



# Countering Violent Extremism:

An Introductory Guide to Concepts, Programming, and Best Practices

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Adapted for the Central Asian Region

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Text by Dallin Van Leuven

Reviewers: Lena Slachmuis, Irene Belmonte, Carlotta Nanni, Cristina Mattei, Sara Zeiger, Lilah Elsayed, Wedad Al Hassen, Emil Zheenbekov, Keneshbek Sainazarov, Indira Aslanova, Maya Jizzini, Lakshitha Saji Prelis, and Solvi Karlsson

Design and publication layout by Melissa Payne



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For consistency, British English spellings in quoted materials have been changed to American English, with the exception of the names of organizations and publications.

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### **About Search for Common Ground**

Search for Common Ground (Search) has been working since 1982 to transform the way the world deals with conflict, away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative problem solving. Search uses a multi-faceted approach to find culturally-appropriate means to strengthen societies' capacities to handle conflicts constructively. We employ media initiatives and work with local partners in government and civil society to understand differences and act on commonalities. Using innovative tools and working at different levels of society in more than 30 countries, Search engages in pragmatic long-term processes of conflict transformation. Our methods consist of mediation and facilitation, training, community organizing, sports, theater, and media production including radio, television, film, and print.

### **About Hedayah**

Hedayah was created in response to the growing desire from members of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF) and the wider international community for the establishment of an independent, multilateral center devoted to dialogue and communications, capacity building programs, research and analysis to counter violent extremism in all of its forms and manifestations. During the ministerial-level launch of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF) in New York in September 2011, the United Arab Emirates offered to serve as the host of the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism. In December 2012, Hedayah was inaugurated with its headquarters in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Hedayah aims to be the premier international center for expertise and experience by promoting understanding and sharing of good practice to effectively serve as the true global center to counter violent extremism.

### **About the Author**

Dallin Van Leuven is a program manager with Search for Common Ground. With a focus on countering violent extremism, he has worked on a number of issues at the junction of justice, conflict, and gender in Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. With Search, Van Leuven has researched the drivers of marginalization and radicalization across the Middle East, including co-authoring *Youth and Contentious Politics in Lebanon: Drivers of Marginalization and Radicalization in Tripoli* and advising on *Women and Violent Radicalization in Jordan*. Van Leuven also co-authored the United Nations Development Programme's report, *Kosovo-Wide Assessment of Perceptions of Radicalization at the Community Level* and a book chapter in 2016 on the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant's unprecedented use of gendered strategies to recruit foreign men and women, which was published in *Foreign Fighters under International Law and Beyond*.

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# Glossary of Terms

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**Countering violent extremism** refers to the programs and policies which aim to dissuade individuals or groups from radicalization and recruitment into violent extremism and resorting to ideologically motivated violence to further social, economic, religiously-based or political objectives.

**Counter-terrorism** is the realm of coercive and non-coercive programs and policies to prevent and deny opportunities for violent extremist activity and to disrupt, arrest, prosecute, and/or kill violent extremist groups and individuals.

**Terrorism** is using violence, “including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act.”<sup>1</sup>

**Violent extremism** “refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support or use ideologically motivated violence to further social, economic, religiously-based or political objectives.”<sup>2</sup>

**Violent radicalization** is the process by which an individual or group comes to adopt increasingly violent and extreme political, social, cultural, and religious ideologies.

**Violent self-radicalization** is when someone comes to adopt increasingly violent and extreme political, social, cultural, and religious ideologies without necessarily being approached by a member of any violent extremist group, although they may have been influenced by that group’s ideology.

**Recruitment** is the process where an individual shifts from “grievance/mobilization to partaking or supporting in a violent act. Recruitment requires at some level (even a very basic level) a personal connection to a violent extremist, even if that recruitment is done online.”<sup>3</sup>

**“Disengagement** is the process of shifting one’s behavior to abstain from violent activities and withdraw from a violent extremist group.”<sup>4</sup>

**Deradicalization** is the process of “countering and undermining the ideology related to violent extremism and suggesting an alternative ideology” by degrees.<sup>5</sup>

**Rehabilitation** is the process “where practitioners in community or detention centers are involved in rehabilitating individuals after they have been deradicalized and/or disengaged from violent extremist ideologies.”<sup>6</sup>

**Reintegration** is the process “where practitioners help the transition of the completely rehabilitated individual back to society. Practitioners also work at the same time on society to ensure there is a positive response to the rehabilitated, and to mitigate social stigma. The ultimate goal of reintegration is to foster the social inclusion of the individual and prevent recidivism.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 1566, S/RES/1566 (October 8, 2004), 2, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/1566\(2004\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/1566(2004)).

<sup>2</sup> “Introduction to Countering Violent Extremism: Resources on Key Concepts and Definitions” (Hedayah, Internal Document). This handbook is not yet published.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Mia Chin et al., “A National Strategic Framework for Countering Violent Extremism in Jordan,” *Journal of International Affairs* 69, no. 2 (2016), 116.

<sup>5</sup> Hedayah, “Introduction to Countering Violent Extremism” (unpublished).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

**Vulnerability** is a “condition produced by personal risk and protective factors which might make an individual more susceptible to [drivers of violent extremism] and ultimately, to radicalization leading to violent extremism.”<sup>8</sup>

**Resilience** is where individuals or communities have the positive capacities of “knowledge, skills and abilities to protect against factors that might lead to radicalization and recruitment.”<sup>9</sup>

A **Do No Harm** approach is the practice of understanding how countering violent extremism efforts interact with local dynamics and relationships to allow practitioners to mitigate or avoid negative, unintended consequences that may result from these efforts and to focus on positively influencing these dynamics and relationships.

**Drivers of violent extremism** are causes or reasons why groups or individuals might be attracted to supporting or engaging in violent extremism.

**Push factors** are any condition or grievance that creates a sense of frustration, marginalization, and disempowerment which encourage people to seek out remedies including, but not limited to, joining extremist groups.<sup>10</sup>

**Group dynamics and relationships** are factors that shape the issues, environment, and community in ways that make individuals or communities more vulnerable to violent extremism.

**Pull factors** are forces that can be attractive to potential recruits and specifically draw them into radical organizations, such as a sense of kinship, heroism, adventure, economic gain or self-realization.<sup>11</sup>

**Civil society** is the broad term for organizations and institutions that act in the interests of citizens—including informal collectives, labor unions, activists, charities, religious institutions, and more.<sup>12</sup>

**“Gender** refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men – such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed. While most people are born either male or female, they are taught appropriate norms and behaviors – including how they should interact with others of the same or opposite sex within households, communities and workplaces.”<sup>13</sup>

**Gender norms** are the roles, responsibilities, and standards of a particular society, culture and community that are socially acceptable for men and women, based on their actual or perceived sex.

