

Concept Paper

2024–2028

**bicc **

Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies gGmbH
Pfarrer-Byns-Straße 1, 53121 Bonn, Germany, +49 (0)228 91196-0, bicc@bicc.de, www.bicc.de

Director \ Geschäftsführer Prof. Dr. Conrad Schetter

Chair of the Supervisory Board \ Vorsitzender des Aufsichtsrats Thorsten Menne

Register of Companies \ Handelsregister Bonn HRB 6717

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Preface

This *Concept Paper* (2024-2028) is the third in a series that sets the scientific direction of BICC for a period of five years each. The renaming of the Institute from 'Conversion' to 'Conflict Studies' in 2021 was an essential milestone in the preparation of this third *Concept Paper*. For this reason, it is not simply a continuation of the previous Concept Papers but realigns the Institute's orientation and vision.

At the heart of BICC's work are violent conflicts, which we study in terms of their conditions, dynamics and consequences. As a relatively small institute, we are certainly not in a position to study the full complexity of violent conflicts. That is why we concentrate on themes in which BICC already has a proven track record. However, to make a difference, BICC has two unique selling points: First, it conducts empirical research in conflict-prone countries, which gives us insights into conflict events that are not often found in research. Second, at BICC, political advice is just as important as research. That is why we are always trying to find innovative ways to improve the links between research and political decision-making with the aim of contributing to a more peaceful world.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to all colleagues at BICC who have contributed to the preparation of this *Concept Paper*. In particular, I would like to thank BICC's Head of Research, Marc von Boemcken, who held the strings together in the process of drafting this Concept Paper, organising targeted discussions at BICC and succinctly bringing together all our ideas that emerged as we worked on this paper. I would also like to thank BICC's International Board, whose thoughtful and perceptive comments helped to improve the Paper.

I hope you enjoy reading it.

Professor Conrad Schetter, September 2023

Introduction

The need to make the world a more peaceful—or at least less violent—place remains as high as ever on the agenda of civil society organisations, local communities, many national governments and international organisations. Given the multiple intersecting crises and potentially far-reaching social transformations we are experiencing, this task has perhaps never been as challenging and complex as it is today.

The Russian attack on Ukraine and renewed arms dynamics across Europe and NATO members will profoundly shape societies for years, if not generations, to come. Beyond the war in eastern Europe, many conflicts, some latent, others manifest and hardly less destructive in their impact on human life, continue to undermine the prospects for non-violent social orders worldwide. The rivalry between the United States and China, fuelled by the unresolved dispute over the status of Taiwan, poses a looming threat of full-scale war in the Pacific region. Beyond the conflicts between great powers, the emergence of non-state armed groups that challenge fragile state structures represents an equally worrying dynamic. Many such groups are gaining a foothold throughout the Sahel region of Sub-Saharan Africa. In war-torn Afghanistan, the Taliban have even taken control of the government. The Middle East remains riven by multiple conflicts between states and religious or ethnic groups along demographic and socio-economic lines and between opposing political camps within societies themselves. In Latin America, conflicts between organised criminal groups have reached levels of destruction comparable to some of the deadliest civil wars in other parts of the world. While some violent conflicts may seem distant from a European perspective, they are very much connected to states and people in the European Union—through arms exports, military interventions, development cooperation, terrorist attacks and extremist radicalisation, disrupted supply and transport routes and migration and forced displacement.

The highly dynamic landscape of global conflict is constantly evolving against the backdrop of dramatic changes in the global ecosystem as a result of the climate crisis. Climatic stressors feed socio-political tensions and violence. Inadequate governance responses to droughts, floods, water scarcity and energy shortages contribute to the rapid deterioration of people's living conditions, especially in poorer countries. Sustaining livelihoods increasingly depends on the ability to be mobile. Emerging patterns of migration and forced displacement are, in turn, transforming established sedentary societies around the world. Fuelled by populist, anti-liberal and racist discourses, which are gaining support in many places, people frequently perceive migrants as a potential threat to their way of life. Questions of social inclusion and maintaining a modicum of social cohesion in the face of mobility, demographic change and political polarisation continue to preoccupy policymakers. In parallel with these developments, we are only just beginning to understand the potentially far-reaching impact of emerging technologies in the field of artificial intelligence (AI) on the conduct of warfare, the governance of mobility and societies more broadly in the not-too-distant future.

Recent developments in the Sahel, the Middle East and Afghanistan clearly suggest that the interventionary logic informing concepts such as state-building or 'stabilisation' has failed. Fresh thinking is required to develop recommendations to curb violent conflicts. In particular, sustainable measures to prevent, transform and overcome violent conflicts must look beyond their immediate triggers. They require a comprehensive analysis of various political, environmental, economic, technological, and social factors. There is a political need to understand the broader conditions, dynamics and consequences of violent conflicts. BICC (Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies) is well-placed to meet this need in the coming years. Its research agenda covers violent conflicts themselves as well as the wider contexts in which they

take place. These include the climate crisis, migration and displacement, social polarisation and AI-driven technologies.

