

Human Rights and Prevention of Violent Extremism

18th Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights

Background Paper

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Glossary

ASEAN: Association of Southeast Nations

ASEF: Asia-Europe Foundation

ASEM: Asia—Europe Meeting

CoE: Council of Europe

CT: Countering Terrorism

EC: European Commission

ECHR: European Convention on Human Rights

EU: European Union

GCTF: Global Counter Terrorism Forum

HR: Human Rights

HRE: Human Rights Education

ICCT: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism

ISIL: Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

LGBT: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

OSCE: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PVE: Preventing Violent Extremism

RAN: Radicalisation Awareness Network

SAARC: South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

SCO: Shanghai Cooperation Organization

UDHD: Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UN: United Nations

VE: Violent Extremism

Chapter 1: Context & Definitional Agreements

Paper's impetus, context and structure

This background paper is written within the context of the **18th Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights**¹. The paper aims to:

- ***inform and prepare*** the delegates in advance of attending the ASEM seminar
- ***provide the current state-of-the-art in Europe and Asia*** in relation to the four workshops that will be held during the seminar, in particular:
 - (a) Pull and push factors of violent radicalisation
 - (b) Preventing violent extremism at the community Level
 - (c) Violent extremism and gender
 - (d) Youth, education and prevention of violent extremism
- ***contribute towards a better mutual understanding of violent extremism and its underlying causes***
- ***discuss the human rights impact of measures adopted to prevent violent extremism***
- ***identify good preventive initiatives*** that are aligned with human rights standards.

The paper has been divided into four chapters. The first aims to achieve definitional agreements around key terms impacting on the Seminar debates. The second chapter provides a descriptive and critical account of the current-state-of-the art around the four themes of the seminar focusing on Europe. The following part replicates the aims and structure of the second part focusing on Asia. The final part brings the paper into conclusion by presenting some analytical thinking for critical analysis and debate during the seminar.

Human Rights: Definitional agreements

According to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) “Human rights refer to the basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled”, or as Article 1 states: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood”. Human rights are minimum standards that are available to everyone simply because of their humanity. Concepts such as citizenship and democracy are not prerequisites for someone’s right to be human or the enjoyment of those standards that protect this qualification.

However, definitions are hardly helpful in unravelling the complexities of living notions and practices that have indeed travelled through centuries to finally play a role in today’s society law and order. Looking at human rights as an umbrella concept encompassing the various values that now underlie it, Enlightenment and the French Revolution are considered by many to be the key historical catalysts that introduced them into our vocabulary². This may explain

the traditional division of human rights into three generations as it follows the French Revolution’s three watchwords: Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité.

These watchwords were used by Rene Cassin and the other drafters of the UDHR to construct its four pillars of human dignity, liberty, equality and brotherhood. Each of these pillars represents a different “generation of human rights” and a major historical milestone in their development internationally.

Arguably, the UDHR is now used as the agreed reference point of our universal understanding and acceptance of human rights as indivisible, inalienable and as entitlements shared equally by everyone regardless of their status in society. Regional treaties that followed World War II such as the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) are inspired by the UDHR. Table 1 summarises the chronology of human rights and their generations as these are reflected in the UDHR.

UDHR Pillars	Human Rights generations	UDHR Articles	Types of rights	Historical era
Human Dignity	First Generation	1-2	Civil liberties/ rights	Enlightenment
Liberty	First Generation	3-19	Civil liberties/ rights	Enlightenment
Equality	Second Generation	20-26	Political, social and economic equity	Industrial revolution
Brotherhood	Third Generation	27-28	Communal & national solidarity	19 th – 20 th century and post-colonial era

Table 1: The historical development and generations of human rights³

While all religions, secular traditions and Schools of Thought prior to the Enlightenment shared basic visions of a common good and championed certain individual standards within the human rights discourse, the collective understanding of the term “human rights” was not captured. Most importantly, they did not perceive all individuals as of equal value. From the New Testament to the Qu ‘Aran, the Hammurabi’s Codes and Plato one can easily identify a lack of common vision towards certain groups such as women and homosexuals, servants (or slaves), the disabled or the elderly.

This is not to suggest that post Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the UDHR, the implementation of human rights as a collective and universal vision of dignity, respect and liberty was materialised. For instance, in the European colonies and in America, slavery continued until the early 19th century. In Europe and its extended colonies, women did not enjoy equal rights while they were only able to vote equally in mid-20th century (e.g. in England 1928). Children’s rights continue to be usurped and the equal treatment of gays and

lesbians is yet to be enjoyed. However, what did change was the narrative on human rights which were discussed at intellectual, academic and political levels as an aspirational charter of minimum standards for all. The development of a universal language of human rights that was informed by secular and international treaties started to take place.

Radicalisation – extremism – terrorism – religious fundamentalism: Definitional agreements

The terms:

- radicalisation and violent radicalisation
- extremism and violent extremism
- religious fundamentalism, and
- terrorism

are frequently used interchangeably. However, **they are very different.**

Violent radicalisation is the phenomenon of people embracing opinions, views and ideas which could lead to acts of violence including terrorism as defined in Article 1 of the Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism⁴.

Radicalisation does not necessarily lead to violence and has been said to seek making changes to the existing political and social structure. Another approach defines radicalism as a quest for sweeping change, while limiting extremism to the pursuit of concrete and localised political ideologies. In other words, radicalisation can be a good force for change especially in oppressive political regimes.

Extremism has been referred to as the adoption of a particular ideology with the intention to use violence to remove the state or ruling structure and its elites⁵. Again, extremism can be seen as a positive act for change.

Violent extremism involves the exercise of power through violent acts with the intention of changing status quo and the ruling structures illegitimately.

Religious fundamentalism is “a belief in an absolute religious truth, which is challenged by the forces of evil and which must be followed today in the same way as in the past”⁶.

Terrorism is “any act of violence or threat thereof notwithstanding its motives or intentions perpetrated to carry out an individual or collective criminal plan with the aim of terrorising people or threatening to harm them or imperilling their lives, honour, freedoms, security or

rights or exposing the environment or any facility or public or private property to hazards or occupying or seizing them, or endangering a national resource, or international facilities, or threatening the stability, territorial integrity, political unity or sovereignty of independent States”⁷.

Chapter 2: Human Rights & Preventing Violent Extremism in Europe

Push and pull factors of violent extremism in Europe

Introduction

Push factors are defined as something which “pushes (one) away from mainstream society and causes them to be susceptible to radicalisation” and **pull factors** as something which acts as a trigger increasing the likelihood of the acceptance of violent extremism⁸. Pull factors can be described as elements which involve participation in a movement, organisation or activity in order to gain a type of reward such as a universal one⁹. Pull factors can also involve being within a favourable environment and having exposure to ideologies and recruiters¹⁰.

When it comes to the radicalisation process in Europe, push and pull factors are based around three categories of motivational triggers:

- **background factors** which relate to personal and lack of social integration
- **trigger factors** which can either provoke antipathy or activism and
- **opportunity factors** which relates to the individual’s environment in which they were brought up in¹¹. Many opinions can be gathered from this, one being that an individual is more likely to turn to violent radicalisation due to their level of class within society.

Search for Common Ground¹² states that violent radicalisation is caused by frustration with weak, corrupt or illegitimate governance, marginalisation, fractured relationships, lack of voice and opportunity and struggles with diversity¹³. They suggest that in order to deal with this issue within society and be able to eradicate it, people need to move away from adversarial approaches and towards cooperative solutions¹⁴. In order to deal with individuals and address the push and/or pull factors which may lead to a path of violent radicalisation, the European youth work has to make the youth programmes focus on areas such as real or perceived threats of well-being, security and wealth and the feeling of belonging to a group/community¹⁵. This may help to address any issues that the individual may have at a young age and lead them away from the possibility of radicalising.

Push factors

According to the European literature, the push factors that help to nurture the rise or spread in the appeal of violent extremism¹⁶ include social marginalisation and fragmentation¹⁷ and perceived oppression and/or fascination with violence¹⁸. A trigger event such as death or other reasons such as rejection by peer, faith or social group or family and/or pressure from peers associated with extremism¹⁹ could also increase one's vulnerability and put them at risk of being radicalised. The reasons can further be grouped into three main categories: the individual's circumstances, life experiences or their state of mind.²⁰

Social marginalisation and fragmentation can be defined as "the norms and processes that prevent certain groups from equal and effective participation in the social, economic, cultural and political life of societies"²¹. It can be argued that this is why people turn to radicalisation, as they may see it as a way of being heard and a form of getting their view across to many people.

Perceived oppression could result in one "becoming hyper-aware of critical issues ensuing in a radical irrationality and a subsequent willingness to violently act on this awareness"²². This fascination with violence then becomes an escape route leading to socialising with the wrong crowd and "engag(ing) in political violence without moral restraints"²³. For example, the Staircase to Terrorism Model links the perceived oppression to radicalisation as it holds that there are five floors, with one viewing different kinds of opportunities "to be open to him or her on that floor"²⁴. It is believed that the higher a person gets, their choices are limited, and the belief is the only outcome being the destruction of others, oneself or both²⁵.

Peer pressure from peers associated with extremism can increase one's vulnerability and put them at risk of being radicalised because of it being seen as a way of group bonding and it becomes a social process²⁶. This then leads to the view being believed that violence is a way of dealing with the injustice people face, thus making radicalisation hard to overcome²⁷.

Pull factors

Neumann is of the view that the reason individuals may be living within an environment whereby opportunities arise for VE or be recruited for this very reason is due to the lack of introspection²⁸. The term introspection can be defined as "the examination or observation of one's own mental and emotional processes"²⁹. There are various pull factors that draw individuals into a path of violent radicalisation, such as attaining reputation and acknowledgement, seeking a sense of belonging and the promise of adventure³⁰. However, this appeal may be to individuals who are within socio-economic conditions³¹.

For example, in the UK, the “Prevent Strategy” states that the ideologies that people may hear about are based on “historic texts and extensive contemporary literature, including what purports to be rigorous thinking about key texts from the recent and even distant past”³². It also states that the ideology used within violent radicalisation is key as it determines people’s engagement within terrorism-related activity as it is more likely to be accepted and people would be more willing and motivated to take part³³. This could be down to the type of words used in order to attract and connect with people on different levels. The document states that in order to tackle radicalisation and challenge the ideologies put forward by different groups, society needs to be confident in their own human right values³⁴.

Push and pull factors: Human rights and the rule of law in European societies

There can be no doubt that the phenomenon of violent radicalisation needs to be rooted out as it is a threat to Europe’s universal values based on its cultural and humanist inheritance³⁵. Cultural inheritance provides narratives of a collective identity and provides meaning and purpose to people which could be argued that it helps individuals get through some rough parts of their life³⁶. Somers also states that “living together requires educational efforts to ensure that democracy, the rule of law and the principle of dignity of the human person are shared by members of communities in the EU”³⁷.

Human rights, however, are often seen as a hindrance to security. For example, extremists would argue that their right to free speech means that they should be able to “advocate, induce, encourage or glorify terrorism as well as lending material support to terrorism”³⁸. However, this is not an argument that is accepted within the human rights framework. Nevertheless, it is a narrative used by tabloids and politicians in order to undermine the power of human rights.

European governments have often deteriorated the issue due to having “an utter disregard for human’s rights”, therefore “an emphasis has been made on preventing and combatting terrorism and building countries capacity to combat it”³⁹. Sewall is of the view that when it comes to dealing with the human rights aspect of violent radicalisation and taking into consideration the push and pull factors, the what, who and where of a counterterrorism approach needs to be addressed⁴⁰. In terms of looking at “the what” factor and countering violent extremism, the push factors play a part as it highlights “the underlying grievances that violent extremism exploit” such as “no path for advancement and no escape from injustice which feeds instability and disorder” which plays off the pull factors as it allows for recruitment tactics to be used and individuals who are “trapped within impoverished communities” are targeted⁴¹. They may be an easy target as they could be easily persuaded and feel like their rights are being valued and recognised so they are willing to participate in events which may not be morally correct.

The *who aspect* requires a “whole of society approach” between various stakeholders and ensure trust is built and “fraught relationships between the government and actors in civil society or marginalised communities is repaired” in order to tackle this issue⁴². The *where aspect* involves considering the areas in which individuals may be targeted in order to “prevent the expansion of terrorist networks” and keep “vulnerable communities on a path of stability”⁴³.

Law enforcement agencies create the opportunity for individuals to be recruited into a world of violent radicalisation as the behaviour law enforcement personnel show towards the general public may be deemed as discriminatory, therefore organisations use this as a means of justify violence⁴⁴. This shows that law enforcement organisations need to ensure that human rights compliance is being upheld in order for individuals not to be labelled as being vulnerable and targeted for recruitment and help organisation achieve a particular agenda⁴⁵.

Robinson and Kelly believe that in order to deal with the violent radicalisation that happens so frequently within different societies, upholding the rule of law “is the fundamental component of any effort seeking to address violent extremism in ways that are effective, sustainable and respectful of fundamental freedoms, civil liberties and human rights”⁴⁶. By ensuring that this is upheld, it is “promoting human rights, curtailing arbitrary state violence, building more inclusive societies as well as building a social contract between the state and citizens”, with the aim of “correcting injustice and reducing social and political alienation that can lead to violent extremism”⁴⁷.

To remove the possibility of radicalisation occurring within society, the terms deradicalisation and disengagement needs to be understood and implemented⁴⁸. Disengagement is about the individual experiencing a behavioural change whilst deradicalisation “implies a cognitive shift and a fundamental change in understanding” which is “triggered by a traumatic experience which challenges the coherence of the individual’s worldview and can engender post-traumatic growth”⁴⁹. As an individual is going through the deradicalisation stage, an individual is likely to be more receptive to new ideas and they can be persuaded to see the error of their previous ways⁵⁰. This would then lead to individuals wanting to change and in time, the issue of radicalisation slowly lacking existence within society.

European policies and measures: Counteracting and Preventing

To combat radicalisation at a local level, in 2015 the CoE adopted a strategy and the Guidelines for local and regional authorities on preventing radicalisation and manifestations of hate at the gross levels⁵¹. These recommend local multi-agency consortia and the set-up of local safety partnerships, the consideration of education as an important vector, the

involvement of civil society, the development of exit programmes for those willing to leave extremism as well as the allocation of necessary funds in local budgets to allow sustainable funding of prevention programmes⁵².

When policies are being created, human rights and diversity should be at the forefront in order to ensure that all measures are being undertaken by the Member States and the EU to combat violent radicalisation. As a consequence, individuals are less likely to feel some form of wrongdoing has occurred to them, which can then lead to violent radicalisation for retribution.

“The Influencing Push/Pull Model”⁵³ has been put forward as a paradigm for countering violent radicalisation. Asserting and persuading people are push factors as they are a “direct use of your own energy”, whilst bridging and attracting people are pull factors as it “involves the energy of other”⁵⁴. “Moving away” is a term used when an individual is in a predicament whereby they are in a “neutral stance of disengagement which can be used to great effect in some circumstances”⁵⁵. These factors all relate to the mind-set of the individual as that determines how you would move forward when faced with this situation.

It has also been argued that the mind-set of the individual may be down to their family structures⁵⁶. The inability of the parents to communicate, bond or provide a safe environment and upbringing could lead to the child rebelling against their elders and joining extremist groups⁵⁷. This needs to be addressed to ensure individuals have the right mentality so they are not vulnerable and do not need to look elsewhere to have a sense of belonging or purpose within society.