**“Gender-blind:** All projects, organizations, staff, and activities that do not recognize or that deny the gender dimensions and implications of their work.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Lena Slachmuis, “Transforming Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilder’s Guide,” (Washington, DC: Search for Common Ground, 2017), 8. [English] [French]

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> There is also some disagreement as to whether the media or educational institutions are included in the sphere of civil society, but these sectors will be specifically discussed in later modules.

<sup>13</sup> “Gender,” World Health Organization, 2018, <http://www.who.int/gender-equity-rights/understanding/gender-definition/en/>. [English]

<sup>14</sup> Cordula Reimann, “Trainer Manual: Mainstreaming Gender into Peacebuilding Trainings” (Center for International Peace Operations, 2016), 60.

**“Gender-sensitive:** *A project, organization, or activity that is designed, implemented, or assessed by taking into account the different roles, needs, and interests of women and men.”*<sup>15</sup>

**“Gender analysis** *identifies, assesses and informs actions to address inequality that come from: 1) different gender norms, roles and relations; 2) unequal power relations between and among groups of men and women, and 3) the interaction of contextual factors with gender such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, education or employment status.”*<sup>16</sup>

**Narratives** *are a set of ideas, facts, perspectives, and experiences that inform the way an individual or group perceives their place in the world around them.*<sup>17</sup>

**Monitoring** *is a process of “data collection throughout the duration of the program to assess*

*indicators along the way and make appropriate changes if necessary.”*<sup>18</sup>

**Evaluation** *is “a systematic assessment of a program to determine its impact and effectiveness based on benchmarks, standards, and goals.”*<sup>19</sup>

**Outputs** *are measurable products (usually recorded as a number) of a program’s activities or services and are often recorded measures in terms of units completed.*<sup>20</sup>

**Outcomes** *are any results of program activities or services (usually recorded qualitatively) and are often expressed in terms of changes in behavior or attitudes.*<sup>21</sup>

**Impact** *is “the measurable effect or change a program has on the target population [and] can be intended or unintended, direct or indirect.”*<sup>22</sup>

**Indicators** *are measurements of types and*

*processes of change, such as attitudes, behaviors, and relationships.*<sup>23</sup>

A **theory of change** *is an explanation of the causal links from activities to the intended outputs, to subsequent outcomes, and finally to the intended impact.*

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>16</sup> World Health Organization, “Gender.”

<sup>17</sup> Slachmuis, “Transforming Violent Extremism,” 28.

<sup>18</sup> Cristina Mattei and Sara Zeiger, “Evaluate Your Countering Violent Extremism Results: Projecting Your Impact” (Hedayah, July 2018), 7.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Adapted from Mattei and Zeiger, “Evaluate Your Countering Violent Extremism Results,” 8.

<sup>21</sup> Adapted from Mattei and Zeiger, “Evaluate Your Countering Violent Extremism Results,” 7.

<sup>22</sup> Mattei and Zeiger, “Evaluate Your Countering Violent Extremism Results,” 7.

<sup>23</sup> This definition was adopted from Hedayah.

# Introduction

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The field of countering violent extremism is rapidly growing and changing as we learn from practice and research. However, these rapid changes have made it difficult for practitioners in government and civil society roles to understand the latest good practices and lessons learned in countering violent extremism. In addition, they have not been accessible to most practitioners outside of the so-called Global North. For example, they have mostly only been available in English and have not been translated into other languages. These good practices and lessons learned are also rarely adapted for other contexts.

This curriculum is an attempt at overcoming these challenges. As such, it is designed to provide training for government and civil society workers on the field of countering violent extremism, whether or not they have prior experience with it. It is structured into ten learning modules and is accompanied by training materials including a facilitator's guide, slide presentations, handouts, and pre-recorded webinars to allow for multi-day trainings on its content. They include a series of activities for each module and links to illustrative videos that

provide primers for discussion and reflection. Each module also includes a "Further Learning Opportunities" section, which includes additional resources (as many as possible in your own language!) for more in-depth learning as well as some guiding questions on how to incorporate them into your own work. This training program is designed to be done either with in-person groups, led by a facilitator, or through online webinars in groups or individually. An overview of the learning modules is below. But first, a little about what this curriculum is and what it is not.

This curriculum delivers a contextually literate countering violent extremism and awareness-raising training program that is relevant to your context in an accessible way. It highlights the benefits of collaborative approaches beyond the use of military or securitized responses to violent extremism, drawing on good practices, and offers tools and guidance for easy adaptation to your local context and cultures. Finally, it encourages the early identification and mitigation of risks with programming, as well as ensuring a Do No Harm approach.

While this curriculum will offer guidance around how to design, implement, and monitor

constructive responses to violent extremism, an understanding of project management is assumed. Therefore, it is not a training program on general project management skills, monitoring and evaluation, or on fundraising. Since the problem of violent extremism is complex and highly context-specific, it is also not a guide to the drivers of violent radicalization in your local context, nor does it proscribe the programs and policies that would be most effective. Instead, it introduces you to the guiding questions and tools necessary to make informed and effective choices in your own efforts to counter violent extremism.

This curriculum was developed by Search for Common Ground in collaboration with Hedayah and generously financed by the European Union. In addition to gathering the collective insights from the global experiences of Search for Common Ground and Hedayah in countering violent extremism, the curriculum was piloted in Kyrgyzstan and Jordan with local academics, practitioners, police officers, and civil society and government officials. Their contributions were invaluable and helped to better contextualize this training for their respective regions.



# Module Overview

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## 1. Conceptual Grounding in Countering Violent Extremism

This module clarifies the different violent extremism and countering violent extremism terms and concepts, the evolution over the past decade, and engages participants with key documents and resolutions, including the United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, and selected National Action Plans. This module lays the foundation for understanding the countering violent extremism field of practice and offers insights into the opportunities as well as the common pitfalls in this space and suggestions on how to avoid them.

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## 2. Understanding Drivers of Violent Extremism in a Contextualized Manner

This module offers a selection of frameworks and guiding questions which can be used to analyze and better understand the drivers of violent extremism in a specific context; this includes understanding how to identify push and pull factors as well as group dynamics that drive violent extremism in a particular context. This module prepares participants to be able to identify opportunities for prevention initiatives.