We seek to understand the conditions of violent conflict to strengthen capacities for prevention, early warning, and strategic foresight. We study the dynamics of violent conflict to identify means of transforming conflict and ending or at least minimising violence. We examine the consequences of violent conflict to develop recommendations for reducing the risk of future outbreaks of violence.

This *Concept Paper* outlines our core theme, our thematic areas, our overall approach to research and transfer, our key ethical principles and our partnership strategy for the years 2024 to 2028.

The Institute

Since the late 1990s, BICC has been one of the leading institutes for peace and conflict research. It was founded in 1994 as a non-profit, non-partisan institute by the states of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) and Brandenburg. In 2015, BICC became a founding member of the Johannes-Rau-Forschungsgemeinschaft (JRF), the umbrella organisation of the legally independent, non-university research institutes that receive funding from NRW.

In legal terms, BICC is a non-profit limited liability company (gGmbH). Since 2021, its sole shareholder has been the State of NRW. BICC's three decision-making bodies are the BICC Shareholders, the Supervisory Board and the Managing Director. The tasks and responsibilities of these bodies as well as those of BICC's honorary International Board are laid down in its Articles of Association (Gesellschaftsvertrag) of 26 August 2021.

Our History: From Conversion to Conflict Studies

BICC was originally founded as the "Bonn International Center for Conversion". At the time of its founding, BICC was the only institute in the world to focus on defence conversion, i.e. the reuse of resources formerly used by the military for civilian purposes. However, the heyday of conversion passed in the late 1990s as global defence expenditures began to rise again. In line with these changes, BICC gradually changed its thematic portfolio and developed a broader understanding of conversion in the context of conflict transformation. Finally, in 2021, it changed its name to the "Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies".

BICC's Management Structure and Staff

Internally, BICC is headed by a Director, whose position is institutionally linked to a professorship for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Bonn. The Director is part of a Senior Management Team (SMT) consisting of a Head of Finance and Administration, a Head of Research, a Head of Advice and Scientific Transfer and a Head of Research Infrastructure and Data. The decision-making process of senior management is regulated in the Rules of Procedure (Geschäftsordnung).

Research and advisory work at BICC are carried out in and through projects, each of which is coordinated by a project leader. Project leadership is a temporary assignment by the SMT to staff members. Project leaders work closely with the SMT and administrative staff to achieve their individual project goals.

In 2023, BICC has 73 staff members. 38 staff members from a highly multi-disciplinary spectrum (e.g., Anthropology, Area Studies, Geography, Peace and Conflict Studies, Development Studies, Economics, Political Science, Sociology) are directly involved in research, coordination and advisory work. They are supported by 18 student assistants. In addition, 17 staff members belong to the management and administration or take care of BICC's communication and research infrastructure (IT, library, publications).

Our Core Expertise: Violent Conflict

BICC aims to contribute to a more peaceful world by generating knowledge and policy-relevant insights on the conditions, dynamics, and consequences of violent conflicts.

Conditions, Dynamics and Consequences of Violent Conflicts

In addition to conflict dynamics, BICC focuses on the conditions and consequences of violent conflicts. This approach allows us to go beyond a limited concern with violent conflicts per se as they unfold today and to consider the complex parameters that will shape the violent conflicts of tomorrow. We are as much concerned with generating knowledge to help transform or end violent conflicts and reduce the levels of actual violence as we are with prevention.

Any distinction between 'conditions', 'dynamics' and 'consequences' of violent conflict is artificial and abstract. All three dimensions tend to be highly intertwined, and they are not easily separated along the linear chronological axis that they imply. The main reason for using them is to open up the study of violent conflict to a broader social inquiry that goes beyond the mere exchange of violence between opposing parties. They provide the basic points of reference for outlining the broad lines—and objectives—of our research and advisory work.

Conditions of violent conflicts refer to all the factors that contribute to causing and enabling violent conflict—during, before and after the outbreak of violence. Three aspects are relevant here: First, social inequalities can, besides other factors, lead to violent conflict. Conflicts may be created or maintained by, for example, environmental changes and socio-economic structures. Second, conditions for violent conflict are related to levels of social cohesion and fragmentation. Conflicts are often fuelled by political polarisation, radicalisation and nationalist, racist, patriarchal and dehumanising worldviews in societies, that is, symbolic practices that legitimise either the use of direct violence or the reproduction of inequalities based on, for example, wealth, gender, sexuality, ethnic positioning or other perceived differences. Third, violent conflict between groups of people requires a certain organisation of violence: the development, establishment and management of the means and institutions necessary for the use of physical force. This includes, for instance, various weapons systems and military technologies as well as the armed forces, the police and non-state armed groups.

Thus, the conditions for violent conflict can be found in the material means and structures of organised violence as much as in deliberate policies, social inequalities and hate speech. BICC seeks to explore the complex interrelationships between all of these enabling factors. In doing

so, we aim to understand the emergence and continuation of violent conflicts and to improve capacities for early warning, strategic foresight and prevention.

Actual practices of violence and their links to shifting social relations and power structures are at the heart of the *dynamics of violent conflict*. This includes the concrete doings of different actors, whether they are direct parties to the conflict or not, and the overall policies and strategies that shape them. Research may focus on third parties' international or transnational involvement in conflict-affected environments, be it humanitarian relief efforts, development programmes, peacebuilding initiatives, or military or police interventions. It may also examine the mobilisation and actions of armed groups as well as changing military doctrines, civil-military relations and the use of weapons systems and technologies.