Being persuasive is about ensuring people are informed of all the options available when dealing with a difficult situation, being assertive is knowing how to build a rapport with people in terms of your body language, words, voice tone and expression in order to open their mind to a different perspective to the issue in question, bridging is about having good listening skills and being able to question what is said in order to find alternative solutions to resolve an issue, attracting people is about how you connect with people who share the same values and goals and being able to move away from the situation and think about the effects of an issue for the long term and what stance you want to take in order to achieve a positive outcome⁵⁸.

Social media platforms are what organisations may also use in order to spread their propaganda and radicalise and recruit people⁵⁹. Manstroup argues that social media “provides connectivity, virtual participation and an echo-chamber for likeminded extremist views” which gives extremists groups a social media platform that “reaches otherwise unreachable individuals which accelerates the process of radicalisation and increases opportunities for self-radicalisation”⁶⁰. Law enforcement need to have a stronger grasp on

how different platforms can be used in order to promote radicalisation and try and ensure young children as well as adults are aware of the programmes that are available to help them deal with the peer pressure they may face in joining an environment where violent radicalisation occurs.

Preventing violent extremism at the community level: A European analysis

The role of European communities

The EU's Counter-Terrorism Strategy has four key pillars – Prevent, Protect, Pursue, Respond – carefully designed to fight terrorism globally and make Europe safer, while respecting human rights.⁶¹ The 'Prevent' pillar can be distinguished from the following three in that it focuses on non-coercive measures that seek to prevent or mitigate VE.⁶² The remaining three pillars tend to focus on coercive measures. This prevention strategy also recognises the four crime prevention approaches proposed by the UN.⁶³ One of the approaches in them identifies the significant role of the 'community' in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism.⁶⁴

The role of the community in crime prevention is to change local conditions that might be affecting criminal behaviour, victimization and a sense of insecurity among vulnerable individual or groups.⁶⁵ With this objective, the 'community crime prevention emphasizes community mobilization, using the notion of "community" in the sense of either a social group or a living environment, and includes the aim of improving the quality of life of residents'⁶⁶. The relevance of the notion of community in relation to PVE can also be identified in one of four main targets of intervention levels: the individual, the relational environment, the community environment and the social environment.⁶⁷ More broadly, community environmental measures focus on strengthening the community's ability to identify individuals vulnerable to radicalization, and to mobilize resources to intervene should these individuals become radicalized.⁶⁸ This may involve PVE initiatives designed to strengthen the community's trust in institutional authorities or to create safe spaces for youth in trouble. Usually, these initiatives endeavour to foster community resilience, social cohesion and integration of their members.

Furthermore, local communities also play an important role in helping to govern, as well as to implement, PVE initiatives. Firstly, communities are better placed to identify the main local drivers of violent extremism, such as poverty, income disparity, lack of education, ideology, failure of national policies etc.,⁶⁹ Secondly, local perceptions that resonates with the target audience and cultural sensitivities are critical in shaping locally acceptable programmes to counter VE. Local practitioners will often be better placed to identify key target audiences and provide current information about the evolving nature of VE. Accordingly, PVE programmes need to gain support and input from local communities where they are being

implemented. Here civil society and community actors –such as local elders, local religious figures, those with political power, etc., play critical role in the development of holistic, relevant and responsive PVE strategies that have resonance and sustainability with vulnerable groups.

Community in the European context

The concept of community and its relevance to counter-terrorism has been the debate of many policy discussion in Europe. For example, OSCE argues that ‘a community is made up of individuals, groups and institutions based in the same area and/or having shared interests.’⁷⁰ However, this interpretation does not capture the entire meaning of that concept in international law as it is subject to different interpretations that cover different meanings in order to fit the purpose of inquiry. Nevertheless, the underlying concept is significant since, EU Member States have developed variety of PVE initiatives involving wide range of stakeholders within the local community.

PVE initiatives involving local communities have also been marked by the development of two major approaches, namely ‘*Community-targeted approach*’⁷¹ or ‘*Community-driven approach*’. In the latter case, PVE initiatives are pursued through locally driven, co-operative initiatives, tailored to local contexts, to increase effectiveness. That said, in practice, the EU has acknowledged the significance of community-driven PVE initiatives by expanding its approach beyond ‘hard-power’ initiatives and law enforcement interventions and has recognised the need for multi-stakeholder collaboration in the form of community-driven initiatives.

The need for a comprehensive, integrated approach towards PVE has been well augmented under the revised EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism.⁷² The revised strategy encourages collaboration between governments, communities, civil society, NGOs and the private sector. It specifically calls for efforts from multi-stakeholders at local levels to support vulnerable individuals or groups in building community cohesion and community resilience. This is also highlighted in the Communication from the EC of June 2016.⁷³ Furthermore, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has similarly reinforced the importance of involving communities in efforts to PVE.⁷⁴ It has also highlighted the need to increase locally tailored and locally driven initiatives that draw on partnerships among a wide range of actors, beyond traditional security practitioners in their efforts to PVE.⁷⁵ Likewise, as part of the process of putting communities at the centre of counter radicalisation, the RAN policy recommendations define radicalisation as a local issue that requires local solutions and active communities. Most importantly, the RAN asserts that this ‘local issue’ can be contained within those communities.⁷⁶

Examples of community-driven approaches in Europe

A preventative approach to VE necessarily mandates an analysis of the root causes of ‘home-grown’ radicalisation in the first place.⁷⁷ Over recent years, there have been a wide range of locally based or community driven prevention initiatives aimed at changing local conditions that might be affecting criminal-behaviour, victimization and a sense of insecurity.⁷⁸ The following is an overview of preventive measures and projects at both national and local level in selected countries. The focus is on existing successful projects in cooperation with the local communities and civil society.

United Kingdom - case studies

In the wake of five terror attacks in London and Manchester,⁷⁹ the year 2017 saw a significant shift in threats from all forms of extremism in the UK.⁸⁰ This demanded a change in response to tackle the causes and the threats of radicalisation, both in local communities and online. In response to the problem, the UK's updated counter-terrorism strategy 2018- CONTEST⁸¹: a comprehensive risk reduction framework comprising four ‘P’ work strands,⁸² acknowledges that PVE through local interventions minimizes the risk of radicalisation through early intervention and seeks to build strong community resilience of local communities to terrorism. Within its four-track approach, its programme of preventative activity now known as PREVENT is also favoured by the EU and individual members’ states.

Indeed, much of PREVENT’s PVE effort focuses on tracking: drivers of the threat – including ideology and radicalisation; enablers of the threat – including permissive environments and access to exploitable technology; and the counter-terrorism capabilities and actions of other countries; to determine future possible scenarios. The PREVENT strategy was particularly concerned with the risk of ‘home grown’ terrorism and viewed the building of partnerships and alliances with British Muslims as a key element within this framework.⁸³ In practice, one of its objectives is to include ‘a community-led programme to tackling violent extremism’⁸⁴– with the aim to adopt a multi-strand approach that combines government sponsorship and funding with NGO and other agency activities. The UK has a number of projects intended to prevent radicalisation and people being attracted to violent extremism. One of them is the Channel programme, whose referral process is a broad community-based mechanism that tailors action by identifying individuals in the risk zone for radicalisation – in common with referrals in crime prevention.

CHANNEL – *England and Wales*

Channel is a voluntary, confidential programme which safeguards people identified as vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. It is a multi-agency process, involving partners from the local authority, the police, education, health providers and others. Under this programme, a referral can come from anyone who is concerned about a person they know who may be at

risk of radicalisation, whether a family member, friend, school leader, colleague or from a wide range of partners. The type of support available is wide-ranging, and can include help with education or career advice, dealing with mental or emotional health issues, drug or alcohol abuse, and theological or ideological mentoring from a Channel intervention provider—a specialist mentor. One advantage of the programme is that it is not expensive in financial terms as the bulk of the costs are generated through existing departmental structures and there are clear criteria for judging the effectiveness of specific actions.

Channel addresses all forms of terrorism, including Islamist, far-right and others. However, many Muslim communities have alleged that this programme, in fact, is a targeted ideological intervention on young Muslims being reported for activities considered normal for other community. This reporting bias reflected an inability to recognize the ‘symptoms’ of radicalization.⁸⁵

SOLAS FOUNDATION – *Scotland*

The Solas Foundation tries to promote authentic Islamic education. Established in 2009 by two Muslim academics, the goal was to disseminate an informed and coherent image of Islam, present traditional Islamic teachings on controversial issues and dispel any confusion created by radicalization.⁸⁶ The foundation developed various projects geared to the target audience; for example, its *iSyllabus* -educational and study programme for students offers courses based on Islamic scriptural sources that describe the foundations of the religion and their relevance in a contemporary Western setting. One objective of these teachings is to equip students to identify radical interpretations of Islam and to use traditional sources to refute them. Ultimately, it aims for making Scotland and Britain safer by providing quality learning and education within the Muslim community and beyond.

ARCHER – *England & Wales and Scotland*

Archer is more of a management exercise within the Police and partners (includes local communities/ NGO) designed to "demystify" the CONTEST strategy and less of PREVENT. It brings together key strategic partners to help them improve their understanding and communication in the wake of a spontaneous counter terrorism arrest. It uses a backdrop of a number of issues such as hate crime, key national events and national demonstrations. Archer explores the wide ranging and long-term detrimental impact that counter terrorism operations can have on communities if not managed effectively. It plays a great deal of emphasis on media messages and social media in the run up to high profile events.

Netherlands - case study

The Slotervaart Action Plan

Following the murder of Dutch filmmaker, Theo Van Gogh in 2004,⁸⁷ the Dutch counter radicalisation strategy was designed primarily to eradicate Islamic radicals. It was also applicable to right wing and fascistic groups. The Dutch government linked the process of radicalisation and what they referred to as social polarization.⁸⁸ It also viewed radicalisation mainly as a youth phenomenon that occurs when isolated young people at local level are searching for an identity and their place in society. The Dutch *Polarisation and Radicalisation Action Plan of 2007–2011* is thus viewed primarily as the responsibility of local governmental authorities. This plan contains a three-track approach. The first track involves ‘prevention, signalling, and intervention’. These elements are implemented by youth workers, the police, truancy officials, and other municipal or local government security policy.⁸⁹

Following the implementation of a national strategy that stressed the need to counter radicalization at a local level, the first practical steps towards developing community approach programmes aimed at making at-risk individuals feel a part of the society materialised in Amsterdam. There are a number of focused projects in the country. Work with young people was the focus of interventions in the borough of Slotervaart. The Slotervaart Action Plan is mainly focused on counter-radicalization.⁹⁰ The project managed to bring together a wide range of community players and the community has been receptive to its methods.⁹¹ The Action plan consists of seven substantial measures: (1) Create awareness among young Muslims and their social environment of the risks of the radicalisation process. (2) Facilitate the development of competencies that can help to increase the resilience of young people and parents. (3) Support parents in the role as teachers. (4) Support mosques and imams in their work to deal with radicalised young people and counter radicalisation. (5) Ensure that systems designed to discover radicalisation are functioning effectively (Municipal Radicalisation Information Management System). (6) Facilitate cooperation between schools and youth centres. (7) Promote interaction between community groups and religious groups.⁹²

The Action plan emphasized involvement in Slotervaart by various parties, including parents, schools, mosques, immigrant support organizations, civil society organizations, etc. in the fight against radicalization. Another objective of the partnership among these various parties was to improve social cohesion and mutual trust among Slotervaart residents.⁹³ Hence, the Slotervaart Action Plan, has been identified as a model of best practices in prevention of violent extremism.

Denmark - case studies

The Aarhus Model

Over the years, due to a sharp increase in home-grown radicalisation, EU member states came down hard on citizens engaged in terrorist activities at home and, increasingly, abroad.

France shut down mosques it suspected of harbouring radicals. The U.K. declared citizens who had gone to help ISIS enemies of the state. Several other members threatened to take away their passports — a move formerly reserved for convicted traitors. By contrast, Denmark adopted the Aarhus Model's programmes of early prevention and exit that rest on the principle of inclusion. This model of community engagement didn't use force to stop people from travelling to and from Syria but instead fought the roots of radicalization.⁹⁴ In the words of the Mayor of Aarhus, Jacob Bundsgaard:

*“Taking our starting point in the Danish democratic traditions about openness and dialogue, we wish to create a safe and good city for all by working long-term and intensively with crime prevention, while at the same time clamping down on offences and tendencies towards harassment, racism and discrimination. We wish to offer these people a chance of rehabilitation and return to an ordinary Danish everyday life characterized by security for themselves and the people who surround them”.*⁹⁵

The Aarhus Model has three main characteristics: (1) close and flexible cooperation among several already existing institutions and authorities working with exposed and vulnerable young people, (2) inclusion, and (3) scientific foundation i.e., it is based on the discipline of Life Psychology. Life Psychology provides the theoretical grounding for the Model underpinning the idea of empowering individuals with fundamental human life skills, with particular reference to inclusion and legal participation in democratic processes and citizenship.⁹⁶ It also conforms with Denmark's 2009 *Action Plan to Prevent Extremist Views and Radicalisation Among Young People* defines extremism as 'totalitarian and anti-democratic ideologies, intolerance to the views of others, hostile imagery and a division into "them" and "us".'⁹⁷ This is also made clear in one of the official quotes: *“The goal ... is to help youths and adults move away from the radical environments, which may involve crime and violence or helping to radicalize others so that they are channelled onto a different life trajectory.”*⁹⁸

Violent extremism in Denmark is largely viewed as primarily a failure of social integration.⁹⁹ That said, the Aarhus initiatives are not exactly about ideology, right-wing/left-wing politics, or Islam as such, and certainly not about stigmatizing groups of citizens.¹⁰⁰ Main initiatives of the project involves: (1) The InfoHouse; involves handling of information, inquiry and investigation, (2) Mentoring; include debriefing, consultations with psychologists, medical care etc., (3) Workshops; to introduce young pupils and students to the threats of terrorism and violent radicalization (4) Parents Network; Individual guidance and advice to relatives of radicalized child and (5) Dialogues; Dialogue and work on the local community to reach general public. Interestingly, it has been also called the 'hug a terrorist' model in the media.

Danish SSP system

The Danish SSP system is probably one of the oldest community collaborative system used to identify risk factors and the reasons behind at-risk behaviour, delinquency and crimes committed by youth locally. It is a co-operation system between the Schools, Social Services and Police (hence SSP) with a statutory force that forms the basic structure of all preventive actions in Denmark. The basic idea behind this collaboration system is crime prevention at the local level by sharing information about vulnerable youth at-risk of committing crimes. That said, the system plays an important role in crime prevention among youth and integrates the prevention of radicalisation dimension through information-sharing across different professions. It demonstrates how local interdisciplinary collaboration can work through local committees with representatives from the school system, social services and police.

By engaging all these interested parties in cooperation, it helps to maintain a local network with an efficient crime preventive impact on the everyday reality of children and young people. This cross-function cooperation also helps to find valid solutions for the individual youngster, groups of young people, the families, and the local area and so on. Moreover, the SSP system has played a pivotal part as partner in special projects and other initiatives in government action plans against radicalisation and extremism.

Belgium case study

The Vilvoorde approach¹⁰¹

The Vilvoorde approach involves creating PVE infrastructure by building a local network comprising of groups of similar stakeholders. This practice has led to the creation of a local multi-agency setting through which Vilvoorde deals with individual cases of radicalisation: the so-called partners' round table. The model aims to give respect and build trust among local authorities, local community organisations/NGOs and general public by following a set of guiding principles one of them is: '*giving respect, demanding respect*'. The main essence of this proactive approach is to offer support and warmth to vulnerable individuals, mainly frustrated young people who are susceptible to radicalisation, by seeking out for key actors within the community in order to strengthen and restore social relations locally. In raising the awareness of the various local actors this model helps to locate the drivers of VE within the youth affected by indoctrination and increasing isolation.