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## 3. Engaging Community Leaders and Families in Countering Violent Extremism

This module highlights the role that communities might play in efforts to counter violent extremism, such as engaging with diverse community leaders, including religious leaders and other customary leaders, who are often best positioned to offer support and guidance to families or those potentially vulnerable to radicalization. It also explores initiatives that have sought to understand how family members can play a role in countering violent extremism. For instance, the module explores how this can happen when families are a conduit of values and traditions, positively shape the worldviews of children and youths, and identify early signs of vulnerability to radicalization, among other problems. This can also happen through engaging family members in disengagement and rehabilitation efforts for radicalized individuals.

# Module Overview

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## 4. A Multisectoral Approach to Countering Violent Extremism: Opportunities for Collaboration between Government and Civil Society

This module offers guiding principles for engaging state and civil society actors in enabling more effective state responses and engaging a multisectoral approach. It explores the reasons why collaboration may not occur or be limited. The module then guides the participants towards identifying sectors or institutions where this type of collaboration would be ripest for their context.

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## 5. Understanding Gender Dynamics to Radicalization, Violent Extremism and Engaging Women and Girls

This module explores the gender dynamics that affect radicalization and violent extremism. It introduces the topic of gender and offers insights on how to incorporate a gender-sensitive approach to countering violent extremism. It unpacks myths and stereotypes about women and girls' engagement in violent extremism and underscores the critical importance of gender-sensitive research. The module offers an analysis of the gendered ways men and women can be drawn into extremist narratives or even engaging in violent extremism themselves. Finally, this module offers good practices on engaging women and girls in countering violent extremism efforts.

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## 6. Understanding and Engaging Youth in Countering Violent Extremism

This module offers guidance for understanding young people's roles in society, drawing upon other initiatives which constructively engage young people in the context of countering violent extremism. It includes tools that highlight social, cultural and emotional dynamics that are key when seeking to understand the variety of relationships, networks and needs within the youth population in a particular context that can affect countering violent extremism policy and programming. It explores the ways in which youth engagement can be fostered at the policy, programmatic, and grassroots levels, including the leadership and ownership of programming. Finally, the module also explores the opportunities and risks within the relationships that young people establish with other stakeholders, such as the security sector and local authorities. It offers examples where youth have been able to build collaborative relationships with government stakeholders in countering violent extremism, including within the civil society and government sectors.

# Module Overview

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## 7. Education's Role in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

This module offers insights into how educational initiatives or reforms hold the potential to tackle the drivers of violent extremism and thus contribute to preventing violent extremism by building more resilient students. Participants are guided through a discussion around potential blockers or enablers within the education system – ranging from the content of the curriculum to the way in which drivers of violent extremism are managed within the school environment.

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## 8. Understanding the Role of Narratives and Media in Violent Extremism

This module enables participants to understand the concept of narratives and how media (traditional and social media) can be harnessed in countering violent extremism efforts, both online and offline. Participants are equipped with reflective tools to understand how credible and constructive narratives can be supported, and how to better understand the channels of influence of more destructive or extremist narratives.

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## 9. Utilizing an Innovative Toolbox: Leveraging New Media and Technology

In a cross-cutting discussion, this module explores the opportunities of engaging people through online and other tech-based platforms as well as through other forms of new media. It briefly explores how violent extremists use these same tools to great effect to spread propaganda, sow hatred amongst groups, terrorize their target communities, and draw support and recruits. This module also explores how these tools can provide new and engaging opportunities to connect people, engage in dialogues that transform relationships and how issues are viewed or addressed, and disseminate information in ways that can expand the reach of programming and effectively build community resilience to the pull of violent extremism. Finally, it evaluates a number of factors to consider when using new media and technology as well as potential risks.

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## 10. Monitoring and Evaluation of Efforts in Response to Violent Extremism

This module introduces the basics of monitoring and evaluation, including definitions of important terms, and guidelines for developing a theory of change and a monitoring and evaluation strategy. It offers examples of how ongoing monitoring can strengthen initiatives while ensuring continuous learning and adapting to the shifts in context. This module briefly reviews a number of practical frameworks, tools, methodologies, and indicators that might be adaptable for their context.

# MODULE 1.0

## Conceptual Grounding in Countering Violent Extremism

This module clarifies the different violent extremism and countering violent extremism terms and concepts, the evolution over the past decade, and engages participants with key documents and resolutions, including the United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, and selected National Action Plans. This module lays the foundation for understanding the countering violent extremism field of practice and offers insights into the opportunities as well as the common pitfalls in this space and suggestions on how to avoid them.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1.1 What is countering violent extremism?
- 1.2 How can shared understandings of violent extremism and countering violent extremism support collaboration?
- 1.3 What does the field of countering violent extremism look like in practice?
- 1.4 What are common pitfalls in countering violent extremism efforts and what are the good practices in avoiding them?

# 1.1

## What is countering violent extremism?

Violent extremism is one of today's greatest security concerns. However, as the efforts to combat violent extremism has carried on, policymakers and researchers have come to understand that a shift in thinking is necessary: responses based solely on 'securitized' measures to prevent extremist violence are not enough to end the threat and may only make the problem worse. This has led to a gradual acceptance of the need to incorporate measures that might prevent violent extremists themselves. This approach is now called countering violent extremism.

>> **Countering violent extremism** refers to the programs and policies which aim to dissuade individuals or groups from radicalization and recruitment into violent extremism and resorting to ideologically motivated violence to further social, economic, religiously-based or political objectives.

Countering violent extremism can be done by any government, civil society, or other actor

and often includes non-coercive counter-terrorism measures. However, countering violent extremism does not include the coercive programs and policies of counter-terrorism:

>> **Counter-terrorism** is the realm of coercive and non-coercive programs and policies to prevent and deny opportunities for violent extremist activity and to disrupt, arrest, prosecute, and/or kill violent extremist groups and individuals.

Traditional, coercive, and security-oriented counter-terrorism measures are usually limited to government actors, such as the security forces or the military, but may include other institutions like the banking sector when it locates and stops violent extremists' funding sources. For clarity, when this handbook uses the counter-terrorism it is specifically referring to coercive and "hard" counter-terrorism approaches.

The countering violent extremism field of policy and practice is changing rapidly. Ten years ago, the field of practice was sometimes called "anti-

radicalization" or referred to as "prevention." Now, institutions like the United Nations prefer the term "preventing violent extremism," while others combine the terms into "preventing and countering violent extremism" or simply "countering violent extremism."<sup>24</sup>

While there might be some conceptual differences, the differences in terminology used are often preferences and concerns with how the public sees programming. This is because, in general, all of these terms still all apply to policies that help to limit 'securitized' counter-terrorism measures in favor of non-coercive approaches that prevent division, build resilience to the appeal of violent extremism, and strengthen and sensitize responses. This training handbook will use the term countering violent extremism, while recognizing how some communities and other organizations might have concerns with using it.