One of the aims of conducting research into the dynamics of violent conflicts is to identify the factors that explain either the intensification of violence or its de-escalation and cessation. The knowledge gained may contribute to the development of more effective measures to ensure the non-violent resolution of conflicts, for example, by improving arms control and developing new formats for communication, reconciliation and peacebuilding between opposing parties.

Consequences of violent conflicts refer to the short- and long-term effects of violence and the various problems they cause. They do not necessarily refer to a time 'after' the violent conflict but to all the direct and indirect effects of a particular act of violence, including social inequalities. During the conflict itself, its destructive consequences fall heavily on the civilian population, which is often deliberately targeted. Women, for example, are often affected differently by violent conflict than men. LGBTQIA+ people may also experience conflicts differently than heterosexual and cis persons. Beyond the immediate and short-term effects, the aftermath of large-scale violent conflict continues to affect societies for long periods of time and over long distances, sometimes traumatising entire generations. The effects of forced displacement, following conflicts in Ukraine, the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, have also been felt—albeit to a much lesser extent—in BICC's home state of North Rhine-Westphalia.

Social orders that emerge from conflict and violence may well produce structural inequalities, discursive constructs and policies that create the conditions for violence to erupt again in the future. By exploring the many consequences of violent conflict, we aim to make concrete recommendations on how to deal with the aftermath of violence and improve the prospects for lasting peace.

Topics

Between 2024 and 2028, BICC's research and advisory work on the conditions, dynamics, and consequences of violent conflict will take place within the following five topics: 1) Building Peace and Social Cohesion; 2) Militarisation and Arms Control; 3) Environment, Infrastructure and Sustainability; 4) Agents and Patterns of Security and War; 5) Migration and Forced Displacement.

We recognise that these topics do not cover all areas relevant to a comprehensive understanding of violent conflict. The choice is based on our current in-house knowledge, research interests and normative preferences. The five topics represent the focus that organises BICC's project work and informs BICC's strategy for acquiring new projects in the period 2024–2028.

Each topic should ultimately encompass several research and advisory activities. Some topics may resonate more closely with conditions or consequences of violent conflict, while others may be more concerned with the actual conflict dynamics (see Figure). To reiterate: The distinction between these three dimensions is far from clear-cut. Potentially, any topic could touch on issues related to the conditions, dynamics, or consequences of violent conflict.

Topics and Dimensions in Violent Conflict Research at BICC

Topics/Dimensions	Conditions	Dynamics	Consequences
Building Peace and Social Cohesion	●	●	●
Militarisation and Arms Control	●●	●	●
Environment- and Infrastructure-related Conflicts	●●	●	●
Agents and Patterns of Security and War	●	●●	●
Migration and Forced Displacement	●	●	●●

●●● Current strength of focus

The five topics of BICC are:

Building Peace and Social Cohesion

Societies all around the world are divided by multiple conflict lines driven by interlinked political, religious, ethnic and economic factors. Research at BICC asks what can be done to strengthen social cohesion and contribute to peace in different settings (states, societies, localities). We base our research on the experiences and perceptions of the actors involved. Our research pays attention to competing visions of social cohesion and aims to identify common ground where there is potential to negotiate and strengthen peace. This sometimes requires a critical engagement with established normative assumptions about effective peacebuilding institutions and practices, such as the role of the state. Our research focuses on the tensions and potential for peace within societies. It also looks beyond state borders, seeking to understand the interests of different actors and lines of conflict in a transnational context. Topics of interest include measures to prevent and counter violent extremism and de-radicalise violent extremists, the humanitarian–development–peace nexus as a new approach for third-party engagement in conflict-affected environments, programmes for the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants, and issues of reconciliation and transitional justice in the aftermath of violent conflicts.

Selected projects (2023):

- / 'How can the HDP-Nexus succeed? NGOs between humanitarian assistance, development cooperation and peacebuilding' (funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development).
- / 'CoRE NRW—Connecting Research on Extremisms in North Rhine-Westphalia' (commissioned by the Ministry for Culture and Science NRW).

Militarisation and Arms Control

The availability and quality of weapons influence the incentives and opportunities to use violence. They affect the likelihood of violent conflict and shape the behaviour of state and non-state actors during the conflict. BICC examines the various effects of armament, militarisation and arms control at different levels and tries to reduce their potentially harmful impact on societies. First, we map the global dynamics of militarisation as reflected in government defence spending, armed forces personnel and heavy weapons systems. By studying the impact of militarisation on development, we contribute to creating knowledge about the so-called

security–development nexus. Second, we are interested in the local impact of militarisation and international arms and technology transfers, particularly in developing countries and conflict regions. We focus on the impact of arms transfers on regional conflicts and human rights and on changes in military–government and military–society relations. Third, we look at how to manage access to small arms and light weapons (SALW). We aim to achieve practical arms control by developing and delivering national and regional training courses, supporting the harmonisation of weapons and ammunition management standards and undertaking related capacity-building activities in partnership with national, regional and international partner organisations. We want to develop evidence-based approaches to understanding and mitigating the problems posed by the cross-border trafficking of SALW, the challenges of dealing with SALW in transitional settings and the stockpiling of SALW in civilian contexts.