Further, another guiding policy this practice follows is that of '*prevention where possible, repression where necessary*'. Thus, by seeking out for key actors within the community this programme has managed to stop the exodus to Syria and has succeeded in de-radicalising young people and at the same time become a source of inspiration for other authorities' policy in Europe. It is also to be noted that there is no planned project funding for this practice, but limited financial support comes from the federal government as well as Vilvoorde.

Violent Extremism and Gender in Europe

Introduction

The field of national and international security has traditionally been gender-blind. Conceived as the purview of men, women have been largely excluded from decision-making processes, and insufficient attention has been given to understanding the gendered nature of violence and extremism. VE is, however, a highly gendered phenomenon. The Global Countering Terrorism Forum (GCTE) manual for 'Good Practices on Women and Countering VE' recalls that:

*"Women are subjected to a range of gendered experiences based on assumptions about masculine and feminine roles as they relate to economic, political, social and cultural realities. Gender-related assumptions shape available opportunities, rights, recruitment, and roles within organizations for both women and men."*¹⁰²

Understanding the complex gender dynamics sustaining VE and including women in decision making processes and efforts to prevent it, is critical to contemporary security issues and to the preservation of women's and human rights.

In Europe, advocacy for the advancement of a gender-sensitive perspective on violence has gained considerable space in the literature and regulations concerned with violent extremism and the prevention of it over the past decade. The introduction of a gender perspective to EU security-related policies have its roots in the introduction of the UN Women, Peace and Conflict (WPS) agenda. The WPS agenda, introduced by the landmark UNSCR 1325 resolution¹⁰³, recognized that the exclusion of women and girls from peace-making violate their rights, and that the inclusion of a gender perspective in decision-making processes at all levels can support the promotion of sustainable peace. According to the OSCE 2013 report on women and terrorist radicalization, this landmark resolution set the tone for the subsequent debate on gender and security, greatly providing the impulse and inspiration for the gender-oriented nature of many CVE and countering terrorism (CT) debates, guidelines and regulations within the European context.¹⁰⁴

Current debates in Europe are mostly conducted under three headings: women's role in preventing VE, women's role in promoting VE, and the impact of VE and of CVE measures on women's rights.

Women's role in preventing violent extremism in Europe

Several EU security guidelines and regulations, and some national security agendas, now recognize women have an important role to play in security issues, particularly in preventing radicalization that may lead to violence. Many of these guidelines recommend that measures should be taken to encourage empowerment of women and girls to become more vocal within their communities.¹⁰⁵ Some national states, such as the UK, have taken the lead in introducing specific guidelines to foment women's involvement in preventing VE to their national security policy.

From a policy perspective, two questions are key to understanding women's role in CVE: in what capacity(ies) can women effectively contribute to preventing VE; and what policies can be designed to promote or enhance their contribution?

When the notion that female empowerment adds value to CVE efforts is invoked, it normally rests on two assumptions. Firstly, it is often said that women, as mothers, are strategically positioned at the centre of their communities and families, thus playing a vital role in the formation, transmission and reproduction of social values. As central pillars of family units, they are also strategically situated to detect the early signs of radicalization¹⁰⁶. Resonating with this view that women have an important role to play because they are at the centre of their family units, a recent Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) study on the role of gender in VE opens up with the following remarks:

"Women can be unique agents of change within society, exercising considerable power over radicalised individuals in their roles as mothers and as wives".¹⁰⁷

A second argument often used to support the value of engaging women in preventive efforts is that VE is a highly gendered phenomenon that tends to thrive on and to perpetuate conservative views of gender roles. Empowering women to build counter-narratives to traditional gender roles and power dynamics that characterises adherence to VE is seen as essential to the promotion of women's rights to equality, and as a means to effectively address some of the root causes of VE.¹⁰⁸

Although these two views are not necessarily seen as mutually exclusive, it has been pointed out that efforts to engage women that concentrate solely on their role in the private sphere, as mothers, can perpetuate gender power imbalances and reduce women's contribution to CVE and to society. As De Leed et al. explains:

"gender misconceptions and gender stereotypes often affect the space within which women contribute to these initiatives. Frequently, women are included in these programmes as mothers, sisters and wives, as they are considered ideally positioned to spot early warning

signs of radicalisation. While this can be a valuable element of PVE/CVE programmes, it reinforces gender stereotypes and overlooks women’s capacity to contribute in many other areas.”¹⁰⁹

OSCE¹¹⁰ and GCTF¹¹¹ recommend that women’s role should not be confined to the private sphere and that policies should be designed to build capacity for women’s participation in all spheres that relate to security issues, including taking on roles as policymakers, policy shapers, community leaders, educators and activists. On the other hand, there also exists a recognition that, although CVE can and should be designed to empower women and to address gender inequalities, sensitivity to cultural context and to the social barriers faced by women should be considered, particularly in the context of EU interventions abroad. The ‘Operational Guidelines on the preparation and implementation of EU financed actions specific to countering terrorism and violent extremism in third countries’ states that:

“At the same time, the cultural and social restraints that limit women’s participation in the social sphere and the potential opposition to the engagement of women in P/CVE programming need to be appreciated”¹¹²

When considering what policies can effectively promote the role of women, a problem faced by European policymakers trying to design and implement such policies to empower women with the specific goal of preventing VE is that there is a general lack of understanding of what may work best in each context. It has been pointed out by critics that even though the rhetoric of women’s empowerment to act as key players in CVE has become more prominent in European institutional agreements and national security agendas, there exists surprisingly little evidence-based knowledge about the effectiveness of these policies in directly addressing VE, and little consideration about the possible side-effects of these policies, posing the risk that they may be implemented based on ideological assumptions, having deleterious impacts on particular targeted groups.¹¹³

In view of that, recent EU guidelines emphasise the need to strengthen knowledge of the effectiveness of policies by undertaking evaluation work previous to, and concomitant with, the introduction of policies, and to build and support platforms for knowledge exchange¹¹⁴. Advances have also been made recently in digital networks for dissemination of knowledge about European and global initiatives designed to foster women’s participation in VE. An example of this is the digital platform AWARE: Alliance for Women Against Radicalization and Extremism.¹¹⁵

The UK was one of the first countries, and in fact one of the few countries in Europe, to specifically design policies to integrate women into the national security agenda to counter terrorism¹¹⁶. The UK’s counter-terrorist policy CONTEST first introduced in 2003—and last revised in 2018—comprises four strands: Prevent, Pursue, Protect and Prepare¹¹⁷. Based on a

‘whole society approach’ to preventing VE, in 2008 the government issued a guidance identifying women as key constituencies to reach out for security efforts: “women can be a particularly effective voice as they are at the heart not only of their communities but also of their families”¹¹⁸. Under Prevent, it encouraged local authorities to fund and support a series of new or ongoing community engagement projects targeting women, particularly from Muslim background.

Funded projects have a variety of purposes, but mostly focus on addressing issues relating to the role of women in preventing violence by providing skills building lessons to detect early signs of VE; leadership and confidence building for engagement in civic debates and professional skills building. Examples of these are: the Muslim Women’s Community Leadership Training Project delivered by Sizanani Africa, which focuses on building assertiveness and confidence and in providing coaching on how to identify and address signs of violent extremism; the Hounslow Leadership Training to empower Muslim women with the skills and confidence to tackle extremist ideologies by promoting shared values, citizenship and challenging the misconceptions around the position of women in Islam and the Muslimah-Make a Difference project, which involves discussions on Muslim women’s contribution to communities and wider society, awareness of women’s role in preventing VE and detecting early signs of it, and the provision of guidance on how they can take up key roles in society, such as school governors, councillors, journalists¹¹⁹.

Even if a few of these initiatives may have had positive impacts on women¹²⁰, from 2011 Prevent no longer had any explicit focus on women, as noted by Huckerby¹²¹. An oversight of Prevent commissioned by the Government¹²² concluded that the downsides of overseeing and funding these projects under national security policy—rather than simply treating them as community development projects—outweighed the benefits. It thus recommended that a clearer line should be drawn between security policy and community engagement policies.

This move also responds to criticism levelled at Prevent’s approach to community and women’s engagement. Criticised on several grounds, Prevent’s former community engagement policies were seen by several critics¹²³ as a top-down surveillance-based engagement which led to increase mistrust in the government and increased isolation of minority groups.

Perhaps the strongest criticism came from an excessive focus on the Muslim community, with all guidelines for women’s empowerment projects designed to target Muslim women. As a result, this policy orientation often exacerbated feelings of cultural exclusion and isolation amongst Muslim communities. The 2009 Muslim Women Network submission for Inquiry into the Preventing VE Project, specifies a series of concerns about the impacts of Prevent, including the stigmatization of Muslim groups, the neglect of other forms of extremism, such

far-right extremism and the instrumentalization of women's role by the State as useful spies¹²⁴.

The impact that such policies may have on women's rights and on human rights, as well as a discussion of alternative avenues for including women into CVE practices which are compliant with human rights will be discussed in more depth in the last section.

Women's role in promoting and participating in violent extremism in Europe

According to the 2016 European Parliament briefing 'Radicalization and counter-radicalisation: A gender perspective', the role of women in promoting VE has received less attention than the role of women in prevention¹²⁵. Thus, women's involvement in VE remains under-estimated and poorly understood. This is often attributed to the persistence of gender stereotypes that conceive men as naturally more prone to violence and radicalization than women¹²⁶. In 2013, OSCE recommended that more awareness is raised about women's role in promoting VE, and that gender stereotypes built around the notions of women as naturally maternal and non-violent are dispelled¹²⁷.

In Europe, there is a growing concern that women's involvement with VE is on the rise. According to national official statistics, mentioned in a recent study on women's involvement with the Jihad, several European countries, such as Germany, the UK, Belgium and the Netherlands saw a sharp rise in female leaving these countries to become foreign fighters, particularly after the proclamation of the Caliphate in 2014¹²⁸. A recent study conducted by the ICCT, indicates that at least 17% of foreign fighters are female¹²⁹.

It has been estimated that in some cases women account for up to 40 per cent of the fighting force of some terrorist groups¹³⁰. It has also been noted that, albeit the involvement of women in ethnic and politically motivated violence had historically been proportionally higher than in religiously motivated VE, the latter has seen a sharp rise in recent years, attracting much more media and public attention¹³¹.

In Europe, as a result of growing concerns with the radicalization of European citizens into religious extremism, the most recent debates on the involvement of women with VE tends to concentrate on religiously motivated VE. They mostly address the pathways to radicalization—the push and pull factors for women joining VE—the roles of women in supporting VE, the strategies used by VE groups to recruit women.

According to a RAN report on the role of gender in VE¹³², the radicalization process for both men and women is a complex, multi-layered phenomenon involving several contextual and individual push and pull factor. Additionally, the ICCT study on foreign fighters' phenomenon

in the EU based on analysis of member states data indicates that there is no standard profile of female Jihadists. These include women from a variety of ethnic, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds¹³³.

It has also been argued that despite the impossibility to define profiles for radicalized individuals or simple pathways to radicalization, some gender patterns of push and pull factors can be identified¹³⁴, as men and women may be susceptible to different drivers and given that many VE groups use different recruitment strategies for men and women¹³⁵. The OSCE report suggests gender inequalities, violence against women lack education and economic opportunities may act as gender drivers¹³⁶. Understanding these patterns is thus important for tailored preventive measures to be designed.

In view of that, the most recent version of the “Revised EU strategy for combating radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism” now recommends that gender is considered as a factor in radicalization that leads to violence.¹³⁷

A growing number of studies also shed light onto the multiple roles that women play in supporting VE¹³⁸. In the case of Jihad VE, women can play: the domestic role of raising children according to Jihadist ideology; act as recruiters, propagandists and fundraisers; serve as propaganda asset, where women’s participation is used to shame men into Jihad. Finally, women can also have operational roles, by taking part in violent acts themselves.

Women can also be used as a cover or façade to disguise the violent nature of some groups, to open bank accounts in their names and to carry supplies. These strategies feeds of accepted gender stereotypes, which renders women less visible than men¹³⁹. Some of these roles, particularly that of acting as recruiters, fundraisers and propagandists are said to have been greatly facilitated by more recent access to internet¹⁴⁰. Recent CVE efforts in Europe now include a strong focus on combating online radicalization.

There is also a focus on understanding the recruitment strategies employed by VE from a gender perspective. This has been partially attributed to VE groups increasingly using sophisticated recruitment strategies to target new groups such as women and young people¹⁴¹.

These groups are said to make extensive use of gender roles in their recruitment strategies, such as emphasising the domestic role of women, which is presented with glorified and rosy overtones¹⁴². Additionally, many of these groups have been shown to capitalize on grievances resulting from the dominance or enforcement (perceived or otherwise) of Western gender norms and values over traditional understandings¹⁴³.

However, it has also been pointed out that although some women are indeed groomed into Jihad, pathways to radicalization involve a complex combination of factors, requiring a multi-layered approach¹⁴⁴, and a consideration of their agency¹⁴⁵

The impact of violent extremism and its countermeasures on women's rights

The UNSCR 2242 (2015) Resolution¹⁴⁶ noted that current violent extremism is posing a serious threat to advances in women's rights made over the last decades. These threats include strategic attacks on women's rights and freedoms, including restrictions on freedom of movement, access to education and employment, participation in public life and freedom of expression. The situation is particularly acute in places where VE groups had made territorial advances.¹⁴⁷

In view of this association of VE with the violation of women's rights, the UNSCR 2242 (2015) resolution¹⁴⁸ called for States to make a stronger effort to integrate their agendas on women, peace and security, counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism. The 2016 UN Plan of Action to prevent violent extremism¹⁴⁹ puts gender equality and women's empowerment at the heart of CVE strategies, as one of its seven priority areas. The promotion and protection of women's rights and the prevention of VE can go hand-in-hand by means of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, which include achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as one of its priority goals. The document recalls that: "it is also no coincidence that societies for which gender equality indicators are higher are less vulnerable to violent extremism".

Within the EU, the notion that member states should take more direct action to prevent VE at home and abroad, and that CVE agendas must include measures to prevent direct and indirect impacts of violent extremism on women and girls, is now expressed in several EU guidelines and regulations¹⁵⁰. Member states are, however, responsible for their national security agendas. Therefore, there are significant in-between country disparities in introducing gender-sensitive and rights-based approaches to VE.