<sup>24</sup> Search for Common Ground's approach to countering violent extremism is called *transforming violent extremism*, which requires recognizing that while violent extremism might exist, the reasons and motivators leading to an individual or group being drawn to violent extremist movements can be literally transformed into a different type of agency or engagement. Transforming violent extremism is a unique approach that incorporates a peacebuilding and conflict transformation approach to recognizing the transformative potential in addressing the root causes of violent extremism in ways that do not aggravate tensions and marginalize affected individuals and communities even further. Many of the tools and insights in this guide are influenced by this approach. See Lena Slachmuis, "Transforming Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilder's Guide," (Washington DC: Search for Common Ground, 2017). [\[English\]](#) [\[French\]](#)

## 1.2

# How can shared understandings of violent extremism and countering violent extremism support collaboration?

## 1.2.1 The question of definitions

*What are the different definitions of violent extremism in your local context?*

*If there are many different definitions, how do you think that this can affect working on this problem in your local context?*

What is radicalization? Who is a violent extremist and who is not? It is hard to know without clear, shared definitions. But this is not an easy task. Groups may be considered extreme by their methods (like using violence) but not by their goals, by their goals *and* methods, or by their goals but not by their methods.<sup>25</sup>

This handbook will focus on *violent* extremism, and not extreme beliefs that do not use or support the use of violence to further their goals (sometimes called non-violent extremism).

Why would definitions be so important? Definitions can be unclear or too broad, which can threaten to criminalize or discourage legal behavior or activities.

Even when a definition is clear, applying the “violent extremist” label to specific groups or individuals can be done in a biased or subjective

way. At times, these terms can be politicized, such as when governments use them to refer to their non-violent and violent political opponents as “terrorists.” Indeed, in many cases the term violent extremist is only applied to groups that oppose governments, but not to violent groups that operate in (real or perceived) support for those same governments, which may sometimes support their violent efforts. There are also numerous examples of violent extremism existing among governments, security services, or official political parties themselves.

Any national or international law needs to have a clear definition of violent extremism, but any countering violent extremism program should as well.

Let us review a definition of violent extremism from the region:

The Kyrgyz Republic adopted its main law on “Countering Extremist Activity” on August 17, 2005 and made the following main definition of extremism. Although the law is concerned with “extremism” the definition (like others from the region) is more in line with “violent extremism” in other contexts. The definition is as follows:

### The use of the term “extremism” in Central Asia

Unlike some other contexts, Central Asia often uses the term “extremism” synonymously with “violent extremism” and therefore usually does not make a distinction between violent and non-violent forms of extremism. For example, the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism defines extremism specifically to mean the use of violence. Other countries have also adopted laws regarding extremism in similar ways. This can sometimes result in characterizing “violent extremism” more like the meaning of terrorism in other contexts, encouraging more securitized approaches.

Practitioners should thus be aware of this unique use of terminology in the Central Asian region. However, this handbook will use the term violent extremism to be consistent with other contexts and to clarify the important distinction with non-violent forms of extremism.

<sup>25</sup> Ronald Wintrobe, *Rational Extremism: The Political Economy of Radicalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 84.

## 1.2

1. activities of public associations or religious organizations or other enterprises, organizations and institutions, as well as mass media, regardless of the form of ownership, or individuals in planning, organizing, preparing and performing actions aimed at:
    - a. violent change of the constitutional foundations and violation of the integrity of the Kyrgyz Republic;
    - b. undermining the security of the Kyrgyz Republic;
    - c. seizing or assigning power [structures];
    - d. creation of illegal armed formations [forms];
    - e. carrying out terrorist activities;
    - f. inciting racial, national (interethnic) or religious hatred, as well as social discord connected with violence or calls for violence;
    - g. humiliation of national dignity;
    - h. carrying out mass riots, hooliganism and acts of vandalism based on ideological, political, racial, ethnic (or) religious hatred or enmity, ... towards any social group;
      - i. propaganda of exclusivity, superiority or inferiority [towards] citizens on the basis of their [relation] to religion, social, racial, ethnic (ethnic), religious or linguistic affiliation;
  2. propaganda and public demonstration of Nazi attributes or symbols or [such similar actions];
    - a. [promotion] of an extremist organization;
  3. public calls for [committing the above-mentioned] activities;
  4. financing of the specified activities or assistance to [their] implementation, including [through provision/assistance of] finance, real estate, educational, printing and technical bases, telephone, facsimile and other types of communication, information services, [or] other material and technical means;<sup>26</sup>
3. *Does the definition make a clear distinction between violent extremism and other forms of violence?*
  4. *Are there any parts of this definition that are unclear or hard to understand?*
  5. *Do you believe that any parts of this definition are too broad? Why or why not?*
  6. *Is there anything that you would add or change about this definition?*
  7. *After reviewing this regional definition, why do you think definitions of violent extremism and countering violent extremism are important?*

### 1.2.2 The key definitions of terrorism and violent extremism

We understand that there are many definitions and that no definition is perfect. However, below are the two definitions that will be used to distinguish between the difficult concepts of terrorism and violent extremism, which are sometimes related but have important differences. Other definitions can be found below in the next section as well as in later

#### REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. *According to this definition, what are the actions that would qualify as violent extremism?*
2. *Is violence required for an action to be considered violent extremism? If not, what are those actions?*

<sup>26</sup>With amendments from February 20, 2009; May 8, 2013; February 18, 2014; July 1, 2016 and August 2, 2016.

## 1.2

modules, as needed. For a full list of definitions, see the Glossary of Terms at the beginning of this handbook.

>> **Terrorism** *is using violence, “including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act.”<sup>27</sup>*

However, terrorist violence is only one narrow manifestation of violent extremism (others would include genocide and hate crimes), so attempts to narrowly define violent extremism in terms of support for or engaging in terrorism is overly simplistic. Therefore, a separate definition is needed to make the distinction clear:

>> **Violent extremism** *“refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support or use ideologically motivated violence to further social, economic, religiously-based or political objectives.”<sup>28</sup>*

Violent extremism often seeks to eliminate other groups, cultures, or identities.