Selected Projects (2023):

- / 'Security, Armament and Development in Recipient States of German Arms Exports' (funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development).
- / 'Small Arms Control in Sub-Saharan Africa' (funded by the German Federal Foreign Office).

Environment and Infrastructure-related Conflicts

The existence of different and competing worldviews of people regarding the access, control, exploitation and use of renewable and non-renewable natural resources, such as water, land, minerals or grazing land, provides a point of reference around which social conflicts can develop and potentially turn violent. In addition, many marginalised and poor people around the world are under increasing pressure from resource scarcity induced by climate change. Large-scale infrastructure, economic development and nature conservation projects hold out the promise of a better future but can also impede some people's access to certain resources and threaten their local livelihood strategies. The climate crisis and future-oriented development schemes drive socio-ecological transformation processes that are a source of social and political tension. By examining the challenges caused by the climate crisis, food insecurity, land-use change and the governance of access to land, BICC aims to develop an applied understanding of sustainability that particularly addresses the relationship between violent conflict and social inequalities.

Selected projects (2023):

- / 'Future Rural Africa: Violent Futures? Contestations along frontiers in East Africa' (Collaborative Research Centre, funded by the DFG).
- / 'China's New Silk Road Initiative in North Rhine-Westphalia and Pakistan' (funded by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Science).
- / 'Food Security and Conflict Dynamics in Northern Kenya' (commissioned by Caritas).

Agents and Patterns of Security and War

A crucial element in understanding violent conflicts is the analysis of practices and structures of organised violence. How do people secure themselves from violence, and how do they collectively exercise violence against others? BICC studies practices of security-making and war-making at different levels of social organisation. We examine the different ways vulnerable groups secure themselves against external threats in their everyday lives, and we critically reflect on the—often violent—practices of securitisation, which may secure some people but make others less secure. We also analyse ongoing transformations in the conduct of warfare and seek to understand their wider social, political and ethical implications. The availability of new technologies and their application to warfare and mobility control is changing military doctrine and practice in many places around the world, not just in Western countries. We are interested in military AI applications as well as the proliferation of long-range precision strike weapons

(e.g., cruise missiles, precision-guided munitions or drones). We also examine the interplay between kinetic and hybrid warfare, disinformation, and the soft, smart and sharp power techniques for legitimising organised violence. Finally, we look at various aspects of the organisation of armed groups, both regular and irregular, including the economic dimension (e.g. illicit economies). Our research analyses their incentives and motivations, everyday practices, process dimensions, networks and organisational structures, social embeddedness, as well as resource endowments and -constraints. In particular, we follow the trajectories of individuals as they move in and out of armed groups, including their transition back to civilian life.

Selected projects (2023):

- / On the road to liquid warfare? The consequences of the proliferation of modern military technology on the warfare of autocratic states and non-state armed actors' (funded by the DFG).
- / 'Regional approaches to dealing with armed groups in the Sahel' (funded by the German Federal Foreign Office).

Migration and Forced Displacement

In June 2023, the United Nations reported that the number of forcibly displaced people had reached a record high of 110 million. BICC conducts empirical research on the mobility and livelihood strategies of migrants, refugees and other displaced persons, their local and transnational support and solidarity networks and their prospects for local integration and return and reintegration. We also examine the causes and consequences of protracted displacement, encampment and forced immobility, and how these affect the relations between displaced persons, returnees and their host communities. This requires, among other things, critical analyses of the political economy of forced displacement, (re-)integration processes and border regimes, as well as the policies, discourses and governance structures that enable or constrict people's movements, livelihoods and social relations. We conduct extensive empirical research on migration and forced displacement in a variety of settings in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe—ranging from regions of violent conflict and transit zones to places of temporary or permanent settlement. Using qualitative, quantitative and participatory methods, we seek to better understand the daily lives, coping strategies and perspectives of migrants and displaced persons aiming to support the development of solutions to displacement that are centred on the rights, needs and priorities of the affected groups themselves. We provide policy advice and actively engage in dialogue with key stakeholders and public debates on migration, forced displacement, integration and return.

Selected projects (2023):

- / 'Attitudes and Practices in Minority Returns after Conflict-induced Displacement' (funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development).
- / 'GAPs—Decentering the Study of Migrant Returns and Readmission Policies in Europe and Beyond' (funded by the European Union/Horizon Europe).
- / 'Forced Migration and Refugee Studies: Networking and Knowledge Transfer' (funded by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Science).