However, as noted by the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism, any initiatives to counter violent extremism have the potential to infringe on basic human rights and freedoms, thus being of critical importance that States evaluate and monitor these practices to guarantee their compliance with human rights.¹⁵¹

The experience with the implementation of CVE measures to protect and promote women's rights in Europe and abroad has shown that such measures can have negative impacts on women's safety, rights and on human rights in general. Some of these are listed below:

1. **CVE measures may lead to the instrumentalization of women's role**¹⁵², where the promotion of women's rights becomes priority only in so far as it serves CVE efforts. Some state-led measures to strengthen the relationship between women, communities and government, such as some initiatives funded by the UK under Prevent, were criticised as top-down surveillance-based initiatives that can encourage the perception that women's engagement is CVE is promoted for security concerns, such as gathering intelligence¹⁵³. The concern that this approach may lead to sidelining of women's and human rights as state security takes priority over the protection of those rights has been highlighted by several experts, institutional representatives and human rights activists¹⁵⁴.
2. **CVE strategies may lead to the stigmatization of certain groups.** CVE policies implemented in Europe have often targeted particular groups which are perceived as being at higher risk of radicalization or more affected by it. Muslim communities in particular have been the most affected by CVE policies, with less attention given to far-right extremism, for instance. In some cases, like in the UK, this has exacerbated feelings of cultural and social marginality. EU Recommendations are often made that VE and CVE agendas avoid associating VE with specific religion, ethnicity, race or national identity¹⁵⁵.
3. **CVE policies may lead to backlashes and grievances that can be explored by extremist groups.** When cultural differences are not considered in the formulation of strategies to promote women's rights and empowerment, CVE strategies may risk being ineffective and provide a fertile ground for VE groups to explore. As mentioned in the previous section, some VE groups have been shown to explore grievances resulting from the dominance of Western values. Within the European context, a huge challenge has been the design of policies and initiatives that promote women's empowerment and rights, whilst maintaining at once sensitivity to cultural differences regarding gender roles, and a commitment to promoting gender equality within an overarching European framework of shared values, perspectives on gender roles and women's rights.
4. **Interventions designed to empower women can make them more vulnerable and more visible targets for VE groups,** as their involvement with CVE efforts, particularly in areas of conflict, can be seen as a threat to their ideologies¹⁵⁶.

European rights-based case studies for women's empowerment

In Europe, initiatives that proved more successful in advancing rights-based strategies for women's empowerment with positive impact on CVE efforts and on the protection of women against gender-based violence often came from civil society initiatives, promoted largely by NGOs or by various institutions supporting community-led initiatives.

Some examples of successful projects to empower women—in various capacities—to: have a real stake in preventing violence; to embrace and actively protect their rights and to promote appreciation and respect for women’s contribution to society are:

- ⇒ ***‘The Mothers School’***, a Women Without Borders project based in Austria, which offers international and local family-oriented CVE strategies that focuses on supporting mothers and families to spot signs of radicalization. This innovative project offers tailored community-based mothers’ workshops, where women cover diverse themes from psycho-social development, confidence-building, family communication and applied parenting skills designed to teach mothers how to support their children become more resilient to the fears and frustrations that may lead to radicalisation, and to become ambassadors for de-radicalization within their communities¹⁵⁷.
- ⇒ ***‘The Mothers for Life’***, is a unique global network run by the German Institute on Radicalization and De-radicalization studies for mothers who have experienced radicalization in their families. It aims to bring these mothers together and to provide a safe space where they can discuss, share their experiences and heal their wounds. The project also aims to create counter-narratives to VE from the perspective of those women that have experienced it first-hand¹⁵⁸.
- ⇒ ***The Gender and Justice Project***, a Comic Relief funded initiative run by the IARS International Institute, which offers support to refugees and asylum-seeking women with the aim to empower them to actively fight for their rights and influence policy change. Refugee and asylum-seeking women experience multiple disadvantages, being more likely to experience gender-based violence, and less likely to understand their rights as victims of abuse and to have access to justice. This innovative users-led project offers legal training and mentoring which aim to empower refugee and asylum-seeking women to understand their rights, embrace them and lobby for the establishment in the UK of safeguards for the protection and support of victims that do not have legal resident status¹⁵⁹.
- ⇒ ***The Muslim Women Network*** (MWNUK), a UK-based national Muslim women's organization that works to improve the social justice and equality for Muslim women and girls through community engagement workshops, advocacy and individual support. MWN projects are grounded on a perspective of Islamic feminism that challenges interpretations of the Quran that discriminates against women and girls.

These grassroots initiatives cater for a variety of context-specific issues, incorporating multiple goals and flexible approaches. These may have several advantages over top-down state-led initiatives, including a better capacity to gain trust and to foster truly participatory, multivocal, multicultural and inclusive initiatives that allow for co-building of knowledge. Additionally, grassroots civil society led movements tend to have a stronger focus on promoting women’s rights and empowerment on its own right, instead of treating it as a matter of national security

instrumental strategy. They also often reach out for hard-to-reach individuals for which the State sometimes offers no, or little, protective legal support.

In conclusion, as the debate over the integration of gender considerations into CVE and CT policies gains terrain, it is important that governments and institutions frame their policies under an overarching framework based on respect for and foremost commitment with the preservation of human and women's rights. As the GCTF puts it:

“Practical integration of women and girls into all aspects of CVE programming can only occur in the context of broader guarantees of the human rights of women and girls in particular; these include addressing the causes of gender inequality such as the subordination of women and discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, age, and other factors. The promotion and protection of women's rights and gender equality needs to underlie CVE programmes and strategies.”¹⁶⁰

Youth, Education & Prevention of Violent Extremism in Europe

Introduction

In Europe, the latest terrorist attacks created a narrative that is presented within “two frames: ‘Youth as Problems’ or ‘Youth as the Future of the Nation’, both of which are instruments for political control rather than reflections of the life experiences and interests of youth themselves”¹⁶¹. Young people are seen as being the most at risk to violent radicalization but as the UN alert us this approach increases the risk of losing a generation of youth to despair and disengagement¹⁶².

Governments and EU institutions are realising that allocating funds to reinforce security measures is insufficient and that violent extremism must be considered within a holistic prevention framework¹⁶³. Preventative strategies are effective responses to push factors, also known as an “upstream” approach¹⁶⁴. However, preventing radicalisation is a challenge, and doing it at an early stage is even more so because of current prevention obstacles such as detecting who is at risk of violent radicalisation, being able to get into contact with them and give them and their families the right support¹⁶⁵.

The position of the EC

In Europe, poverty and social exclusion have increased during the economic crisis and young people were impacted the most by this decline. Fortunately, the EU Youth Strategy¹⁶⁶ acknowledges the links between young peoples' financial hardship and the risks of being radicalized for violence. It has two main objectives: to provide more and equal opportunities for young people in education and the job market, and to encourage young people to actively

participate in society¹⁶⁷. In relation to Education and Training, the EU Youth Strategy works to ensure that young people can transit from education to employment. Here, the Erasmus+ programme must be highlighted since it “supports projects designed for youth organisations or groups of young people, with a focus on non-formal learning”, such as youth exchanges or volunteering, and it also engage people in a Structure Dialogue with policy makers¹⁶⁸. All these actions have a role in preventing youth radicalisation since they promote social inclusion and foment education as well as they involve young people in the decisions that affect them directly.

The new EU Youth Strategy¹⁶⁹ (2019-2027) proposes some important novelties such as: (1) a clearer link between EU youth policy implementation and related activities in Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps; (2) a tracking of EU spending for youth in main funding programmes, but also (3) an agenda for youth work to further improve its quality and to allow other sectors to capitalize on the potential of non-formal learning. The Commission proposes a new framework for cooperation on youth so young people and EU can get closer and address the issues that concern them the most, focusing on three areas of action: engage, connect and empower¹⁷⁰. While this strategy is forging a stronger link between the EU and young people through inclusive ways of dialogue, bring effective results through focused priorities and actions, and provide a more effective structure to capture and transmit young people’s ideas¹⁷¹, it will also help EU by tacking huge steps in the prevention of young people’s violent extremism and radicalisation.

Furthermore, in their 2015 Paris Declaration, the EC committed to strengthening their actions to promote social inclusion and to ensure that children and young people acquire social, civic and intercultural competences and enhance their critical thinking¹⁷². All these commitments have a huge potential at what it comes to young people radicalisation since they can be used to manage young people who may have be at risk. For instance, if young people have the tools to develop their critical thinking when they are face-to-face to extremist messages on the internet they will have the capabilities to produce their own counter-narrative and to see/understand behind that message.

In addition, RAN connects frontline practitioners from around Europe who work with people who have already been radicalised or who are vulnerable to radicalisation¹⁷³. RAN has also a platform for young people (18-25) where they can exchange ideas and experiences, as well as a give a valuable input to the RAN Working Group and address recommendations to policy makers¹⁷⁴.

By having youth engaging directly with the democratic decision process they have the possibility to improve what matters the most to them, and tend to be more included in society, this way they have more tools to tackle violent extremism and radicalisation. And so, to embed young people in democratic decision process many programmes can be acknowledged, and

one of them is the YouthMetre, that is a “Forward Looking” youth project funded by the EC and is based in Belgium. This initiative targets young people (aged 18-30) living in the EU and the aim of this project is to “identity, test, develop and assess an innovative approach” which connects young people to EU policy. The project’s goal is to provide information and empower young people living in the EU with tools, so they can interact with policy actors, that the purpose of this project is to support young people who wish to bring about changes in public policy¹⁷⁵.

An Erasmus+ Project that seeks to prevent violent and political radicalisation by promoting the participatory learning approaches, intercultural understanding and active citizenship in and outside schools is the European Learning Environment Formats for Citizenship and Democracy. Three different formats are being implemented in Germany, Denmark, Hungary, Poland and Spain: (1) Street Education: reaches out to young people from disadvantaged areas and backgrounds and invite them into political dialogue; (2) Democracy Coaches: teachers and pupils work together to develop a module for participatory learning approaches and; (3) Innovative, experimental and multi-media supported learning activities, which will be organized by young people¹⁷⁶.

The EU Work Plan for Youth 2016-2018¹⁷⁷ outlines the priorities of youth policy at the European level, and so, the priority has been given towards increase social inclusion of all young people, especially those who are at risk of marginalisation (young people who are “Not in Education, Employment or Training” – NEET) and those who are migrants (immigrants and young refugees). Another resource that can be used to understand and prevent violent radicalisation is EC funding such as the Seventh Framework Programme¹⁷⁸ (FP7), now Horizon 2020.

Horizon 2020 is the financial instrument implementing the Innovation Union, a Europe 2020 flagship initiative aimed at securing Europe’s global competitiveness. Since Europe’s leaders and the Members of the European Parliament agreed “that research is an investment in our future”¹⁷⁹ many projects and programmes have Horizon’s funding, in the field of youth and radicalisation too.

One example is the Dialogue about Radicalisation and Equality project (DARE), that includes 13 countries. It aims to investigate young people’s encounters with messages and agents of radicalisation, how they receive and respond to those calls, and how they make choices about the paths they take. It looks at young people “neither as victims nor perpetrators of radicalisation, but as engaged, reflexive, often passionate social actors who seek information they can trust, as they navigate a world in which calls to radicalisation are numerous”¹⁸⁰. SAFIRE (Scientific Approach to Finding Indicators of & Responses to Radicalisation), is another example involving groups and individuals on the extreme and violent radicalisation spectrum. However, this project notices the fact that “in order to understand them and their motives,

we also need to step back and understand what happened before they turned to a more violent version of their philosophy”¹⁸¹.

Education as soft power

Many European governments as well as the EC see education as the soft power that can play a key role in prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation. Education plays an essential role in the promotion of the core values of the CoE and it has been a defence against the rise of violence, racism, extremism, and more. This growing awareness is reflected in the adoption of the CoE Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education¹⁸² by the Organisation’s 47 members states in the framework of Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7.

In other words, young people need relevant learning opportunities to develop skills and attitudes that can instigate their resilience against extremist groups propaganda¹⁸³. In the context of violent extremism resilience has been defined as the capability of people, groups and communities to reject proponents of violent extremism when it manifests itself¹⁸⁴. In this context, resilience can help young people to build positive actions, rather than heading down to violent behaviours¹⁸⁵. In other words, building young people’s resilience is a good start to prevent violent extremism, because it enables young people with the ability to utilize the opportunities that exist but also to create new ones, and consequently they are less likely to conclude that violence is an option and when confronted with problems they manage them positively¹⁸⁶. There is evidence that this resilience can be built through formal and informal education as it can act as the vehicle for engagement even with the most vulnerable young people¹⁸⁷. The primary purpose of education is not only to develop knowledge, skills, competences and to embed fundamental values, but also to help young people – in cooperation with parents and families – to become active, responsible and open-minded members of society¹⁸⁸.

For example, in December 2015, the UN Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent VE¹⁸⁹ was launch, and with its launching came the recognition of the importance of quality education to address the drivers of this problematic. Also, in 2015 (October) UNESCO’s Executive Board adopted a Decision¹⁹⁰ that enhances the importance of education as a tool to help prevent violent extremism, as well as war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Even though the right to education has been recognised as a human right in international conventions and as one of the key targets of the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by UN member countries in 2015, many children and youth face barriers in accessing and receiving quality education¹⁹¹. Despite considerable gains in education enrolment in the past decade, only 63 per cent of youth accessed upper secondary school education in 2014,

according to the Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals Report by the UN Secretary-General.

Education can take place through formal and informal routes. Formal education is understood as “the structured training systems that run from pre-primary and primary through secondary school and on to university”¹⁹². Non-formal education is understood as “any planned programme of education designed to improve a range of skills and competences, outside the formal educational setting”.

One format of non-formal education is youth work. Youth work can enable youth with safer spaces for discussion, to express their selves, to pluralistic debate and engagement¹⁹³, as well as it can promote counter-narratives and alternative role models based on tolerance and democracy¹⁹⁴. However, it “takes an exceptional level of honesty, integrity and moral judgement to help young people explore their own beliefs without imposing our own”¹⁹⁵. Considering that social exclusion is a risk factor for youth’s radicalisation and knowing that it denotes to “a process of progressive multidimensional rupturing of the social bond at the individual and collective level¹⁹⁶” youth work can provide them with positive behaviour and instigate positive relations with peers. In conclusion, teachers and youth workers need to be equipped with appropriate skills and tools to deal with young people’s problems¹⁹⁷. Resilience is about how students are taught as well as what they are taught¹⁹⁸.

European examples of education for prevention

Teachers play a central role in the prevention of VE (not as punishers, but as educators). They can be role models but also the first to identify signs of radicalization. They can also serve as a bridge between school, families and the broader community¹⁹⁹. Therefore, UNESCO designed the first Teacher’s Guide on the Prevention of VE through education. This Guide was designed for teachers in upper primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education, and was developed with the hope that it can support teachers working in both formal and non-formal educational settings. This tool seeks to provide practical advice on when and how to discuss the issue of violent extremism with learners, and to help teachers create a classroom climate that is inclusive and conducive to respectful dialogue and critical thinking²⁰⁰.

Since one of the principles of the CoE Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education²⁰¹ is “all means of education and training, whether formal, non-formal or informal, have a part to play in the learning process and are valuable in promoting its principles and achieving its objectives” over the last years the number of non-formal educational projects aiming the prevention of youth radicalisation has increased. The University of Turku, in Finland, with funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture, developed The KivaKoulu (“Nice School”) programme focusing on violence among young

people. The results show a reduction of anxiety and depression and a positive impact on students' perception of their peers. Also, the data from all the schools where it was implemented showed that after the first year of implementation, both victimization and bullying were reduced significantly, contributing this way for a better and more inclusive school environment²⁰².

Furthermore, Erasmus+ recognising the urgent need to tackle youth radicalisation, funded the Youth Empowerment and Innovation Project (YEIP)²⁰³, a 3-year youth-led initiative that aims to construct and test innovative policy EU-wide intervention models founded on the principles of positive psychology, restorative justice and the Good Lives Model. YEIP aims to design a positive policy prevention framework for tackling and preventing marginalisation and violent radicalisation among young people in Europe, and it will be implemented through the construction and the field validation of tools in different environments (schools, universities, prisons, online). The success of this project will "demonstrate to European citizens the leadership and determination of EC Institutions in rooting out the reasons that lead to young peoples' marginalisation and radicalisation, firming up in this way trust and confidence"²⁰⁴. In addition, The Philosophical Dialogues Programme that has been tested in UK and French schools, aims to reduce the risk of young people adopting radical, discriminatory, non-liberal ideologies and the potential to act on these. This programme, "by focusing on the formation of positive identities, analytic and reflective habits of thinking, and the acquisition of skills for growth and flourishing, can expand young people's resilience to narratives or pressures that promote extremist systems of value"²⁰⁵.