The next section will explore the theoretical basics of how people may be drawn into violent extremism and how the field of countering violent extremism works to prevent this as well as to help people leave violent extremism. 🌐



*Indeed, in many cases the term violent extremist is only applied to groups that oppose governments, but not to violent groups that operate in (real or perceived) support for those same governments, which may sometimes support their violent efforts.*



<sup>27</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 1566, S/RES/1566 (October 8, 2004), 2, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/1566\(2004\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/1566(2004)).

<sup>28</sup> From “Introduction to Countering Violent Extremism: Resources on Key Concepts and Definitions” (Hedayah, Internal Document). This handbook is not yet published.



## 1.3

## What does the field of countering violent extremism look like in practice?

Often described as a “phenomenon” (even by those in the countering violent extremism community), violent extremism actually has a lot of similarities to other types of organized or motivated violence such as gangs and rebellions with causes, pathways, and even opportunities to address or resolve it. The field of countering violent extremism is grounded in our growing understanding of how individuals and groups come to support and embrace violent extremist worldviews and to even engage in violent extremist activities, including violent attacks. This process (which can be a sudden or long-term shift) is called violent radicalization or simply radicalization:

>> **Violent radicalization** is the process by which an individual or group comes to adopt increasingly violent and extreme political, social, cultural, and religious ideologies.

This can be done at both the individual or group levels, and may or may not be facilitated by members of a violent extremist group.

>> **Violent self-radicalization** is when someone comes to adopt increasingly violent

*and extreme political, social, cultural, and religious ideologies without necessarily being approached by a member of any violent extremist group, although they may have been influenced by that group’s ideology.*

This is distinguished from radicalization in that no direct contact between the person and someone from a violent extremist organization occurs. However, when that contact is made successfully and the person aligns himself or herself with a violent extremist group, this is referred to as recruitment, which is defined below:

>> **Recruitment** is the process where an individual shifts from “grievance/mobilization to partaking or supporting in a violent act. Recruitment requires at some level (even a very basic level) a personal connection to a violent extremist, even if that recruitment is done online.”<sup>29</sup>

However, this does not require a person to adhere to the group’s ideology. Indeed, recruitment can even be forced or coerced, such as when young men and women are captured by violent extremist groups and forced to join

or when individuals support violent extremist efforts out of fear.

The Countering Violent Extremism Cycle on the next page, produced by Hedayah, outlines the main stages or levels of radicalization as well as the kinds of responses found in countering violent extremism programming.<sup>30</sup> The top of the chart (from left to right) displays the levels of engagement from those who are not radicalized or who are not particularly vulnerable to radicalization (referred to as the “general population”), to those who have been radicalized, and finally to those who have abandoned violent extremist ideologies or groups and have worked to re-enter the community.

This distinction between the general population and vulnerable individuals is particularly important to the field of countering violent extremism because it helps practitioners target their policies and programs to the people and areas that are most in need of interventions and support.

<sup>29</sup> Hedayah, “Introduction to Countering Violent Extremism” (unpublished).

<sup>30</sup> The original may be found at: <http://www.hedayahcenter.org/Admin/Content/File-11620189412.pdf>

## 1.3

Vulnerability is defined below:

>> **Vulnerability** is a “condition produced by personal risk and protective factors which might make an individual more susceptible to [drivers of violent extremism] and ultimately, to radicalization leading to violent extremism.”<sup>31</sup>

In the concept of radicalization, the opposite of vulnerability is resilience:

>> **Resilience** is where individuals or communities have the positive capacities of “knowledge, skills and abilities to protect against factors that might lead to radicalization and recruitment.”<sup>32</sup>

Explore the Countering Violent Extremism Cycle on the next page, taking note of the different levels of involvement:

Where countering violent extremism operates is found along the bottom of the chart. Refer back to the Countering Violent Extremism Cycle and notice how there are specific responses for every level of involvement. The six levels of responses are outlined below:

General prevention is where countering violent extremism practitioners work with the general

population to increase resilience to violent extremism, usually at the community level. Projects do this by addressing the sources of grievance and drivers of violent extremism, which can be very specific to an area or community (the next module will explore how we can understand these drivers of violent extremism according to a specific context). Examples of general prevention activities would include:

- Establishing intercultural dialogues to build tolerance between cultures and identify areas of cooperation in the community in areas where divisions in the community are drivers of violent extremism.
- Helping religious leaders to address the extremist interpretations of religion by violent extremists with the more tolerant, mainstream practice of religion in areas where religion is exploited to recruit people into violent extremism.
- Improving access to justice, legal aid, and the effectiveness of the justice system in communities when these issues are drivers of violent extremism.