Cross-cutting topic: Gender

Across all five topics, BICC pays particular attention to gendered dynamics. We acknowledge that we live in a patriarchal social order. Power hierarchies are often gendered and discriminate against women and everyone who is considered 'other', i.e., does not conform to traditional male and female roles. Furthermore, gender has long been conceptualised in a binary way, thereby discriminating against and subjugating gender identities like trans and non-binary persons. These power hierarchies not only have a fundamental impact on how societies are shaped, they

are also crucial to understanding violent conflict. Societies with high gender inequality are more prone to intrastate conflict. The higher the level of structural and physical violence against women, the lesser the political and economic security of a state. Moreover, particularly vulnerable groups like the LGBTQIA+ communities are often the first to be targeted by populist politics or in situations of instability. At BICC, gender is an important cross-cutting issue that informs our research and policy advice across all topics. We follow a gender-sensitive approach that is aware of various sexual orientations and gender identifications in our research and advisory activities.

Diversity and Gender Equality at BICC

The BICC Culture Code of 21 September 2017 provides the overall guidelines on how BICC staff should behave towards each other. It emphasises that BICC's work is enriched by the diversity of its staff. Everyone at the Institute should behave accordingly and treat their colleagues with respect. The Culture Code is binding for all staff members. It also sets out procedures for dealing with internal conflicts and workload management as well as BICC's non-discrimination policy and leadership role model. The Culture Code is supplemented by BICC's Gender Equality Plan (GEP) of 12 September 2022. BICC strives for gender equality in all aspects of its work.

Our Approach: Research, Transfer and Advice

BICC is a non-partisan, non-profit organisation. We conduct empirical research and provide advisory services on the conditions, dynamics and consequences of violent conflicts. We produce innovative findings and recommendations that inform academics, policymakers, practitioners and the public alike. Our main goal is to stimulate academic and policy debates with a view to promoting less violent social relations and less suffering. Our approaches are often unconventional and may challenge commonly held explanatory frameworks. We adhere to strict ethical guidelines. We work in close cooperation with local, national and international partners. While we receive funding from a variety of sources, including government bodies, our research is always independent. However, as BICC is heavily dependent on third-party funding, we recognise that our research agenda is in part influenced by funding decisions made elsewhere.

Research

BICC is a research institute. We strive for scientific excellence and regularly publish our findings in high-impact, open-access international peer-reviewed journals. In addition to adhering to recognised national standards of academic practice, our research continues to be guided by three basic principles:

- / BICC's research is *policy-relevant*. We want to make a difference in the world. We prepare and present the findings of our research in such a way that they reach relevant stakeholders and decision-makers.
- / BICC's research is *problem-oriented* and *interdisciplinary*. Given the complexity of studying the many facets of violent conflict, we recognise that relevant research results can often only be achieved by approaching a concrete problem from an interdisciplinary perspective, which is not constrained by the logic of disciplinary boundaries.
- / BICC's research is *reflective*. We always disclose and critically reflect on our basic normative assumptions. Critical reflection also means giving serious thought to the normative validity of one's own research objectives.

Scientific practice at BICC follows the Guidelines of the German Research Foundation (DFG) for Safeguarding Good Research Practice. In 2023, an internal directive came into force that implements the current DFG Codex and obliges all researchers at BICC to adhere to it. BICC has

its own mechanisms for dealing with cases of scientific misconduct, including an in-house ombudsperson.

BICC Working Groups

BICC Working Groups cut across the project structure at BICC. Their purpose is to promote wider communication and collaboration between staff members on a particular issue. Working Groups may cover one of BICC's topics (e.g., the Working Group on Migration and Forced Displacement or the Working Group on Arms Control) but may also focus on a particular region (e.g., the Working Group on the Middle East), a specific issue (e.g., the Gender Working Group) or deal with other relevant matters, such as particular skill sets (e.g., Working Group on Writing with Clarity, Working Group on Research Methods). All BICC researchers, advisors and coordinators at BICC are encouraged to actively participate in at least one of the BICC Working Groups.

Regional Focus and Methods

Research at BICC is empirical and includes qualitative, participatory and quantitative methods. One of BICC's hallmarks is extensive fieldwork, which may take place in North Rhine-Westphalia but more often in difficult and often dangerous and conflict-ridden environments. The regional focus of BICC researchers ranges from West Africa (e.g., Nigeria) and the Sahel (e.g. Mali, Chad, Niger) to East Africa (e.g. Kenya), the Horn of Africa (e.g. Somalia, Ethiopia) and the Middle East (e.g. Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen) to eastern Europe and the Caucasus (e.g. Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia) and Central and South Asia (e.g. Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan). We have the necessary regional expertise and language skills (e.g. French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu) to do research in these crisis areas.

Security in the Field

BICC staff often conduct research and advisory activities in unpredictable, conflict-affected environments. BICC prioritises the welfare and well-being of its staff and takes its risk management and duty of care responsibilities very seriously. BICC's policy on health, safety and security of staff in the field outlines these responsibilities, which include pre-travel risk assessments, training (e.g. participation in a HEAT course), health checks, access to equipment and technology, emergency protocols, crisis management and fora for staff to learn from and share experiences with each other. The policy is put into practice through a series of procedures outlined in an internal 'Health, Safety and Security of Staff in the Field Manual'.

