholders back to the negotiating table. It aims to achieve this through innovation and thinking outside the box to develop new ideas, offering the negotiating parties a new perspective, comparative analysis and best practices from other cases to hopefully enable them to adapt their perspectives and combine old thinking with new ideas.

One prominent approach ICO uses is engaging in 'Track 1.5 diplomacy' (ICO 2022[c]). Since its inception, ICO has prioritised informal diplomacy efforts with civil society and those working in peacebuilding. ICO leverages its low profile and closed-door mediations to re-engage, revive and progress peacebuilding efforts aimed at developing working agreements to change the status quo (ICO 2022[c]. Whether it is convening non-majority communities in Kosovo to develop shared priorities or creating space for dialogue in Cameroon ICO takes an impartial and strategic role to help shift power dynamics in peacebuilding and ensures that political transitions do not simply reproduce the inequalities of the past. It does this through building trust between parities, amplifying grassroots perspectives and integrating them into political dialogue and advocating for peace agreements that secure genuine autonomy, legal protections, and governance frameworks that reflect the needs of marginalised communities.

Best Practice

Based on the expertise and lessons learnt from the work outlined in this report, ICO recommends the following key considerations for strategy and methodology building:

- *Develop* local actors' capabilities with the skills needed to successfully instigate positive change in their communities, whereby community beneficiaries may be the proposers, leaders and evaluators of proposals (rather than merely consulted bodies).

- *Embark* upon reconciliation efforts, wherein structural and normative changes occur in parallel, recognizing their nature as mutually reinforcing.

- *Integrate* agility and adaptability to the context and the situation on the ground, wherein a series of 'presently undetermined choices' is in-built in programme design so decision-making may be undertaken in conjunction with project evolution.

- *Advocate* and emphasise the value of long-term efforts aimed at enhancing communities' readiness to engage in constructive dialogue and reach peace agreements in approaches which are inter-generational and future-orientated.

- *Empower* local funding and leaders to help mitigate dependency dynamics and promote local agency.

- *Build* and create sustainable mechanisms and frameworks which laterally nurture the civic space and grassroots organisations, enabling local actors to participate in the peacebuilding discussions, with transparent communication and accountability mechanisms.

- *Promote* marginalised, vulnerable and historically excluded communities in governance, peacebuilding and political dialogues and discussions, so outcomes may be both inclusive and lasting.

- *Plan* for changing interdependencies within socio-political systems and development contexts.

- *Recognise* in conflict affected settings, institutions and bodies commonly not only fulfil their original purpose, but assume several secondary purposes, with 'mandate acquisition' being particularly common in public service delivery.

- *Ensure* channels of communication between minority and marginalised communities to prevent the likelihood of misalignment between the governments' perception of the needs of the communities, which may leave communities' needs unmet, regardless of new government initiatives.

- *Design* reconciliation strategies which acknowledge conflict transformation must occur both at the level of the individual (individual perspectives shift to believe in reconciliation) and at the level of the community (collective narratives shift to frame reconciliation as possible and desirable).

- *Protect* the possibility of future peace by combatting practices where conflict and prejudice is 'taught' across generations through modalities such as formal education.

- *Evaluate* activities with the understanding that any intervention into a context will (from its conception) become 'part' of the context, and no longer external to it.

Looking Ahead

This report outlines specific examples of best practice drawn from ICO's core programmes in Cameroon, Cyprus, Kosovo and the Middle East, in the hope they contribute to the evolving debates concerning the implementation and lasting realisation of the UN Pact for the Future.

The report's launch marks a significant step in ICO's ongoing efforts to enhance its presence in New York in the years ahead, for better engagement with member states and other stakeholders on implementation of the actions and commitments set out in the UN Pact for the Future.

ICO has scheduled a review of its work against the Pact and its progress in September/October 2028, in line with the review of the overall implementation of the Pact during the 83rd session of the General Assembly, as mandated in resolution A/RES/79/1 (UN 2024, UN 2025).

ICO notes the intergovernmental negotiations of the Pact took stock of input provided by diverse stakeholders through 'impact coalitions' and commends the efforts to ensure the actions and commitments set out in the Pact were holistic and inclusive.

Moving forward, ICO encourages the continuation of ongoing multi-stakeholder dialogue regarding the implementation of the Pact, which centres best practice, recognising the benefit of cross-stakeholder learning, and preserving institutional memory when addressing systemic and structural challenges.

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