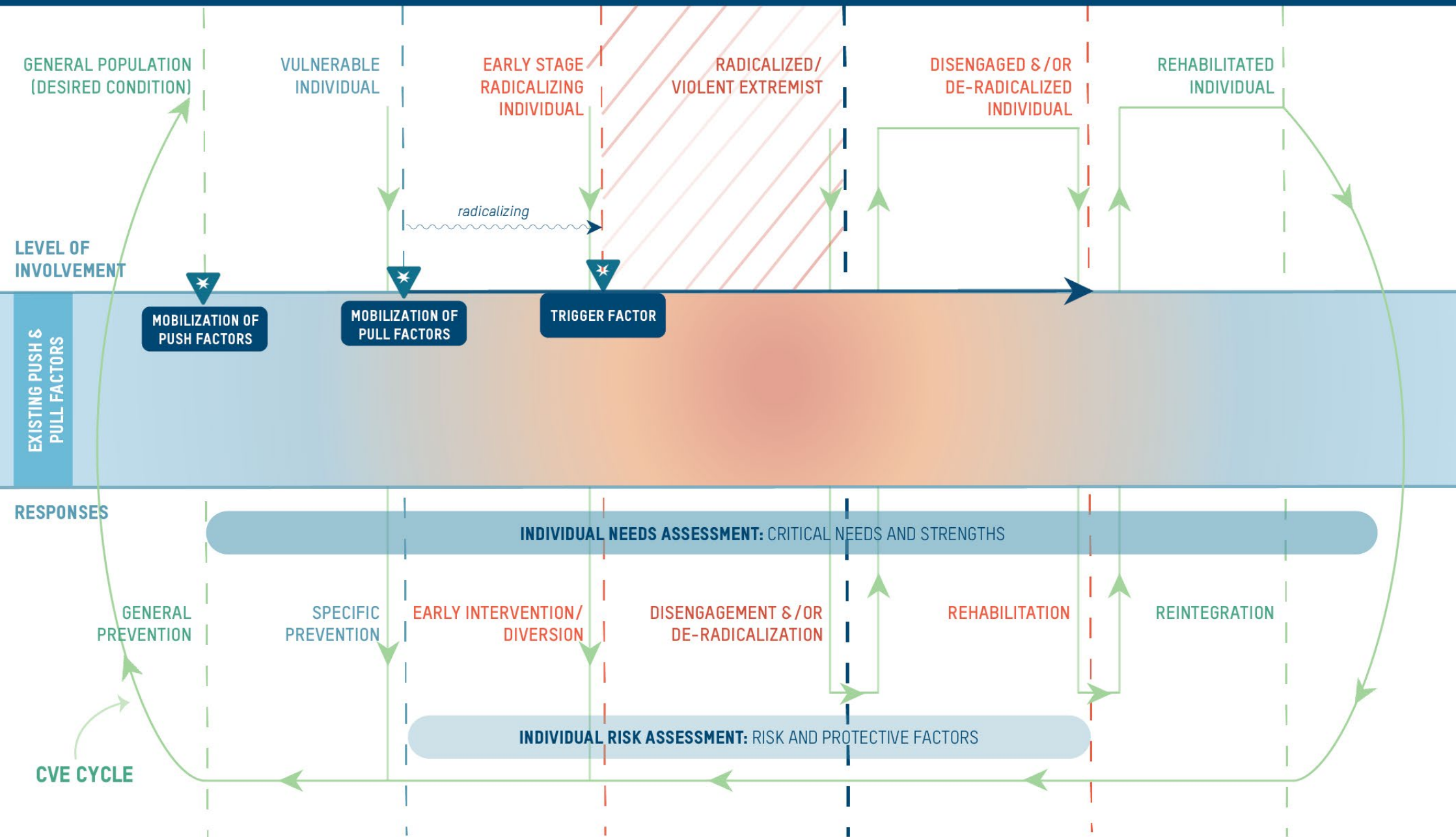
More narrowly, **specific prevention** programming targets only those who have the characteristics that research has shown makes people vulnerable to the appeal of violent extremism. Of course, the presence of these factors or characteristics does not mean that these individuals are somehow “destined” to become violent extremists, and not simply because of these specific factors. Therefore, practitioners work with **vulnerable individuals**, as people and not as criminals, to help them develop the personal skills and capacities to be more resilient to the appeal of violent extremism, which individuals at this stage may have not even considered or even ever will. What is important is to help these individuals overcome the issues that make them vulnerable or develop the strategies that can help them manage these issues effectively. Examples would include:

- Fostering social cohesion through inclusion and participation among marginalized social groups when these groups are found to be more vulnerable to radicalization for these reasons.

<sup>31</sup> Hedayah, “Introduction to Countering Violent Extremism” (unpublished).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

# INFOGRAPHIC ON THE CVE CYCLE



# 1.3

- Promoting critical digital and media literacy among vulnerable adolescents and young adults to be resilient to violent extremist narratives about everyday life, identity, religion, and social or political activities.
- Increasing the resilience of vulnerable individuals by helping them to develop skills to release stress, master their emotions, withstand radicalization and peer pressure, and solve conflicts using non-violent action.

However, once someone has begun to exhibit violent extremist attitudes or interest in violent extremist propaganda or even to begin to interact with radicalized individuals, **early intervention and diversion** programming is needed. These activities are implemented to prevent the individual from radicalizing any further by disrupting the radicalization process with individualized interventions such as counselling and redirecting them to effective (and non-violent) alternatives to violent extremism worldviews or approaches. While early intervention and diversion programming

may include the police or other security forces who may identify individuals or collaborate on this process, this type of intervention usually occurs before the individual commits any violent act or crime. Therefore, these activities are meant to prevent further radicalization and the need for more coercive interventions like arrest, prosecution, and even imprisonment. Examples of **early intervention and diversion** programming would include:

- Recording and sharing the life-changing experiences of those who have been involved with or hurt by violent extremism to expose the dishonest propaganda of violent extremists that the target audience is receiving.
- Increasing the awareness of police and prison officials in detecting signs of radicalization at an early stage by strengthening their perception and assessment skills.
- Targeting those who search for violent extremist messaging online and redirecting them towards curated YouTube videos that

debunk that group's recruiting themes.

However, once someone is radicalized and/or becomes a member of a violent extremist group, sometimes with the help of a **trigger factor** event that motivates the individual to cross that line, the police or other security forces (such as prison officials) may play a larger role.<sup>33</sup> In the following kinds of countering violent extremism responses, some of the individuals may have already been arrested or imprisoned when interventions begin. These responses at the post-radicalization stage include the following:

>> **“Disengagement** *is the process of shifting one's behavior to abstain from violent activities and withdraw from a violent extremist group.*

Disengagement only includes the cessation of participating in violent extremist activities and does not imply that the individual no longer adheres to a radical ideology.”<sup>34</sup>

Examples would include:

- Implementing a strategy to help radicalized people getting out of violent extremist ideology by strengthening the bonds within

<sup>33</sup> A trigger factor is any event or situation that hastens the process of radicalization and pushes the individual into being more willing to support or engage in violent extremism.

<sup>34</sup> Mia Chin et al., “A National Strategic Framework for Countering Violent Extremism in Jordan,” *Journal of International Affairs* 69, no. 2 (2016), 116. Emphasis added.

# 1.3

the family and helping them find employment and positive social groups.

- Broadcasting radio programs into areas where violent extremist groups operate to encourage them to lay down their weapons and informing them about available government demobilization programs.

>> **Deradicalization** is the process of “countering and undermining the ideology related to violent extremism and suggesting an alternative ideology” by degrees.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, by these definitions the term disengagement would be the opposite of recruitment and deradicalization would be the opposite of radicalization. Examples of deradicalization activities would include:

- Developing a program for persons in prisons who have been radicalized or have been convicted of violent extremism offenses that allows them to re-evaluate their worldviews and form meaningful relationships with those they have considered to be the enemy.
- Offering assistance and guidance to violent

extremists and youth sympathizing with violent extremist ideologies willing to leave the scene and the surrounding radicalized spaces.

>> **Rehabilitation** is the process “where practitioners in community or detention centers are involved in rehabilitating individuals after they have been deradicalized and/or disengaged from violent extremist ideologies.”<sup>36</sup>

Examples would include:

- Assessing violent extremist offenders in prison regarding their motivating ideology and the strategies they have used to justify their offenses and offer pre-release counselling to help them see through these justifications and find better alternatives instead.
- Providing prisoners who are charged with or convicted of terrorism as well as inmates vulnerable to radicalization with mentorships to help them solve problems and conflicts by opting for a lifestyle free of crime, involving the inmates’ network outside prison and assisting with the challenges they will face after release.