Our main analytical orientation differs from those approaches in Conflict Studies that take a more state-centric perspective and focus on the national and international levels. BICC researchers, instead, regularly examine local micro- and meso-settings. Using methods from anthropology and sociology (e.g. participatory observation, qualitative interviews, focus groups, community surveys), they study, for example, the behaviour of certain persons in their daily lives. Often, the aim is to bring to the fore the perspectives of marginalised groups in or from conflict regions, whose voices are otherwise not heard in popular political and academic discourse.

Qualitative field research in volatile and sometimes difficult-to-access locations can be complemented by other innovative methods with a broader scope. We aim to further strengthen our expertise in data science over the coming years. Relevant methods in this area include qualitative and quantitative network analysis to understand dynamics within larger social groups, spatial analysis combined with remote sensing and earth observation techniques, or automated image/text analysis to identify relevant patterns in social media data. Agent-based modelling techniques can be used to simulate conflict scenarios and make observations about the likelihood of certain actions. At a more global and macro level, we also compile indices (e.g. the Global Militarisation Index). Time series analysis can help to gain insights into the dynamics of militarisation, and causal models analysis can help to understand its conditions and effects. More generally, we aim to take advantage of AI-driven technologies (e.g. deep learning, natural language processing) to analyse large data sets.

Research Data Management

Data collection and management are fundamental to any empirical analysis. They are an essential pillar of BICC projects to open up new perspectives. BICC maintains a data management system that serves as an internal support unit and is an important component of knowledge management and dissemination. All data collected by BICC should be accessible and usable by its staff in a coordinated and standardised way. All data is handled according to its sensitivity and anonymised wherever possible and necessary to allow sharing and subsequent (re-)use in line with the FAIR Data Principles. In the future, BICC intends to publish its datasets through dedicated data repositories and with permanent identifiers for proper citation. Moreover, BICC has a long-standing expertise in translating research findings into interactive, web-based, knowledge-sharing databases, mapping applications and thematic websites—all accessible to the public.

To supplement BICC's internal directive on Safeguarding Good Research Practice, we developed and implemented in September 2023 a Research Data Policy and a Guideline on Research Data and their Use, Transfer and Exploitation of Rights, both bindingly regulating the handling of research data at BICC.

Transfer and Advice

BICC sees itself as an institute at the interface between academia, politics, practitioners, the public and the media. We take our mandate for knowledge exchange and communication very seriously. Knowledge transfer is sometimes seen as a one-way process in which academia produces knowledge and feeds it into the non-academic world. This overlooks the fact that research can greatly benefit from the practical experience of policymakers and practitioners. Ideally, knowledge transfer should be a two-way process. We understand it as a multidirectional relationship between those who produce knowledge, those who use it and those who benefit from it, where academics and practitioners can be on either side of the exchange. This should result in a transdisciplinary knowledge circle that bridges the knowledge production and communication gap between research and practice. Part of BICC's work is to actively develop and maintain larger networks where this kind of knowledge exchange can take place.

Knowledge transfer at BICC also refers to internal communication between staff members. The expertise of BICC's advisory services is firmly rooted in BICC's research findings. At the same

time, we strive to generate new research questions from the experiences and insights gained in advising policymakers and practitioners (internal knowledge circle). External knowledge transfer takes place with four main communities and/or stakeholder types:

- / With its outputs, BICC aims to contribute to and shape *academic knowledge production*, particularly in Peace and Conflict Research.
- / BICC shares its findings with its original *informants and sources* and seeks to obtain their feedback.
- / BICC aims to inform *policy debates* and to meet the needs of different *practitioners* (users).
- / BICC aims to maintain a close relationship with those members of the *public and civil society* who are directly affected by the knowledge it produces (beneficiaries).

The users and beneficiaries of BICC's knowledge are very diverse and can be located in Germany (e.g. members of federal and state parliaments, ministries, political foundations, civil society), in Europe (e.g. EU institutions, civil society), in multilateral organisations (e.g. United Nations, OECD) and in the regions in which BICC conducts research and provides technical advice (e.g. African Union, national governments, civil society, local communities).

We intend to further improve our external communication through three basic and closely interrelated strategies of knowledge sharing: Information sharing, dissemination and uptake:

- / *Information sharing* is how we reach out to the public at large and make visible who we are and what we do. The main channels through which we inform the public about our work are our website, our social media accounts (Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook), BICC podcasts and the BICC Annual Report. BICC's Annual Conference is a key event for sharing information about a topic or project at BICC. BICC's contributions to national and international media and the participation of BICC staff in conferences, workshops and other events also help to inform a wide range of audiences about BICC and strengthen our reputation.
- / *Dissemination* is a targeted 'push' activity that we plan in our projects. This is where we communicate certain knowledge outputs to a specified target group. Dissemination can use some of BICC's information-sharing channels (e.g. social media, annual conference), but also other formats such as open-access publications, both internal and external. BICC *Policy Briefs* and *Commentaries* or Op eds in leading media outlets can reach policy circles and influence public debates. Open-access articles in peer-reviewed journals are a primary channel through which BICC reaches academic communities. Other dissemination formats include closed talks or roundtables, brown bag lunches, breakfasts and informal meetings with members of our target groups, as well as open events such as public lectures, exhibitions and virtual or physical workshops/conferences.
- / *Uptake* refers to the use of BICC's knowledge by users and beneficiaries. We prepare and design findings and knowledge outputs in a way that increases the chances of uptake by the intended target audience. Important formats that we have at BICC are training courses, training manuals, training curricula and the 'train-the-trainers' courses. Other possible formats are BICC online databases, visuals, infographics and toolboxes.