Mind Your Own Business²⁰⁶ is an entrepreneurship-focused development programme that seeks to strengthen participants' professional skills and vocational relationships through vocational and personal skills development. The participants are boys from deprived neighbourhoods around Denmark (aged 13-17), because they often experience rejection and negative attention because of their ethnicity or negative stereotypes. And so young people are given the responsibility to establish and operate their own micro-enterprise. With this programme the participants improve their communication and social skills, such as co-operating with others and listening to others' views, also, the exposure to a variety of new experiences can increase the confidence of this young boys.

The truth is that education by itself cannot prevent an individual from committing a violent act, but the provision of relevant education of good quality can make it difficult for violent extremist ideologies to proliferate, and that's why education policies must ensure that learning doesn't become a breeding ground for violent extremism²⁰⁷.

Ensuring inclusive education for both children and young people helps counter racism and discrimination, promotes citizenship and teaches understanding and acceptance for different opinions, beliefs or lifestyle²⁰⁸. And when trying to face this problematic, Europe cannot

afford wasted talent, social exclusion or disengagement among its youth, and that's why young people should not only be architects of their own life, but also contribute to positive change in society²⁰⁹.

European families and their role in prevention

Family is one of the domains where greatest changes have taken place over the past years in Europe. The traditional nuclear European family consisted of a married father and mother with several children. However, today, this is only one of the many European family models. The role of men and women has changed with women in most European countries enjoying the same educational and employment opportunities as men. Regardless the consequences that all these changes have, violent extremism and radicalisation prevention still benefit from familiar support, even if it is a single parent family, a family composed by two homosexual parents or just a "typical one".

The role of the family in violent radicalization has become the centre point in the European debates around prevention, and so, family members should be seen "as partners in signalling, preventing and protecting individuals at risk of radicalisation, contributing to the safety and security of society", however research shows that they need support to succeed²¹⁰. Parents and close family members are one of the most important socialization agents for children and can play an important role in the prevention of violent extremism. For better execution of this role it's required that parents develop the understanding of radicalisation processes that lead to violence, but also, it's needed to equip them with the skills to play a proactive role in shaping positive attitudes toward non-violence²¹¹.

Capacity building is crucial to safeguard families, and so it's suggested that it should be facilitated by national and local authorities by means of a proper financial resource putting on the field enough human resources, by developing the understanding of processes of change, disengagement or deradicalisation and by investing in support structures for family support professionals²¹².

One example where family helped in the prevention of violent extremism, took place in 1997 in Norway. The Norwegian Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Children and Family, and the Directorate of Immigration formally established the Project Exit²¹³. The project aimed to establish local networks to support parents of children embedded in racist or violent groups, to enable young people to disengage from these groups, and, at the same time, to disseminate methodological knowledge to professionals working with the target group. This project emphasised the need for parents to be involved in dialogue between youth and professional, highlighting their integral role in the process of disengagement and enabled parental network

groups which facilitate the sharing of advice and information between parents whose children involved in the racist scene²¹⁴.

A more recent approach in the UK was the Channel Programme²¹⁵ that focused on providing support at an early stage to people who are identified as being vulnerable to being drawn into extremism. The results show that for the programme to succeed it is important that both the individuals and their families are fully engaged²¹⁶. Knowing, that violent extremism groups for their survival, require the support of a huge number of sympathizers, and if they are deprived of this support, their capacity to cause harm will be greatly reduced²¹⁷, the need to capacitate the community members, such as parents or other family members, with a safe and inclusive environment is easily seen.

Internet and young people

The internet has a huge impact on society, especially young people as they grow up in a world surrounded by technology and social media. Research confirms that many uses of social media by violent extremism groups are meant to foster fear and to polarize societies, but also it includes the incitement and recruitment of individuals to engage in violence²¹⁸. And so, young people must be protected from inappropriate content, so they are free to enjoy the amazing opportunities the internet has to offer, and for this to happen, they must be as protected online as they are offline²¹⁹.

According to the Net Aware Report 2017²²⁰ the biggest risks for young people when online including (a) interaction with strangers, and this includes unwanted friend requests and sexual or offensive messages; (b) inappropriate content that is particularly prevalent on sites and apps with livestreaming functionality, and where young people deal directly with violence, radicalisation and hatred, sexual content and bullying.

Raising awareness about the risks of the internet for VE is paramount²²¹. Strengthening children's and young people's ability to think critically particularly in the context of the internet and social media is a must, if they are to distinguish facts from opinions and be able to recognize propaganda and hate speech²²². One example is a project by NSPCC and O2. It aims to help parents and teachers to keep their children safe when using the internet, social networks, apps, games, among others, always having in mind that "the internet is amazing" because children can play, learn, connect and open to a whole new world full of opportunities. The O2 and the NSPCC provide tools and advice so that parents and teachers can keep children safe. In school environment they provide staff training, by an elearning course, "Keeping Children Safe Online" and through teaching resources. Regarding what parents can do they propose the TEAM framework, where through four steps parents can almost assure the security of their children. Parents should Talk (about safety online), Explore (the online world

with their children), Agree (rules together as a family about what is OK and what is not) and Manage (the settings available to manage their technology control) this phenomenon with their kids. Actions like these are very important because young people are especially vulnerable and because the internet and social media are part of correlated factors, that when combined with other social and psychological factors may facilitate the radicalisation process²²³.

A holistic approach

If cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature²²⁴, it is imperative to foster the construction of a more inclusive society, that is also prepared to deal with cultural differences. Respect for diversity can also help to understand antagonistic points of view, that will foment social abilities as empathy and compassion²²⁵. And if two of the most mentioned topics that young people want the EU to focus on are education and skills (53%) and the management of migration and integration of refugees (40%), it is necessary that European government allocate funds in a way that responds to these concerns²²⁶.

In the “State of democracy, human rights and the rule of law” report, the CoE’s Secretary General²²⁷ names inclusive societies as one of the five fundamental building blocks of democratic security, by saying that a democratically secure Europe is only possible [if] is guaranteed that all members of society have equal access to fundamental rights. Because, it is by paying attention to respect for diversity that it is possible to build a society prepared to deal with differences, that is more inclusive and in which the risk of radicalization by young people will be possibly null. And so, at a time of increasing global challenges and threats worsened by local tensions and conflicts which undermine humanity’s cohesion, learning to live together becomes more topical than ever before²²⁸.

The EC and SALTO work together to ensure that cultural diversity is understood, respect and promoted within Youth in Action and beyond. SALTO Cultural Diversity²²⁹ is a Resource Centre that provides resources, information and training courses in this area, and the We Are All Europeans²³⁰ is one of the tools developed by it. This guide is designated to support young people and youth workers to create intercultural youth projects using educational and project planning tools and the Youth in Action funding. This guide is for young people, youth workers and youth organisations that want to carry out projects with migrant or multicultural groups and it can be used to inspire ideas, to learn about funding opportunities and more.

The International Young Naturefriends (IYNF) is a Prague-based NGO, promoting solidarity between people of different backgrounds through international activities. After the so-called “Refugee Crisis” of 2015, IYNF decided to dedicate the year of 2017 to the topic Border-free solidarity, which means the absence of fences between young people and indicates that any

perceived barriers, whether religious, cultural, linguistic, geographical, educational, moral, and more should not stop society from cooperating, helping each other and learning from each other.

Regarding this, co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the EU, the “Working with migrants and refugees: Guideline, Tools and Methods” Guide was built, aiming to provide useful tools and methods for working with young refugees and/or migrants in different contexts. The secondary aim of this Guide is to “increase the understanding of the challenges and opportunities that migration brings to the youth work sector and international cooperation and to provide recommendations for good practices when working with young refugees and migrants”²³¹.

Integration policies have positive ancillary effects on preventing violent radicalisation, however a holistic approach to integration is necessary, that manages social, cultural, religious, linguistic and national differences²³². And although young people can be radicalised they are not “risks” to manage, in a way that all of them have something to offer, and that’s why Europe needs their ideas and hopes²³³. To empower young people implies the discovery of individual skills, the transformation of emotions into energy and ideas into projects²³⁴. In other words, to enhance the social impact of violent extremism prevention it is needed to take another step forward and include young people voices, because this is the only way to achieve their goals and limit the negative outcomes through social policies²³⁵.

In this regard, young people should be encouraged to channel their energy to create and develop positive ideas and solutions to the challenges we face today²³⁶. This way, through the participation in organizations and informal groups, young people can develop self-confidence, identity, belonging, friendship, feelings of comradeship and give purpose to their lives. Society needs to deal with the fact that extremism is going to be around for a very long time and that the “most effective long-term solution is looking upstream and changing the ethos of people to make sure they are more tolerant, more inclusive and more diverse as a preventive measure”²³⁷.

[Chapter 3: Human Rights & Preventing Violent Extremism in Asia](#)

Background

While socio-economic, political, and cultural differences exist between and among Asian countries, many are negatively affected by violence and conflict. In a study of cross-national patterns of terrorism, a trajectory analysis revealed a rapidly rising new terrorist threat concentrated especially among countries in South and South East Asia, the Middle East and Africa²³⁸. Extremism is a common factor creating instability in the region. South

Asia, for instance, has one of the highest numbers of deaths from violent extremism. According to the Global Terrorism Index, South Asia is the second-most affected region with three countries ranking among those with the highest impact of terrorism: Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. In fact, the Index listed Pakistan as one of the four countries in the world most affected by terrorism, along with Nigeria, Syria and Iraq. In Afghanistan, terrorism incidents continue to increase, with the Taliban responsible for most attacks targeting civilians, schools, and the police²³⁹.

In South East Asia, of significant concern is the growing influence of ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) or Daesh. It is reported that more than 60 terrorist groups in Southeast Asia have pledged their support to ISIL who declared in a June 2014 video that foreign fighters who could not get to Syria should go instead to Mindanao in southern Philippines. It is estimated that more than 100 of these so-called “foreign terrorist fighters” (FTF) have returned from Syria and Iraq to Indonesia resulting in fears that they will bring back the war to the home front²⁴⁰. The consequence of this is the urgent need for de-radicalisation and rehabilitation programmes. The establishment in Indonesia and “growing influence” of the Malay Archipelago Unit of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (Katibah Nusantara) signals a more strategic role for ISIL in Malaysia and Indonesia²⁴¹.

The five-month siege in Marawi, in southern Philippines, also provides a stark example of the transnational nature of violent extremism. The aim of the attack on Marawi by the home-grown groups led by the Maute brothers of Lanao and Isnilon Hapilon of Basilan was to establish an East Asian Wilaya or province as part of the global caliphate being created by ISIL. Fighters from India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Chechnya were killed in the battle of Marawi²⁴². Funding from ISIL was facilitated by a Malaysian member. “We see the southern Philippines emerging as an important venue for foreign terrorist fighters,” reports, the head of Singapore's International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research²⁴³. According to the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), “One possible impact of Marawi is an increased risk of violence in other countries in the region as local groups are inspired or shamed into action by the Philippine fighters. In Indonesia, some of the attacks against the police in May 2018 were linked to the Philippines²⁴⁴.”

Asia is also seeing cross region religious violence between Myanmar and Bangladesh. Mass attacks led by the Buddhist-majority state army of Myanmar and supported by militias have led to massive displacement of Rohingya who have fled to Bangladesh, creating yet again a mass of people with the potential to be recruited into extremism²⁴⁵.

Push and Pull Factors

As indicated in the introduction to “push and pull factors” in this paper, there is no single driver but a combination of drivers of violent extremism.

Many of the drivers of violent extremism in Asia are local in nature, as witnessed for instance, by the continuing presence and influence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the rise of Hindu and Buddhist nationalism in India and Myanmar. In some cases, religious extremists have capitalized on a culture of political violence by questioning the legitimacy of secular governments and proposing a violent transformation of the state. Moreover, extremist groups often seek to reduce the space for pluralist discourse and engagement, threatening minority rights and civil liberties, as demonstrated by deadly attacks on liberal and secular voices in Bangladesh and the Maldives²⁴⁶.

However, with the rising transnational nature of the threat in Asia, groups are exploiting these local grievances for their recruitment and mobilization efforts. According to IPAC, “Where they often used to be triggered by local factors — such as the sectarian conflict between Indonesia's Christians and Muslims that triggered a deadly bombing in 2002 in Bali— now, fighters are inspired by what's going on thousands of miles away in Syria and Iraq”²⁴⁷.

Push factors

Like other parts of the world, violent extremism of all kinds in Asia thrives in an environment of socio-political inequality, ethnic and religious marginalization, intolerance, discrimination, un-/underemployment, weak rule of law and governance, violations of human rights and poor justice systems, political exclusion, and a lack of adequate resources and service delivery. Other drivers include Islamophobia, hate speech, lack of education and critical thinking, military operations by Western government in Afghanistan and Iraq, feelings of victimhood and secondary trauma related to suffering of Muslims outside the region (Palestinians, refugees from Syria). In other instances, heavy handed security and counterterrorism measures also contribute to distrust between citizens and the state and to deepening grievances about the securitization of the state-society relationship and fostering an enabling environment for terrorism and violent extremism²⁴⁸.

Pull factors

Common pull factors in Asia include political identity, cultural and religious identity, influence of media, monetary incentives, idealization of former fighters from Afghanistan and other conflicts, idea of achieving a “pure Islam”, sense of adventure, feelings of power, opportunity of transformation and change for their community²⁴⁹.

To understand better the influence of these factors, it is important to know what the common types of narratives are being used by violent extremists for recruitment and radicalisation. According to the Hedayah Center, the five narratives are:

➤ **Inter-Faith and Inter-Ethnic Narratives**

These counter- and alternative narratives encourage general support for peace and non-violence as well as tolerance between ethnicities and religions. Because South East Asia is particularly diverse in terms of religious and ethnic identity, these sorts of narratives are especially applicable to the region.

➤ **Religious or Ideological narrative** - These types of narratives utilize religious or ideological concepts or elements to justify the terrorist organization's end goal as well as the use of violence to achieve that goal. Religious components of the narrative ascribe divine legitimacy to the story, which in turn reinforces the narrative for those receiving it. Included in this categorization of narrative, for example, is a moral narrative by which the West is corrupt, and the only rightful.

➤ **Political narrative** - The political narrative contains elements of political objectives such as government change, a new state-structure, or the institution of a new legal system. In some instances, political narratives can also be coupled with religious narratives, to give legitimacy to the political objectives through religious authority. One of the main narratives of violent extremists in South East Asia relates the political construction of a "state" with religious authority in an attempt to give it legitimacy. This is also sometimes coupled with the aspiration of territorial control.

➤ **Social or Heroic Narrative** - The next categorization of narratives used by violent extremists is social/heroic narratives or socio-psychological narratives. This type of narrative focuses on the glorification of violent acts, including terrorism, as well as their perpetrators. It also links them directly to the grievances. An example of a social/heroic narrative is the idea that Muslims are suffering in other parts of the world, and an individual has a personal responsibility to protect fellow Muslims from harm. This type of narrative also includes elements of social pressure or the desire to be part of a greater good or larger cause.