>> **Reintegration** is the process “where practitioners help the transition of the completely rehabilitated individual back to society. Practitioners also work at the same time on society to ensure there is a positive response to the rehabilitated, and to mitigate social stigma. The ultimate goal of reintegration is to foster the social inclusion of the individual and prevent recidivism.”<sup>37</sup>

Examples would include:

- Facilitating the reintegration of former violent extremists into society by encouraging non-violent political participation and positive actions in the community.
- Working with communities to prevent the stigmatization of affected children in families of foreign fighters or returnee families, which can cause marginalization or even encourage them to follow their relatives into violent extremism.

These kinds of post-radicalization responses face higher security concerns and should be guided by **individual needs and risk assessments** (as in pre-radicalization responses) to determine the

<sup>35</sup> Hedayah, “Introduction to Countering Violent Extremism” (unpublished).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

# 1.3

kinds of safeguards, approaches, and goals that should be chosen for each case. Practitioners must also be careful to assess the success of these efforts, or the radicalized individual may seem to end their support or embrace of violent extremism and return to violence after programming has ended.<sup>38</sup>

*Can you think of examples of each of these kinds of responses from your own local context? 🌐*



<sup>38</sup> For more examples of countering violent extremism projects (where many of these examples were drawn from) go to Impact Europe's Countering Violent Extremism Database Search at <http://www.impact.itti.com.pl/index#/inspire/search> and the Radicalization Awareness Network's (RAN) Collection Search at [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/ran-best-practices/ran-search\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-best-practices/ran-search_en). [English]

## 1.4

# What are common pitfalls in countering violent extremism efforts and what are the good practices in avoiding them?

*What are some critiques of countering violent extremism in your local context?*

*How do communities in your local context perceive countering violent extremism work?*

*Where do you believe these perceptions come from?*

Countering violent extremism efforts can be controversial, often for good reasons. Countering violent extremism programs have been criticized for marginalizing target communities, using communities as a tool rather than empowering them as a partner, securitizing other important efforts (such as education, social cohesion, community-oriented policing, interreligious dialogue, youth and women's empowerment, and so forth), an inability to measure success or what works, or as simply masquerading other fields or kinds of programs as "countering violent extremism" (such as peacebuilding, development, rule of law). This handbook will help you to identify common risks and pitfalls to countering violent extremism and provide you with the tools and good practices to avoid them and to have greater success in your programs. These are important to have a Do No Harm approach:

➤ A **Do No Harm** approach is the practice of understanding how countering violent extremism efforts interact with local dynamics and relationships to allow practitioners to mitigate or avoid negative, unintended consequences that may result from these efforts and to focus on positively influencing these dynamics and relationships.

*Have you witnessed criticism of local countering violent extremism efforts?*

*What caused this criticism? Misconceptions? Mistakes?*

For example, Los Angeles, California was one of three American cities that was chosen for a pilot project in countering violent extremism. While its program goes back to 2008, it faced initial problems in the community. The new model partners government agencies on the federal and local levels with local organizations in the community.

Watch Video 1 on the next page for a brief overview of the program and their lessons learned:



Evgeni Zotov/CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

## 1.4



## VIDEO 1

### Countering Violent Extremism in Los Angeles



**By:** The Los Angeles Interagency Coordination Group

**Original Link:**  
<https://youtu.be/YPM3M5qee7M>

**Downloadable Link:**  
 The video can be downloaded [here](#).

**Russian Subtitles:**

**Advanced**  
*(recommended for use with downloaded versions)*

**Basic**  
*(recommended for use with YouTube)*

*Instructions on using these subtitles are available [here](#).*

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. One of the police officers in the video explained how intervention efforts in the context of the “war on gangs” in Los Angeles were a failure because they realized that they could not “arrest their way out of the problem.” How is this similar or different when dealing with the problem of violent extremism in your context?
2. The video mentions the failure of the local police’s “Suspicious Activity Reporting Process” because it angered the community and violated freedoms. How did it affect the relationship between the police and the community? How was it resolved? Have you witnessed a similar incident in your context? If so, how did it affect the community and how was it resolved?
3. Numerous forms of violent extremism were mentioned in the video and representatives from multiple religious communities were featured in the video. If the Los Angeles project focused only on one kind of violent extremism, how would that have affected the project? Is there a similar danger of this in your context? Why or why not?



## 1.4

The above example encouraged an “all-of-society” approach to the problem of violent extremism. Remember in the video that the city took some of the lessons that they learned from countering gang violence and incorporated those lessons into their countering violent extremism agenda. Importantly, many of these lessons are also lessons that we have learned in the countering violent extremism community of practice:

- The singular tactic of suppression is, at best, ineffective and, at worse, strengthens the identity and cohesion of the targeted group.
- Prevention program tactics alone will not reduce violence that is already occurring.
- A balanced approach between constitutional and compassionate law enforcement and evidence-based social programs is difficult to operationalize but is most likely to be effective.
- It is impossible to reduce violence without engaging the perpetrators of violence.
- Those who have chosen to disengage from the group identity in which violence is embedded are valuable assets in helping

others exit the group.

- Sensible public policies should create a pathway out for those that want out but need support to do so.
- Efforts to prevent youth from joining groups with a propensity for violence should be directed at a much earlier age.<sup>39</sup>

These lessons helped the Los Angeles pilot project on countering violent extremism to be more effective. In fact, the city hosted a conference with countering violent extremism practitioners from around the world, including from the Middle East, to share these lessons and apply them to countering violent extremism.

#### REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. *Again, we see the city’s emphasis on creating “pathways” for people to leave violent groups or prevent them from joining. What are some potential pathways in your local context that might provide alternatives to joining or leaving violent extremist groups?*
2. *What do these lessons tell you about working in countering violent extremism, especially in your context?*

On the international policy level, the former United Nations’ Secretary-General launched the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (hereinafter referred to simply as the Secretary-General’s Plan of Action), which reviews the causes of violent extremism and dedicated the United Nations to support Member States in their efforts. It also recommends a number of important activities to prevent violent extremism along the following pillars:



- Dialogue and conflict prevention;
- Strengthening good governance, human rights and the rule of law;
- Engaging communities;
- Empowering youth;
- Gender equality and empowering women;
- Education, skills development and employment facilitation; and
- Strategic communications, the Internet and social media.