BICC's Advisory Services

We aim to inform policy debates and provide advice to key stakeholders around the world: in Germany, in Europe and in the regions where we work. We advise members of federal and state parliaments, ministries and national governments, EU and UN institutions, regional organisations, political foundations, civil society and local communities. Using our scientific knowledge and expertise in technical and policy advice, we conduct training courses, carry out evaluations and fact-finding missions and bring decision-makers together in high-level meetings.

We also strengthen the capacities of our local, national and international partners through multi-year secondments of advisors to organisations such as the African Union and the United Nations.

Career Development

Thematic work at BICC is organised along three career paths: Researchers, advisors and coordinators. Researchers work at BICC on projects with a clear scientific focus. Project deliverables are usually of an academic nature. Advisors work on projects commissioned to meet specific external needs. These projects and their outputs usually have to meet basic academic standards. However, the aim is less to contribute to an ongoing academic debate. Unlike a 'traditional' research project, an advisory project renders a service directly to a clearly defined client. Coordinators take on complex managerial tasks at BICC that require thematic knowledge and leadership skills. These include the conception and organisation of international conferences and workshops, the coordination of inter- and transdisciplinary scientific networks, fellowship/training programmes and funding schemes, or the coordination of large, often international research consortia. Coordinators are often assigned to externally funded BICC projects but may also be tasked with coordinating internal processes.

Each career path distinguishes between senior and non-senior positions. BICC staff at all career levels are encouraged to participate in BICC-organised training activities to improve relevant skills, be it for managing research projects, conducting field research (e.g. security training, trauma training) or for public outreach (e.g. facilitation and media training).

Ethics

Ethics are an integral part of our work. BICC has its own Ethics Committee, consisting of three members appointed by the Director. Staff members can approach this Committee with any ethical questions they may have in connection with their research or advisory work. Two Committee members also represent BICC on the Ethics Commission of the Johannes-Rau-Forschungsgemeinschaft (JRF), which was established on 19 June 2023. The Commission can provide advice and, if necessary, grant official ethical approval.

BICC has endorsed the general ethical guidelines of the DFG Code of Conduct for Safeguarding Good Research Practice, which is binding for all researchers, advisors and coordinators. Ethical challenges that arise at any point in the life-cycle of a project should be openly discussed within the Institute and always reported to the BICC Ethics Committee. BICC has developed an Ethics Manual for its research and advisory activities. It serves as a guide to various ethical challenges and is intended to simulate a self-reflexive critical debate among colleagues.

Five principles are particularly important to us in our daily work:

- / *BICC strives to be as unbiased and gender-sensitive as possible in its work.* BICC staff should be aware of their own and others' possible biases, e.g. regarding gender identification, appearance, socio-economic status, education and sexual, ethnic and religious orientation. The diverse composition of groups should always be recognised and given due consideration. Any behaviour that stigmatises and discriminates against certain people or makes inappropriate generalisations about certain group characteristics must be avoided.

- / *BICC is as transparent as possible.* As BICC is primarily funded by the public sector, it must make its research accessible and transparent. In cases where it conducts contract research, it makes the project conditions public (funding agency, purpose, timeline, etc.). BICC is transparent about the challenges arising from expectations of third-party funding by different actors.
- / *BICC observes ethical standards in its dealings with partners and research participants.* BICC is aware of its ethical responsibilities towards its partners and research participants and treats them with respect at all times. Highly sensitive contexts and potential high-level vulnerabilities must be kept in mind throughout all research and advisory activities. Information that is likely to be detrimental to research participants will not be published. BICC seeks the voluntary informed consent of its research participants. As a matter of principle, BICC also aims to feed back its findings to the people concerned and thus adapt its dissemination strategy to the local context (e.g. stakeholder workshops, publications in local languages).
- / *BICC takes data protection seriously.* BICC adheres to the principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which includes requirements for the anonymisation, pseudonymisation and minimisation of data. BICC always ensures the anonymity and confidentiality of the information it receives.
- / *BICC is aware of the ethical challenges of working in conflict environments.* As many of BICC's activities take place in countries with deeply divided societies or non-democratic governments, ethical considerations are a particular obligation and challenge. Time and again, BICC staff are confronted with power structures, forms of organised violence and rules that may be considered unjust and unacceptable. BICC always puts the safety of its staff, partners and research participants above all other concerns.