➤ **Economic Narrative** - In this case, violent extremists directly or indirectly suggest that by joining that organization, economic freedom will ensue. For example, original ASG (Abu Sayyaf Group) members were mostly comprised of young Filipino Muslims who joined the terrorist group because of "economic marginalization and silent discrimination." Cash and easy access to weapons—"the allure of money and power that comes from the barrel of a gun" were other motivating factors for ASG members. In the 2000s, the ASG kidnapping for

ransom policy helped to reinforce the idea that by joining ASG, economic concerns would no longer be an issue for group members.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs)

Terrorist groups and individuals are increasingly and strategically using ICTs to recruit, finance, propagate, train, and incite acts of terrorism, as well as gather and disseminate information for terrorist purposes. Former UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, referred to the Internet is a “prime example of how terrorists can behave in a truly transnational way; in response, States need to think and function in an equally transnational manner²⁵⁰.”

For instance, ISIL has exploited social media with slick video productions that have made their propaganda more effective and recruited record numbers of foreigners to Syria and Iraq. Technology has also contributed greatly to mobilization. But because of tighter monitoring of pro-ISIL social media accounts and suspension of some of them, ISIL has been using end-to-end encryption, a more sophisticated and secure platform for communicating with their operatives. They have used these encrypted communication platforms not only for recruitment online but also to spur recruits to action, enabling them to play “an intimate role in the conceptualization, target selection, timing, and execution of attacks.” Bomb-making techniques are also taught online. “Virtual planners have even helped operatives who got cold feet, literally coaching them until the moment they blew themselves up²⁵¹.”

Preventing Violent Extremism in Asia

In January 2016, while terrorism wrought havoc in many parts of the world, a conceptual shift occurred in the halls of the United Nations. The “war on terror” became “PVE” or preventing violent extremism. This shift was announced by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon as he unveiled the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. He said:

“I am convinced that the creation of open, equitable, inclusive and pluralist societies, based on the full respect of human rights and with economic opportunities for all, represents the most tangible and meaningful alternative to violent extremism and the most promising strategy for rendering it unattractive²⁵².”

The “war on terror”, many claimed, had blurred the distinctions between armed conflict and terrorism, between criminal law enforcement and war-related military action, and ultimately between the legal regime of international humanitarian law and human rights

law²⁵³. Because it was a “war”, it seemed to imply that ordinary legal safeguards and rights protections didn’t have to be observed. “War” was an extraordinary phenomenon and needed extraordinary powers from those who would execute the plans for winning the war.

This new way of framing the problem as PVE not only enlarged the scope of the actions but also deepened them. The new Plan of Action would strengthen two pillars of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy originally adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2006, namely, Pillar I - addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism; and Pillar IV - ensuring human rights and the rule of law. The Plan presented seven priority areas: dialogue and conflict prevention; strengthening good governance; human rights and the rule of law; engaging communities; empowering youth; gender equality and empowering women; education, skill development and employment facilitation; and strategic communications, including through the internet and social media²⁵⁴.

National and regional action plans for the prevention of violent extremism

Following the adoption of the UN Plan of Action on PVE, Asian states are now starting to formulate National PVE Plans of Action that would address local drivers of violent extremism. The national PVE plans would complement any existing national counter-terrorist strategies. These should be developed in a multidisciplinary manner with input from governmental and non-governmental actors to²⁵⁵: fortify the social compact against violent extremism; address the Foreign Terrorist Fighter threat; prevent the financing of violent extremism and terrorist groups; align national development politics with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and include effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

In order to proceed with the development of the national strategies and action plans, Asian countries attended a landmark cross-regional workshop in November 2017 with the aim of exchanging knowledge and experiences on how to develop and implement National Action Plans to Prevent Violent Extremism (PVE). These action plans are comprehensive policy documents that governments can adopt to promote a holistic approach to PVE. In line with the UN Secretary General's call for an "all-of-UN" approach to PVE assistance, the workshop was convened by a team of five UN agencies including the recently established United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN Women and UN Volunteers²⁵⁶.

Throughout the meeting, participants among whom were government officials, civil society delegates and members of the academia from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia,

Pakistan, Philippines and Thailand shared views and experiences in dealing with different forms of violent extremism, identifying some of the major challenges and key recommendations to promote "whole-of-society" responses to violent extremism. Experts from Hedayah and the Global Center on Cooperative Security provided technical knowledge on the main elements and methodologies for the development of comprehensive and measurable National Action Plans on PVE.

Some Asian governments have started to develop national action plans on preventing violent extremism. According to UNDP, the governments of Indonesia, Philippines, and Bangladesh are in the process of developing their plans.

The UN Plan of Action also calls for the creation of Regional PVE Plans of Action to strengthen regional and sub-regional cooperation in preventing violent extremism. Three regional bodies in Asia have drawn up interventions to prevent and counter violent extremism. These are, ASEAN or the Association of South East Nations, SAARC or the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, and SCO, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The 10-member ASEAN has had a series of conferences and meetings that have resulted in the Manila Declaration to Counter the Rise of Radicalization and Violent Extremism agreed upon on 20 September 2017, the formation of the Ad-Hoc Experts Working Group to formulate an ASEAN Plan of Action to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalization and Violent Extremism; and the Regional-UN Dialogue on "Women, Peace and Security" - The Role of Women in the Prevention of Violent Extremism held on December 6-7, 2017 in Kuala Lumpur²⁵⁷.

On the other hand, SAARC, because of the relationship of its two largest members – India and Pakistan – is at a new low, is not taking any action toward formulating a regional plan of action. However, countries in the region have been engaged in efforts to promote regional cooperation on countering terrorism and violent extremism through a process implemented by the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) and the Global Center on Cooperative Security. Since 2009, over 300 judges, prosecutors, and police from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka have shared experiences, lessons learned, and best practices on how to counter terrorism in their region and beyond. A parallel process in support of the practitioners' dialogue was launched in 2011 by the Global Center, in partnership with the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore, bringing together key experts, academics, and practitioners to explore national and civil society responses to terrorism²⁵⁸.

SCO describes itself as the largest regional organization in the world in terms of geographical coverage and population, covering three-fifths of the Eurasian continent and nearly half of the human population. Apart from cooperation among the Member States in various fields like economy, culture and finance, the SCO members have agreed to organize themselves to prevent and counter violent extremism. A High-Level International Conference on Countering Terrorism and Preventing Violent Extremism was hosted by the government of Tajikistan in partnership with the UN, OSCE and EU. ASEAN is a major partner of the SCO²⁵⁹.

Prevention of violent extremism and human rights in Asia

To date there is no agreed definition of terrorism and violent extremism. The Plan of Action merely states that “definitions of terrorism and violent extremism are the prerogative of Member States and must be consistent with their obligations under international law, in particular, international human rights law²⁶⁰.” The Plan leaves the matter to each State although it tries to make a distinction between the two terms by stating that “Violent extremism encompasses a wider category of manifestations²⁶¹.” However, the Secretary-General cautioned that “Sweeping definitions of terrorism or violent extremism are often used to criminalize the legitimate actions of opposition groups, civil society organizations and human rights defenders”. He concluded that “This has led to drastically narrowed space for freedoms of expression, association and assembly²⁶².”

In Asia, the implications of not having an agreed definition means that one and all kinds of violence found in the region can come under the cover of violent extremism. Specifically, in South Asia, development actors “remain cautious about engaging on counterterrorism or CVE issues due to the negative association with the “global war on terror,” which has fueled resentment among local populations and has been exploited by terrorist organizations in promoting their violent narratives as a challenge to what they perceive as the social, cultural, and political domination of the West²⁶³”.

Clearly, one major challenge in the implementation of an effective prevention strategy is to agree on a definition of both violent extremism and terrorism. No such agreement has been forthcoming. Human rights violations could come from overly broad responses to violent extremism. The lack of a definition could permit counterterrorism programming to unduly expand and encroach on civil liberties. There is a need at least for greater delineation between terrorism and violent extremism.

The UN High Commissioner on Human rights has also stated that “In some jurisdictions, counterterrorism legislation has reportedly been used to unduly restrict human rights,

such as freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and religion or the right to privacy²⁶⁴.” The Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief has repeatedly expressed concern that overly broad or vague definitions of extremism may be applied arbitrarily and misused to control religious communities or even criminalize legitimate manifestation of religion or belief²⁶⁵. The Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism has expressed concern that Governments have used vague and broad definitions of “terrorism” to punish those who do not conform to traditional gender roles and to suppress social movements that seek gender equality in the protection of human rights²⁶⁶.”

In the interest of finding a common definition, three criteria have been advanced for what constitutes a violent extremist actor: (1) transnational reach; (2) decentralized operations; and (3) ideological opposition to the very values and structures of international society. Some have warned that “With no ownership of the term and no criteria for determining attendant projects, PVE can easily be subverted, misused or manipulated. The lack of definition and conceptual framing in the Plan of Action leave the term virtually defenseless against misuse”²⁶⁷.

Centralizing human rights in PVE can also enable women’s rights - until then in the margins of the issue - to be significantly integrated into PVE initiatives. According to Fionnuala Ni Aolain, now Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism, and Jayne Huckerby:

“Women’s rights advocates and gender experts working on the counter-terrorism and P/CVE spaces have a particularly important obligation to remain locked into and unrepentant on the necessity of protecting women’s social, economic, cultural, political, civil and reproductive rights in the context of countering terrorism and P/CVE”²⁶⁸.

Ben Emmerson, in his 2016 report as Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism, described the impact of measures to counter/prevent violent extremism on human rights. Emmerson broke these down into three sections, the first being ‘Limitations on Freedom of Expression and Censorship Online’, which enforces that: Measures taken to prevent or remove messages communicated through the Internet or other forms of technology constitute an interference with the right to freedom of expression; Bans on the operation of certain sites should not be generic but content-specific; No site or information dissemination system should be prohibited from publishing material solely on the basis that it may be critical of the government or the social system espoused by the government. The second section surrounding ‘Limitations on the Freedom of Movement’ states that: Countries must ensure that all persons enjoy the substantive right to nationality without discrimination and violation must have effective remedy and due process protections.

Lastly, ‘Target Persons or Groups Based on Identity or Beliefs’ pertains to: Countries’ counter violent extremism strategies being broad to encompass anyone but in practice being disproportionately applied to target specific groups classified as ‘at risk’ to violent extremism, and countries’ strategies to identify individuals, indicators, and who is qualified to raise concerns²⁶⁹.

The core issues therefore are: how to make the implementation of the complex, multi-layered approach to violent extremism effective? How do we ensure that human rights and the rule of law is not mere rhetoric and are no longer trampled upon at the first sign of crisis?

Experts from the humanitarian, development, peace and rights communities are calling for taking stock of lessons learned from these fields and how these could make PVE more effective. There are “highly relevant lessons from political economy analyses of aid, years of learning about what works in peacebuilding, conflict analysis and strategy development techniques, the limits of stabilization and security assistance, how to approach perplexing capability traps in the governance sphere, ways to support social empowerment, and so on”²⁷⁰.

In PVE, experts agree that context is everything because of the dynamic and constantly evolving nature of the threat. Therefore, another big challenge is how to collect data that must be “context and time specific and delivered on real time.” It is especially important for technical knowledge and skills to be built up and strengthened regarding the push and pull factors and their rule-of-law and human rights implications²⁷¹.

Technical and political issues faced by Asian countries

Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon articulated in his Action Plan on Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) that:

...rebuild[ing] the social compact between the governing and governed [and] creation of open, equitable, inclusive and pluralist societies, based on the full respect of human rights and with economic opportunities for all, represents the most tangible and meaningful alternative to violent extremism²⁷².

Collaboration and cooperation among the many actors - from global, regional, national, sub-national; across peace, development, human rights fields - will entail asking this crucial question: who decides what for whom? This is a core issue. Where does the right to participation of citizens begin and end? What are the institutional mechanisms for making participation in decision-making possible and viable? As the UN’s so-called

“whole of nation” approach is rolled out, this becomes a key issue specially in the context of the critical importance of the local context in any prevention program.

Many in the development, peace and rights communities are finding this issue of participation in PVE programmes problematic for two reasons: (1) that only 0.5% of terror attacks occurred outside countries suffering conflict or political terror, so focusing on PVE may be co-opting the energies of those who were trying to work for the interests of conflict-affected societies; and (2) The Plan of Action seemed to ask humanitarian actors to become political agents or to assist on the basis of threat rather than need, particularly in authoritarian or conflict settings. The key question in the State-society relationship therefore is whether PVE is a form of instrumentalization or empowerment²⁷³.

For example, Attree proposes that rather than trying to co-opt women’s and youth organizations to serve top-down, state-driven counter-terror strategies, it would be more valuable to support them to set their own agenda for its own sake, with full freedom to challenge all problem behaviors, and have a say in shaping wider stabilization strategies and peace processes. Political will, based on a clear commitment to people’s right to participate in matters that affect their lives, means that instead, of “routinely focusing efforts on religion and ideology, PVE interventions make “changing people’s lived reality the fundamental focus of strategy in the way that rights, peace and development programmes typically do²⁷⁴.”

On the matter of people’s participation in the design of interventions, for example on de-radicalisation and countering radicalisation, IPAC 11, says the problem is that prevention programmes seem to be thought up in capitals like Jakarta without much reference to concrete cases, thus diminishing their chances of success²⁷⁵. She also gives the example of the lack of people’s participation in the rehabilitation of Marawi not just as a challenge for the Philippines but also for Southeast Asia as it could provide fertile ground for recruitment if resentment builds up at people having no voice in the rebuilding of their city.

Lastly, as part of keeping the political space vibrant and relevant to people’s concerns - women and men both - it is proposed that we “embrace vigorous debate on foreign policy.” Attree explains:

“It is important that actions to stop incitement to violence don’t creep into becoming broad clampdowns on dissent. Instead, we need more diverse and vigorous debate – in which decision makers adopt a listening rather than a hubristic stance... It is vital – through deeds more than words – to counteract IS and Al Qaeda’s claim to be the primary international actors standing against the suffering of Muslims in conflict-affected and repressive countries²⁷⁶.”

Preventing violent extremism at the community level in Asia

The shift to a “soft” approach has offered many opportunities for a broad, comprehensive, and coordinated multidisciplinary response to be implemented by a multitude of actors, including those working on women’s rights and women, peace and security issues. The technical capacity to work strategically with this approach is critical to effectiveness. The Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism said that the human rights dimension as both a cross-cutting theme and one of the central pillars of the counterterrorism strategy needed “meaningful support in implementation and practice²⁷⁷.”

The term “glocalisation” has been coined to describe the phenomenon whereby ISIL or Daesh is able to bring its global agenda to a very local level²⁷⁸. That is why communities are an important arena for preventing violent extremism. Community initiatives enable civil society to have a critical role in PVE because of their legitimacy, reach and understanding of local demands, aspirations, and culture. Here are some examples of CSOs involvement in PVE:

Regional case studies

Networking

The Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN – meaning peace in Arabic) is an international network organization promoting a socially engaged, peace-oriented civil society that upholds universal humane and spiritual values. AMAN works to build understanding and solidarity among Muslims and other faith communities in Asia. With members from Jordan to East Timor, AMAN brings together individuals, groups and associations of Muslims in Asia under a progressive approach to Islam. By empowering Muslim people through institutional capacity building, human resource development and interfaith dialogues, AMAN works to create a culture of peace on the local, national and international levels. AMAN also collaborates with other faith-based and secular groups in its many areas of work. AMAN’s main activities include: School of Peace Studies and Conflict Transformation; Interfaith dialogue, peace forums and promoting peace processes; Research fellowship on Islam in Southeast Asia for young scholars; Women’s Commission; Amana Media Initiative: promoting peace thoughts and actions through responsible journalism; AMAN Watch: Human rights watchdog and engaging Muslim lawyers for legal aid services; Friendship and Assistance to Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Migrants; and Prevention of HIV/AIDS and reducing stigma and discrimination²⁷⁹.

