

# EUNPACK

## UNPACKING THE EU'S INTEGRATED APPROACH TO CONFLICT & CRISES

In 2016-19, researchers from 13 universities and think-tanks studied the European Union's integrated approach to conflict and crises under the EUNPACK project, funded by the European Commission as part of the Horizon 2020 Programme. They conducted more than 1,300 interviews with people directly affected by conflict, in Afghanistan, Mali, Iraq, Libya, Kosovo, and Ukraine, analysing to what extent the EU's response was indeed conflict-sensitive and developing a set of recommendations to make the EU's integrated approach to conflict and crises more responsive to local needs.

Since adopting a 'comprehensive approach' to crisis management in 2013, the EU has spent considerable time and energy on streamlining its approach and improving internal coordination. New and protracted crises, from the conflict in Ukraine to the rise of Daesh in Syria and Iraq, and the refugee situation in North Africa and the Sahel, have made the improvement of external crisis-response capacities a top priority. But the implementation of the EU's policies on the ground has received less scholarly and policy attention than the EU's actorness and institutional capacity-building, and studies of implementation have often been guided primarily by a theoretical or normative agenda.

The main objective of the EUNPACK project has been to unpack EU crisis response mechanisms and provide new insights how they are being received and perceived on the ground by both local beneficiaries and other external stakeholders. By introducing a bottom-up perspective combined with an institutional approach, the project has tried to break with the dominant line of scholarship on EU crisis response that has tended to view only one side of the equation, namely the EU itself.

Thus, in addition to interviews in Brussels, the EUNPACK project team have conducted fieldwork in countries of EU crisis response, interviewing key personnel from local and international organisations, including representatives of EU delegations and programmes, and conducted surveys on people's perceptions about the EU's crisis response on the ground.

The approach applied by the EUNPACK project team has made it possible to explore local agencies and perceptions in target countries without losing sight of the EU's institutions and their expectations and ambitions. It has allowed us to analyse the full cycle of dynamic events, from EU intentions, motivations and subsequent implementation, to local actors' perceptions and reactions, and back again to EU intentions and understanding.

Thus, the project has been attentive to the local level in target countries as well as to the EU level and the connections between them. The research has been conducted through an inductive and systematic empirical research combining competencies from two research traditions that so far has had little interaction, namely peace and conflict studies and EU studies.



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A CONFLICT SENSITIVE UNPACKING OF  
THE EU COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH  
TO CONFLICT AND CRISES MECHANISM



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## EUNPACK DEVELOPED FIVE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS THAT CAN BE APPLIED ACROSS THE UNIVERSE OF EU CRISIS RESPONSE

- 1** **First**, the EU needs to get a better grip on the real needs of the people on the ground. This can only be achieved by establishing a sound local knowledge base built on micro-political approaches to grounded data and intelligence gathering. The EU needs to establish contacts with local civil society organisation and other traditional and non-traditional sources of knowledge and information. This might also be facilitated by some innovative thinking about diplomatic representation from the EU side. Instead of high turnover of generalists, it might be better to have longer term postings of personnel with in depth competence and interests for the country where they are stationed.
- 2** **Second**, the EU needs to institutionalise systematic procedures for vertical lessons learnt about local root causes of conflict and how they can be addressed most effectively in a legitimate and transparent manner.
- 3** **Third**, the EU must be clearer about its intentions and objectives and acknowledge and work with local beneficiaries to overcome the 'information-local ownership' gap. The EU must improve its capacity to communicate clearly with a broad spectrum of the population when it is engaged in a crisis response.
- 4** **Fourth**, the EU must recognise that its priorities – notably the fight against terrorism and halting migration – are not necessarily aligned with the interests of various segments of the local population. EU representatives must actively try to work with, instead of against, local populations' views and ideas in this regard.
- 5** **Fifth**, the EU always needs to combine short-term crisis response with more long-term engagement to avoid unintended consequences. Fragile countries are not only those most in need of external crisis response, but also those where it will be most difficult to get such external programming to work due to a combination of very weak domestic administrative capacity and often governments without much real popular legitimacy.

### HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE RESEARCH



**In Mali**, EUNPACK found that despite years of EU engagement, approximately half of the respondents (from a sample of Malians in Bamako who had been involved with the EU either professionally or as direct beneficiaries) had so little knowledge about what the EU is doing that they could not come up with an answer concerning their level of satisfaction with EU support. They simply did not know whether they were satisfied with EU assistance to security sector reform, governance and capacity-building, development aid and humanitarian assistance. This points to a huge democratic deficit as people are not aware of crucial processes in their own country.



**In Libya**, a lack of conflict sensitivity on the part of the EU has been most evident in the EU's outsourcing of migration management to Libyan authorities and the setting up of detention centres, which fuelled a criminal economy of exploitation and trafficking. The EU may have unintentionally empowered non-state armed actors and militias, given the links that exist between security officers and trafficking networks on the ground.



**In Iraq**, the EU approaches the whole of the country as a single unit, while on the ground no such entity exists. Implementing the same projects in all governorates, as the EU tends to do, lacks the sensitivity to local context and conflict needed to gain a more sustainable impact.



**In Kosovo and Serbia**, the EU's approach to stabilisation through the dialogue process between Kosovo and Serbia may have come at the expense of contributing to building transparency and democracy as some of the individuals the EU relies on in this regard are the very same that a significant number of the general public believe should have been investigated by EULEX.