Partnerships

BICC highly values its cooperation with a variety of partners from academia, civil society, political practice and the media. Our third-party funding strategy favours joint projects with partner institutions. We see research consortia, workshops and joint publications not only as a way of temporarily combining the strengths of different institutions but also as a means of intensifying cooperation for the future. BICC's partnership strategy is implemented on four levels:

- / *International and European partnerships:* BICC has a global orientation. We seek to increase our international visibility by participating in international networks and conferences, publishing in renowned peer-reviewed journals and establishing regular exchanges with various partners in the Global North and the Global South. For example, BICC is a member of the International Migration Research Network (IMISCOE). It works closely with the United Nations Department of Peace Operations, the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In the coming years, we aim to deepen our strategic cooperation with relevant European Union (EU) institutions. Other partners include universities (e.g. the University of Waterloo in Canada, Newcastle University in the United Kingdom), leading think tanks in Peace and Conflict Studies (e.g. SIPRI, PRIO), international humanitarian relief organisations and international and local non-governmental organisations. We recruit new colleagues from all over the world and intend to further internationalise our staff in the future.
- / *Partnerships throughout Germany:* BICC receives a large part of its third-party funding from German federal ministries, in particular the Federal Foreign Office and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. BICC researchers, advisors and coordinators are members of several national advisory committees on peace and conflict (e.g. Advisory Board on Civilian Crisis Prevention and Networked Security to the German

government; Study Commission of the German *Bundestag* on Afghanistan). BICC also regularly exchanges knowledge with institutes and academic networks specialising in our core theme (e.g. the Institute for Migration Research—IMIS—at the University of Osnabrück and the German Association for Peace and Conflict Studies—AFK). Together with the Institute for Security Policy and Peace Research at the University of Hamburg (IFSH), the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF) and the Institute for Development and Peace at the University of Duisburg-Essen (INEF), BICC publishes the annual Peace Report, which is presented at the Federal Press Conference. BICC also cooperates with influential civil society bodies (e.g. the Joint Conference Church and Development—GKKE, Caritas, Greenpeace).

- / *Partnerships in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW)*: BICC maintains close relations with several ministries in North Rhine-Westphalia, especially the Ministry of Culture and Science (MKW), the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry for Children, Youth, Family, Equality, Refugees and Integration. BICC's expertise in countering violent extremism and migration and forced displacement is of great importance to the government and many municipalities in NRW. BICC is a founding member of the Johannes-Rau-Forschungsgemeinschaft (JRF) and intends to further intensify its collaboration with other JRF-institutes. It is actively involved in the development of the JRF's guiding themes. So far, BICC has mainly worked with the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS), the Wuppertal Institute and the Center for Turkish Studies and Integration Research (ZfTI) within the JRF. BICC has also cooperated with local civil society organisations in NRW on the prevention of extremism.
- / *Bonn region*: The research landscape in Bonn is very international and has much expertise in development research and global change, which is important for BICC's work. The Director of BICC holds a professorship for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Bonn. Since 2023, BICC has been an affiliated institute of the University of Bonn, and BICC staff members regularly teach courses in various disciplines, especially at the Institute for Sociology and Political Science. Through the Bonn Alliance for Sustainability Research, BICC also participates in the exchange of knowledge between the University of Bonn (Institute for Geography; Center for Development Research), IDOS, the University of Applied Sciences Bonn-Rhein-Sieg (H-BRS) and the United Nations University / Environmental and Human Security (UNU-EHS). Since 2020, BICC has been a founding member of the Bonn Water Network, which includes, among others, various institutes of the University of Bonn and Bonn-based United Nations agencies. BICC is also exploring possibilities for closer cooperation with the Center for Advanced Security, Strategy and Integration Studies (CASSIS) at the University of Bonn and the recently established NRW Academy for International Politics.

How Do We Realise Our Approach?

To concretise our approach, we pursue the following goals in our work:

- 1) *Profile*: BICC constantly increases its reputation nationwide and internationally. We want to be recognised for our applied and empirical research as well as our knowledge exchange.
- 2) *Innovation*: Our work is innovative and original and yields new knowledge. We aim to contribute to theory development in the field of Peace and Conflict Research and initiate scientific and policy debates based on our research insights.
- 3) *Integrity*: BICC's work makes the multitude of voices, particularly from conflict zones, audible in order not to reduce but to expound the complexity of violent conflict.

- 4) *Impact-oriented publications*: BICC improves its record in the academic world by publishing foremost in high-impact, open-access international peer-reviewed journals. BICC improves its impact on policy and practice by publishing in formats that are best suited to its target audiences and stakeholders.
- 5) *Building capacity and providing advice*: BICC contributes to international public debates and policymaking through capacity-building activities such as consultancies, training, advice and didactic outputs (e.g. handbooks, manuals, toolkits).
- 6) *Funding*: BICC aims to increase its core funding by its trustees to maintain its high percentage of third-party funding. Moreover, BICC expands its range of donors, also tapping more international funding.
- 7) *Strategic partnerships*: BICC intensifies strategic partnerships to create synergies, improve the sharing of knowledge and broaden the geographic reach of BICC.
- 8) *Measurement of impact*: BICC increases its efforts to develop and use tools to measure the impact of its work.
- 9) *In-house capacity development*: BICC improves the professional skills and competencies of its staff. BICC supports its staff in taking appropriate measures to build their careers.
- 10) *Internationalisation*: BICC strengthens the international atmosphere of the Institute through its recruitment policy and the increase in international partnerships.
- 11) *Organisational reflexivity*: BICC continuously evaluates and improves all internal structures and processes to optimally match the needs set out in this *Concept Paper*.