Founded in 2016, the **Southeast Asia Network of Civil Society Organizations on Countering Violent Extremism (SEA-CSO)** supports the capacity building of Southeast Asian CSOs working to prevent violent extremism²⁸⁰.

Singapore – case study²⁸¹

Singapore has combined a hard and soft approach to P/CVE. Because of Singapore's multi-ethnic and multi-religious population, its leaders consistently stress the importance of social harmony. Singapore made early investments in building social resilience, an effort that would yield high dividends in the long run. One month after the Singapore Jemaah Islamiyyah (JI) network was exposed in December 2001, then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong proposed the concept of "Inter-Racial Confidence Circles" (IRCC) for each of the country's 84 constituencies, and "Harmony Circles" for schools, work places and other local organizations. A National Steering Committee was also established to provide broad guidance for IRCCs to deepen inter-racial and inter-religious rapport within communities. (Hearn Yuit, 2009).

The total IRCC membership reached 1,021 by June 2006, composed of Chinese, Malays, Indians and other ethnicities. The IRCC was renamed "Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles" in September 2007, to reflect the new role of IRCCs in bridging different religious groups at the local level. According to an official overseeing the process, the aim was "to make sure that in times of peace, we build relationships, trust and confidence. This will create a safety net for Singapore. If ever anything unfortunate were to happen, at that point in time, this safety net would be tested."

After the London 7/7 bomb attacks in 2005, the government launched the Community Engagement Programme (CEP) in February 2006 to provide more integrated and comprehensive efforts in preparing the populace to be psychologically and socially resilient to terrorism. Example initiatives over the past few years include introducing Safety and Security Watch Groups at industrial and commercial premises; outreach to foreign worker populations through the foreign worker dormitories; and expanding the scope of Emergency Preparedness Exercises to cover the readiness to detect and prevent the fallout from potential communal tensions in a crisis.

Aside from the IRCC and CEP, the government also formed (formally in October 2005) the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG), which is an unpaid, all-volunteer grouping of Islamic scholars and teachers who possess formal Islamic educational credentials from both local madrasas and foreign universities. The RRG's objective is to counsel detained JI members and to counter their ideological beliefs. Since 2003, the RRG has performed more than

800 counseling sessions, and has progressively released some of the detainees on restriction orders.

Indonesia – case study

Working with Victims²⁸²

Terrorism victims and their families, strategically deployed, can be a powerful tool in raising awareness of the costs of terrorism. Two organisations of bombing survivors have emerged in Indonesia, the Survivors Foundation (Yayasan Penyintas) and the Association for Victims of Terrorism Bombings in Indonesia (ASKOBI). They are working with the Alliance for a Peaceful Indonesia (Aliansi Indonesia Damai, AIDA), an organisation focused on encouraging victims to share their stories more broadly. Both have members who have taken part in school and university programmes, in a way that has proved to have an emotional impact on the audience.

Bringing convicted terrorists face to face with victims and their families can also be effective, particularly if the victims are Muslim. One of the biggest issues between Jemaah Islamiyah and its more militant critics after JI decided that violence on Indonesian soil was counterproductive was over the deaths of innocent Muslims. JI argued that such collateral damage might be acceptable if Indonesia were under occupation or attack. But in the absence of such dire circumstances, it made no sense. The impact of bringing victim and perpetrator together was in evidence in 2013, when Umar Patek, one of the original Bali bombers, captured in Pakistan in 2011 and returned to Indonesia, was brought together with some of his Indonesian victims. He was reportedly shocked at what they had suffered and said he knew he could never enter heaven without their forgiveness. The emotional punch of that meeting may have contributed to Patek's moderation, to the point that he never became the champion of Indonesian extremists that some of his former colleagues hoped or that Indonesian officials feared. Inside the the prison, he preaches that jihadi actions are only acceptable when Muslims are under direct attack.

Pakistan – case studies

Think Twice Pakistan

Think Twice Pakistan is a collection of videos produced by Black Box Sounds, a communication company in Pakistan, working on countering the terrorist narratives. Among others, some of its videos powerfully capture images that showcase the misery and pain of the victims and the survivors of terrorism²⁸³.

The role of religious journals in violent extremism

In Pakistan, certain religious journals and other media, for instance, for a long time have been a key factor in driving violent extremist views of individuals, groups, and organizations by encouraging and even inciting violence through the distortion of facts and misrepresentation of religious scripture. Although many madrassas and religious groups have no direct link to militant or radical groups, they often promote similarly prejudiced and intolerant views in their religious magazines and journals. Limiting and altogether eliminating the publication and circulation of such literature is challenging for law enforcement agencies and are key objectives of Pakistan's national action plan to counter terrorism, which was established in January 2015.

A study conducted by The Peace and Education Foundation (PEF) explored the dynamics of radicalization and the extent to which religious media, particularly religious journals and magazines, are a key element in the process of radicalization to violent extremism. In analyzing 17 prominent magazines (72 editions in total) related to seminaries or different sects, PEF identified seven major categories of biases that were common in all journals: overt sectarian prejudices; glorification of jihadists; anti-Western sentiments; biases against liberalism, secularism, and democracy; biases against modern education; widespread support for blasphemy laws; and biases against women's empowerment.

The most common trend found was criticism of the practices and beliefs of other sects implicitly and explicitly. Adding to sectarian biases is the promotion of propaganda that glorifies one's own ideology, leading to an endless race for sectarian supremacy. Another common trend is the glorification of jihad, including advocating jihadi activities within Pakistan and in places such as Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Palestine. Many publications also blame Western countries for promoting immoral social values and anti-Islamic rhetoric. They often claim that liberalism, secularism, and democracy are Western values that seek to undermine Islam and are the cause of many contemporary problems faced by Muslim societies around the world. Likewise, non-religious educational topics such as the social sciences are blamed for spreading infidelity and pushing people away from religion. The publications often call on the government to take policy measures to establish an Islamic educational system, which they claim is part of the government's moral, religious, and constitutional responsibility. Many of the religious magazines included articles in support of Pakistan's controversial blasphemy law.

Australia – case study

Community Policing²⁸⁴

The Australian Multicultural Foundation (AMF) has worked with Australian police services for the past 17 years. The AMF was co-partner with the Chief Commissioners' Conference of Australasia in the establishment of the Australian Police Multicultural Advisory Bureau. The AMF also assisted in the establishment of the Multicultural Faith Advisory Council for Victoria

Police and has developed a range of community policing and research projects with Police agencies throughout Australia under their *Mosaic Fund* program.

AMF funded a project in Victoria entitled Community Policing Partnership Project: Helping to Build Social Cohesion and Harmony with Australian Muslim Communities. It was developed after a report revealed that many incidents of discrimination were not reported to police or government authorities due to fear of victimisation; a general lack of trust in enforcement agencies and lack of knowledge about the law and complaints processes. The report advised that mechanisms for building trust between Muslim communities and law enforcement agencies were necessary to reduce the risk of further marginalisation of these communities, particularly young people and women. In partnership with the Australian Multicultural Foundation, this project enabled partnerships between police and Muslim communities across Australia.

Joint community and police projects received funding of up to \$10,000 to establish local networks aiming to build trust, facilitate a stronger sense of social participation, respect and inclusion within communities. The project aimed to (1) demonstrate good practice examples of partnerships which improve relationships between police and Australian Muslim communities, and which can be used as a set of pilots to be replicated with other communities and in other locations; (2) strengthen awareness of the diversity of Muslim communities, an understanding of Islam and issues relevant to Muslim communities across the general ranks of police through education, consultation and other activities; (3) provide a two-way flow of experience, information and direction for police and Muslim communities to identify emerging issues and address common questions and challenges to break down stereotyping on both sides; and (4) develop training and resources for law enforcement agencies to assist in responding to complaints of discrimination and abuse. To be used at a local level but which may be applied in various community policing settings.

Violent Extremism and Gender in Asia

As policymakers and practitioners in South East Asia increasingly recognize the importance of investing in preventive measures that complement counterterrorism operations, it is critical to integrate a gender analysis when developing related national action plans, strategies, and programmes to address the threat, whether by groups, families, returning or relocating foreign fighters, or lone actors. Understanding gender dynamics and integrating a gender perspective means that policymakers, practitioners, and programme implementers account for the different experiences, impacts, and needs of women, girls, men, and boys with regard to their development and security. It also considers their varying access to and control of resources, legal rights, and sociocultural beliefs and practices, and examines how all of these dynamics may change over time²⁸⁵.

Violent extremism and CVE should be considered within the broader context of gender equality and restrictions on women's freedoms and rights, as well as instances of gender-based violence and general criminality²⁸⁶. This is an important framing because key indicators of the spread of violent extremist ideologies include increased discrimination against women and girls, including their rights to education, public life, and decisions over their bodies²⁸⁷.

Systematic and institutional discrimination against women reinforces gender inequalities and limits women's upward mobility and ability to participate freely in society and the economy. Some analysts therefore argue that "countering violent extremism means countering gender inequality, and countering the growing misogyny, sexism, and moral policing of women and their bodies²⁸⁸." In Indonesia, for example, the National Commission on Violence Against Women (*Komnas Perempuan*) found that 154 laws across 140 regions are discriminatory against women, including laws that dictate women's clothing, curfews, restrictions on mobility, and prohibitions on rights of religious minorities²⁸⁹. Furthermore, in Pakistan, a legislation in the Punjab Assembly titled "Protection of Women Against Violence", which included the creation of women's shelters and district-level panels to investigate reports of abuse, was later declared null and void due to pressure from certain religious groups. The bill was criticized by for violating Islamic practices and protecting and legalizing sin²⁹⁰.

Worsening intolerance across the region, including hate speech, against religious and sexual minorities and those who support gender equality is also a cause for concern. Rising nationalism, religious fundamentalism and exclusivity, and intolerance have negative effects on gender equality and women's socioeconomic and political mobility. In Myanmar, for example, fears over polygamy and forced conversion are driving opposition to a bill that protects women from violence²⁹¹.

Additionally, sexual and gender-based violence is increasingly used as a terrorist tactic and can also be an early indicator of violent extremism. In recent years in the Philippines, for example, International Alert found a spike in gender-based violence in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), a region long affected by protracted conflict, instability, and insecurity²⁹².

Even when countries like the Philippines try to address this problem with comprehensive domestic violence legislation that covers physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence, courts are usually backlogged and corrupt, deterring women from reporting their abuse or taking legal action. The lack of women in the justice and security sector also creates "macho" environments where women may not feel comfortable reporting instances of gender-based violence.

Women's role in preventing violent extremism in Asia

According to Bhulai and Nemr, women have long played essential roles in peace and security efforts in conflict-affected regions;

“In helping to safeguard their communities against violent extremism, they are recognizing early signs of radicalization, intervening to dissuade individuals from supporting or joining terrorist groups, and rehabilitating and reintegrating violent extremist offenders back into society²⁹³.”

Furthermore, the authors, cite the fact that because of the importance of family within the region, there is an increasing focus on women's roles within their families and communities and how these roles can be better harnessed to address violent extremism. They cite some programmes that work to empower mothers to take an active role in safeguarding their families against violent extremism by training them in personal communication and parenting skills and to spot early warning signs of radicalization. Bhulai and Nemr state that, in conflict-affected regions, some programmes also involve grandmothers, especially in cases where both parents may have migrated for employment. They caution policymakers and practitioners about making assumptions about or over-emphasizing these traditional roles of women by saying, “Women are not always best-positioned to spot or respond to early warning signs, especially where children may be hiding predilections or behaviours. They are also not likely to alert relevant authorities of their child's behaviour, typically due to mistrust or fear of law enforcement and community backlash²⁹⁴.”

Other P/CVE programmes by civil society organizations, governments, and international agencies focus on promoting the social and economic empowerment of women as a means of building social cohesion and resilience against violent extremism.

Women's role in promoting and participating in violent extremism in Asia

Contextual analysis should include the role of women, not just as coming from a vulnerable group, but as increasingly important actors in mobilization, financing and recruitment for terrorist groups. Bhulai and Nemr note that so far “less attention has been paid to female radicalization and mobilization to violent extremism, resulting in a weak evidence base for programming and neglecting an audience that has garnered specific outreach and attention by ISIL and al-Qaeda, for example. South East Asia has also seen a dramatic rise in women who went to Iraq and Syria. They cite that of women worldwide who traveled to those two countries, South East Asia had the highest rate of female returns at 42 percent. Formerly seen only as a vulnerable group to be protected, women are opting to join ISIL for various reasons, not dissimilar to men and - ironically enough – because of “empowerment” offered by the ISIL through their recruitment methods. In

Indonesia, for instance, some analysts observe a “new activism” of women in violent extremist movements, in which they have moved beyond “reproductive and nurturing roles” to recruitment (both online and offline), providing or facilitating material support to families of imprisoned and “martyred” fighters, or planning or perpetrating suicide attacks.

Asian rights-based case studies for women’s empowerment

Civil society organizations and other stakeholders in South and South East Asia have made good strides in pushing for a more gender-sensitive approach to policies and programmes directly or indirectly related to P/CVE²⁹⁵. Some of these include:

Women's School for Peace in Poso, Central Sulawesi, Indonesians put women front and center in developing a community warning system to prevent the escalation of inter-religious incidents into violence. Moreover, women *ulamaks* or religious leaders in the country are playing a crucial role in challenging extremist ideologies and individuals, as well as in drawing on Islamic teachings and texts that promote tolerance²⁹⁶.

Yayasan Prasasti Pedamaian (Institute for International Peacebuilding, Indonesia) works with women imprisoned on terrorism charges and the female family members of men imprisoned for terrorism to support them psychologically and provide financial support if needed²⁹⁷.

Burka Avengers – This is a locally-made, animated superhero TV series which has claimed numerous international awards, including a Peabody. Its creator, Aaron Haroon, highlighted the importance of having a female superhero who fights for "Peace, Justice, and Education for All" and who reaches children and adults alike across Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, and Indonesia.

Looking for that Other Face, by Frank van Lierde, tells the stories of six Indonesian Muslim women inspired by their faith to develop women’s leadership and work against sexual and domestic violence while countering the rise of extremist beliefs in their communities. The report makes a significant contribution in documenting and vividly portraying indigenous feminism in a Muslim country²⁹⁸.

Mothers for Peace in the Philippines has organized an Imams’ League and Youth Affairs Council to prevent radicalization through Islamic Values Seminars and youth engagement in cultural and sports activities. They also raise awareness about our early warning signs of extremist violence in everyday behavior that affects women including changes in social attitudes to women's and girls' dress and veiling, restrictions on women's mobility, use of derogatory language, and the exclusiveness of mosques²⁹⁹.

Women’s Peace Tables in Mindanao encourages women’s participation in decision-making about peace and security, a campaign to set up Women’s Peace Tables. The Tables are set in local communities by women who bring their issues to the table. Their slogan is “At the Table, On the Table, and Turning the Tables” or women’s participation in decisions

that affect them and their families; their issues and perspectives are considered, and structural changes are affected so that gender equality is achieved³⁰⁰.

In spite of the many interventions by and for women, a recent conference among women leaders in South East Asia noted that a number of challenges and gaps remain that will need to be addressed at all levels by a multiplicity of actors for any robust inclusion of a gender dimension. To address these challenges, the Global Center on Cooperative Security-sponsored conference stated that to leverage the vast knowledge, experiences, and lessons from civil society actors and others who have been working on gender-related issues in the areas of conflict and violence prevention, development, human rights, and other fields critical for PVE. Governments, both national and local, as well as donors and other interested stakeholders, should capitalize on the opportunity to build meaningful partnerships across all sectors to advance a more inclusive and rights-based approach to P/CVE. These partnerships, including with civil society, media, the private sector, and academia, can help raise awareness of gender-sensitive approaches that are being undertaken in communities to prevent and counter violent extremism, and to ensure women and women's organizations have a seat at the table when planning, developing and implementing P/CVE strategies and programmes.

As countries in Asia look to adopt and implement their PVE action plans, strategies, and programmes, The Global Center on Cooperative Security recommends that they consider the following recommendations to ensure gender inclusivity, especially relating to women's participation³⁰¹.

- **Ensure better strategic coherence and coordination among national and local efforts.** Governments should create operational frameworks and formal engagement mechanisms that facilitate meaningful engagement and inclusive dialogue and debate between national and local officials and diverse groups of civil society organizations, including those working on gender issues in related fields like women, peace, and security, violence prevention, development, human rights, peace-building, security sector reform, and good governance.
- **Invest, politically and financially, in national and local efforts to advance gender inclusion and women's participation in P/CVE.** Donors should allow flexibility in terminology and funding for P/CVE projects to test new concepts, facilitate better dialogue and submissions for funding, and report on activities. Stakeholders could also consider providing support for proposal-writing and organizational capacity building for civil society organizations, particularly those tasked with contributing to the implementation of national P/CVE action plans.
- **Facilitate trainings and programmes that improve female economic and social standing and encourage greater representation in society.** These could include literacy trainings or programmes to strengthen political leadership and civic action

among youth – including girls – to help increase their representation in local government at an early stage and establish a future desire for political activism. Other programmes could also focus on educating religious leaders on topics of gender equality and female empowerment to help them become better advocates and partners in building more resilient communities against violent extremism. Trainings could also focus on general paralegal services and access to justice measures to increase understanding of terrorism legislation and to increase the number of legal aides in communities that are overly targeted and prosecuted.

- **Partner with private sector companies to explore funding opportunities for new ideas and platforms.** Private sector engagement can tap into potential corporate social responsibility models that may allow for the private sector to play a greater role in the empowerment of women and girls and change structural, organizational, and cultural barriers to equality.
- **Engage with communications and media professionals to raise awareness of women-led P/CVE efforts.** Gender-sensitive media and communication campaigns can help raise awareness of the work of women-led organizations and can socialize communities and local governments to the role of women in P/CVE policy and programming. Such campaigns could take the form of writing op-eds and hosting radio programmes.
- **Fund and share evidence-based, gender-sensitive, and context-specific research.** Further research is needed on the links between gender-based violence and violent extremism and gendered pathways to engagement in terrorist groups. Stakeholders should invest in collecting, storing, and sharing gender-disaggregated data to explore such links and trends. Government agencies should apply relevant research and policy analysis from academic institutions, think tanks, and others to feed into P/CVE policy and practice, and share their own data with civil society organizations and other relevant actors, where feasible.
- **Prioritize the safety and security of women in P/CVE programming.** Donors, governments, civil society organizations, international partners, and others should develop and implement standard operating procedures to assess the appetite, feasibility, and security risks of undertaking activities designed to amplify the role of women in P/CVE within the local context. This includes maintaining open avenues of communication with local authorities and coordinating as much as possible with such authorities to ensure safety and security.

Youth, Education & Prevention of Violent Extremism in Asia

As of 2014, Asia's youth population stood at 1.1 billion aged 10 to 24, representing 26 percent of the total population. India and China alone accounted for 660 million youth, with 360 and 300 million, respectively, living in these two countries. In other words, Asia has the

largest generation of youth in history. The challenges are enormous: 220 million youth are not engaged in education, employment or training. Only 37 percent of primary school students are expected to leave with a basic level of numeracy and literacy; 36 million youth are unemployed, with another 300 million underemployed; 180 million youth are living in extreme poverty (below USD 1.25/day)³⁰².

Against this background, how to engage the youth of Asia so they are not vulnerable to violent extremism?

UNESCO responds: This must start on the benches of schools and by empowering young women and men with the right values, skills and behaviours to make the most of diversity, to engage fully in their societies, to find decent employment, to live as global citizens, defending human rights and fundamental freedoms in every instance. All of this calls for new forms of education, a new focus on advancing cultural literacy, to defend humanity's shared cultural heritage, new approaches to bolstering media and digital literacy, to strengthen the resilience of societies against the false siren calls of violent extremism, to strengthen the unity of all women and men as members of a single family, sharing aspirations and rights, a past and a future³⁰³.

A research project conducted by SEARCCT among undergraduate students in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand yielded the following significant insights³⁰⁴:

1. Both radically violent and "not-yet-violent" ideas were a clear and present danger because they have the potential for radical violent behavior.
2. The students were aware of the subject of terrorism and believed that it had the capacity to affect their lives.
3. Videos and images of victims of terrorism and former terrorists were powerful tools.
4. There is a need to develop alternatives to terrorism such as non-violent approaches to civil disobedience and to highlight and disseminate such alternatives to the students.
5. The tremendous potential of television and the internet to counter terrorism, considering their popularity among the undergraduates.
6. A small but significant minority of the undergraduates were actively seeking out and engaging with terrorists via the internet.
7. Universities had a responsibility to the students in the prevention of violent extremism.

The research concluded that, first, there is cause for concern based on the patterns of undergraduate radicalisation in institutions of higher learning in these five South East Asian countries; and (2) universities and their undergraduate students can contribute to preventing

radicalisation and violent extremism.

Clearly, young women and men can be partners in any intervention to address the push and pull factors that are directed at them. The research shows that they have the “potential, energy and creativity to play a significant role” in countering terrorism, particularly in the area of countering the terrorist narratives. It is important for these partnerships between the undergraduates and the university to be institutionalised from the very beginning when programmes are crafted and developed. Thus far, “efforts in harnessing this potential from among the undergraduate, in particular, and the youth in general has been ambiguous at best and neglected at worst,” the report concludes.

The research further lists what this programme would consider addressing: (1) the need to exploit the media; (2) the need to target **non-violent** radicalisation to prevent violent radicalization; (3) the need to tell the stories of victims and former terrorists; (4) the need to popularize the alternatives to terrorism; (5) the need for digital story-tellers; (6) the need for real-life heroes and heroines; (7) the need to re-channel curiosity; and (8) the need to move from “selective CVE-inoculation” to “comprehensive CVE-inoculation” or directed at all youth instead of selecting only those who have shown tendencies toward radicalisation.

UNESCO indicates the following priority action areas: education to build resilience; media skills, counter-narratives and online coalitions; youth participation and empowerment, safeguarding cultural heritage, celebrating cultural diversity, promoting intercultural dialogue, and building inclusive sciences and sharing natural resources.

Some projects focused on youth and PVE include:

#Extreme Lives - This is a series of live video broadcasts on Facebook from countries across South East Asia, including Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore, covering on-the-ground stories of violent extremism. The Asia-Pacific region is estimated to have 1.7 billion active users on Facebook, and men between the ages of 18-34 constitute the largest single demographic of users across large swathes of the region. Produced by UNDP, the project counteracts the use of digital technologies and platforms used by radical groups to recruit and radicalize by engaging the regions youth on issues such as violent extremism³⁰⁵.

6+1 Rehabilitation Model in Sri Lanka. The 6+1 model includes six programmes: education, vocational training, spiritual growth, recreational activities, psycho-social counselling, and exposure to society, culture and family. The ‘+1’ component includes preparing the wider community to accept and assist in aftercare, to prevent re-radicalisation and marginalisation. While the number of youth de-radicalised through the programme is currently unavailable, official government statistics indicate that over 11,000

participants of the programmes were reintegrated into society³⁰⁶.

Mythos Labs works with comedians and social media influences to counter the narratives of terrorist and violent extremist groups through humorous viral videos. In South Asia, they partnered with East India Comedy to create the video, “I want to quit ISIS”³⁰⁶. In less than one month, the video amassed more than 900,000 views on Facebook and YouTube. Their latest productions – “Brainwash” and “Hi Sis” – used satire to counter the messages used by terrorist organizations to recruit women to their cause. Targeted at audiences in South and South East Asia, the comedic videos highlight the false promises of violent extremism groups that seek to recruit women and promote the message that withholding support from these groups and promoting messages of peace is the empowered choice³⁰⁷.

Chapter 4: Concluding and Critical Reflections

The “Push and Pull Factors” of Violent Extremism: Who is to be Blamed?

European and Asian literature on the so called “pull and push factors” of violent extremism is rich. And yet, we are far from being able to “profile” those at risk. In fact, there is more evidence to claim that by attempting to profile and predict, we may in fact be breeding the very reasons that lead those at risk to violent radicalisation³⁰⁸. The factors that have been quoted in the aforementioned literature are shared between the two continents and can be summarised as: individual backgrounds and motivations; collective grievances and victimization stemming from domination, oppression, subjugation or foreign intervention; distortion and misuse of beliefs, political ideologies and ethnic and cultural differences; and leadership and social networks.

As the Plan of Action on PVE affirms, there is no one driver for radicalization. The broad PVE agenda, covering economic, social, cultural and political structures and systems thus calls on a “whole of nation” approach for these drivers to be addressed. As noted earlier, the participation of development, peace, and humanitarian agencies, as well as community groups, would be critical in addressing the complex push and pull factors of violent extremism. Many have also argued that the true terrorist is to be found within by raising the mirror of responsibility and looking inside to find only ourselves³⁰⁹.

James Madison once said, “Perhaps it is a universal truth that the loss of liberty at home is to be charged to provisions against danger, real or pretended from abroad” (Letter of James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, May 13, 1798). How true these words sound when considering the anti-terrorism legislation that we have been drafting to minimise the risks created by “pull and push factors”. Take as an example, the UK’s Terrorism Act of 2000 and the Anti-terrorism,

Crime and Security Act of 2001. Both have exposed the British government to a number of criticisms, mainly from international NGOs such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other national human rights groups such as Justice and Liberty.

The road that we have taken in preventing the “pull and push factors” of violent extremism is encouraging international society to become more polarised than ever, while the “them” (criminals - terrorists) and “us” (victims) rhetoric dominates political speeches and media presentations. And we have to ask: what will it take for society to finally raise the mirror of responsibility and look well into its reflection? We are the real architects of the social fabric that generates extremist ideologies, which then gradually corrupt universal values such as tolerance and the respect of life, dignity and brotherhood. The extremist ideology that leads those young men and women to inhumane actions is not an alien virus of unknown origin, but a product of our way of living.

Sharing responsibility and the ability to look inside of ourselves also forces us to ask whether a public debate and a restorative dialogue for responsibility-taking might indeed be more fruitful than yet another “war on terror” that could take more freedoms away from those who are most vulnerable such as those in hospitals, care homes, foster care and prisons.

From the “War on Terror” to Community Prevention

Following the September 11th attacks, the narrative of Western and Asian government has traditionally surrounded “war on terror”. However, as this paper has outlined, communities have risen and gradually responded to this and numerous other narratives (economic, gender, political, and so on). Shifting the focus from “war on terror” to “PVE” has opened up space to the critical participation and leadership of communities and civil society in the prevention of violent extremism.

In a “whole-of-society” approach to PVE from national to sub-national levels, the local European and Asian communities can now provide a strong basis for any plan of action. This is because underlying drivers of radicalization and violent extremism are intimately manifested at the local level. Community-led interventions supported by local government authorities; the private sector; leaders of communities; professionals; women’s and youth organizations; families; faith-based groups; and social service providers, among others, are crucial to any interventions at all stages from pre-radicalisation, radicalisation, engagement in violent extremism, rehabilitation, and reintegration. The challenge in this approach is how to ensure its effectiveness, as security sector strategies run alongside civil society, community-led efforts without each cancelling out each other’s gains.

Women and Prevention of Violent Extremism

It is apparent from the analysis presented in this report that, in both Europe and Asia, the role of women in violent radicalisation can be multifaced. Women can be the catalyst for change, instigating violent radicalisation or performing violent radical acts, themselves. We have also provided evidence to show that the field of national and international security has so far been gender-blind. Conceived as the purview of men, women have been largely excluded from decision-making processes, and insufficient attention has been given to understanding the gendered nature of violence and extremism. VE is, however, a highly gendered phenomenon. The Global Countering Terrorism Forum (GCTE) manual for ‘Good Practices on Women and Countering VE’ recalls that:

“Women are subjected to a range of gendered experiences based on assumptions about masculine and feminine roles as they relate to economic, political, social and cultural realities. Gender-related assumptions shape available opportunities, rights, recruitment, and roles within organizations for both women and men.”

Understanding the complex gender dynamics sustaining VE and including women in decision-making processes and efforts to prevent it is critical for contemporary security issues and the preservation of women’s and human rights.

The UN, through the UNSCR 2242 (2015) resolution, noted that current violent extremism is posing a serious threat to advances in women’s rights made over the last decades. These threats include strategic attacks on women’s rights and freedoms, including restrictions on freedom of movement, access to education and employment, participation in public life and freedom of expression. The situation is particularly acute in places where VE groups have made territorial advances.

In light of this association of VE with the violation of women’s rights, the UNSCR 2242 (2015) resolution called for States to make a stronger effort to integrate their agendas on women, peace and security, counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism. The 2016 UN Plan of Action to prevent violent extremism puts gender equality and women’s empowerment at the centre of CVE strategies, as one of its seven priority areas. The promotion and protection of women’s rights and the prevention of VE can go hand-in-hand by means of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, which include achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as one of its priorities. The document recalls that, “it is also no coincidence that societies for which gender equality indicators are higher are less vulnerable to violent extremism”.

Youth, Education and Prevention of Violent Extremism

When it comes to violent extremism, young people, whether in Asia or Europe, have been the focus of politicians and the media, but not for the right reasons. This has created an even bigger inter-generation gap and further isolation. We have argued that young people need relevant learning opportunities to develop skills and attitudes that can instigate their resilience against extremist group propaganda. In the context of violent extremism, resilience has been defined as the capability of people, groups and communities to reject proponents of violent extremism when it manifests itself. Resilience can help young people to build positive actions, rather than engaging in violent behaviours.

There is evidence that this resilience can be built through formal and informal education as it can act as the vehicle for engagement even with the most vulnerable of youth. The primary purpose of education is not only to develop knowledge, skills, competencies and to embed fundamental values, but also to help young people – in cooperation with parents and families – to become active, responsible and open-minded members of society.

The UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent VE recognises the importance of quality education to address the drivers of this problem. UNESCO's Executive Board also adopted a decision that enhances the importance of education as a tool to help prevent violent extremism, as well as war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Even though the right to education has been recognised as a human right in international conventions and as one of the key targets of the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by UN member countries in 2015, many children and youth face barriers in accessing and receiving quality education. Despite considerable gains in education enrolment in the past decade, only 63 percent of youth accessed upper-secondary school education in 2014, according to the Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals Report by the UN Secretary-General.

Education can take place through both formal and informal routes. It can promote counter-narratives and alternative role-models based on tolerance and democracy. However, it “takes an exceptional level of honesty, integrity and moral judgment to help young people explore their own beliefs without imposing our own³¹⁰”. Considering that social exclusion, as a risk factor for youth radicalisation, is “a process of progressive multidimensional rupturing of the social bond at the individual and collective level³¹¹”, this type of work can create opportunities for young people to develop healthy behaviour patterns and help them to create positive relations with peers.

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