Throughout the following modules, this handbook will explore these pillars in detail and how they can be adapted for your unique context. 🌐



<sup>39</sup> Guillermo Cespedes, “LA’s Lessons for Gang Violence Reduction,” *Insights* (blog), May 18, 2015, <https://www.creativeassociatesinternational.com/insights/las-lessons-for-gang-violence-reduction/>. [English]

# 1.5 Key Takeaways



This module introduced the field of countering violent extremism and presented many of the common critiques of the field. However, by comparing violent extremism with violent gangs and the shared approaches to address them both, this module has tried to demystify violent extremism and show that we already benefit from a number of tools and approaches that are helpful in preventing and reducing the problem. Many of our discussions have helped us understand many of the lessons learned from the field of countering violent extremism. Some of the most important of these lessons are below:

-  **Violent extremism is a complex problem, but is not a “phenomenon” that is impossible to understand or address.**  
The challenge of violent extremism may be intimidating when we begin to look into how we can prevent and counter it. Indeed, it is a problem with a number of different forms and causes. But while there is no simple solution, remedies are available.
-  **Preventing and countering violent extremism requires a broad approach with multiple tools.**

This is reflected in the former United Nations Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: “The present plan of action does not provide a single solution to this challenge — there is no one tool or approach that will put it to rest forever. Instead, we need to broaden the way we think about this threat and take measures to prevent it from proliferating. To be effective in preventing violent extremism, our actions have to be as agile and far-reaching as the phenomenon itself. We have to improve our set of tools dynamically and keep reviewing our responses.”<sup>40</sup>

-  **Violent extremism is very context-specific and cannot be associated with any religion, nationality, or ethnic group.**  
The problem of violent extremism is different everywhere, meaning that what might work in one local context may not work in another. It means that there might also be many forms of violent extremism in a particular local context at the same time, each requiring a different approach.
-  **How we define violent extremism and other terms is important.**  
Having a shared language helps us to build common goals. When definitions are unclear or

too broad, they can threaten to criminalize or discourage legal behavior or activities. They can also overlook other forms of violent extremism (such as when it is to support governments rather than oppose them) or overlook certain people (like women).

-  **Countering violent extremism requires the involvement of the whole society.**  
Since violent extremism threatens the whole community, we must work on all levels of society to prevent and counter it. This even includes former members of violent extremist groups. Indeed, the rest of the training module will give you the tools to have an all-of-society approach in your local context
-  **There may be costs of failure when countering violent extremism programs do not work.**  
We are always striving to learn how to be better and more effective in the countering violent extremism field. However, we must be cautious to not create more tensions or problems, which can even make the problem of violent extremism worse. Incorporate a Do No Harm approach in all that you do.

<sup>40</sup> United Nations Secretary-General, “Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism,” United Nations General Assembly, A/70/674 (December 2015), 22.

## 1.6

## Further Learning Opportunities

The world's current global countering violent extremism agenda is rooted in three important United Nations documents (all available in Russian and English):

- 1) the [Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy](#) (2006),
- 2) [Security Council Resolution 2178](#) (2014) on foreign terrorist fighters,<sup>41</sup> and
- 3) the [Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism](#) (2016).

*Though these documents all encourage prevention, you can see the increasing focus of countering violent extremism. What are the tools recommended by each of these strategies? What has been added as time goes on? What does this tell you about how the field of countering violent extremism has been evolving?*

While the Plan of Action also recognizes the problem of confusing the terms terrorism and violent extremism (such as the risk that it "may lead to the justification of an overly broad application of counter-terrorism measures, including against forms of conduct that should not qualify as terrorist acts"),<sup>42</sup> the Plan of Action

still focuses on violent extremism "conducive to terrorism."

*Why do you think the former secretary-general included this phrase? How might this focus on terrorism affect the shaping of the Plan of Action?*

[United Nations Human Rights Council - Report on best practices and lessons learned on how protecting and promoting human rights contribute to preventing and countering violent extremism](#) [Russian] [English]

*This Human Rights Council report explores the problems regarding definitions in detail. What does it warn are the dangers of vague or overly broad definitions? Are there local definitions that you have concerns about? Why or why not?*

*The report explores the best practices on three kinds of countering violent extremism programming from a human rights perspective: community engagement and empowerment, youth engagement, and preventing and countering violent extremism online. What do these best practices tell you about having an all-of-society approach?*

*How does this report explore the need to balance*

*human rights with preventing and countering violent extremism?*

United Nations Secretary-General reports on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security, available in Russian and English:

[First \(January 2016\)](#), [second \(May 2016\)](#), [third \(September 2016\)](#), [fourth \(February 2017\)](#), [fifth \(May 2017\)](#), and [sixth \(January 2018\)](#).

*These reports outline the global response to one unique violent extremism threat. They show a growing understanding of the problem and an expanding range of activities to address it. What are the initiatives that have been done to counter the threat of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)? Which activities are under the umbrella of countering violent extremism and which activities are better defined as counter-terrorism?*

<sup>41</sup> It defines foreign terrorist fighters as "individuals who travel to a State other than their States of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning, or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict" (see page 2).

<sup>42</sup> United Nations Secretary-General, "Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism," 2.

## 1.6

**SUGGESTED READINGS**

Check out the Central Asian Network for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism's website for a library of materials and resources at <https://www.capve.org/ru/> [Russian and English]

- » *Economic and Social Inclusion to Prevent Violent Extremism* by Shanta Devarajan et al. (World Bank) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Preventing Terrorist Acts: A Criminal Justice Strategy Integrating Rule of Law Standards in Implementation of United Nations Anti-Terrorism Instruments* (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime - UNODC) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Human Rights and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism* (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Plan of Action for Identifying and Countering Recruiters and Facilitators* (Global Counterterrorism Forum - GCTF) [\[English\]](#)
- » *The Hague-Marrakech Memorandum on Good Practices for a More Effective Response to the Foreign Terrorist Fighter Phenomenon* (Global

Counterterrorism Forum - GCTF) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)

- » *Addendum to the Hague-Marrakech Memorandum on Good Practices for a More Effective Response to the Foreign Terrorist Fighter Phenomenon, with a focus on Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters* (Global Counterterrorism Forum - GCTF) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Preventing and Countering Radicalization and Violent Extremism as Related to the Foreign Terrorist Fighter Threat* (Hedayah and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime - UNODC) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Countering Terrorism, Protecting Human Rights by Jonathan Cooper* (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe - OSCE) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Strengthening the Capacity of the Prevention of Violent Extremism in the Kyrgyz Republic* (Search for Common Ground) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Ashgabad Final Declaration* [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Joint Plan of Action for the Implementation of the United Nations Global Counter Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia* [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)

For a 2016 inventory of policy documents and legislation on countering violent extremism that was compiled by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, [go here: https://www.osce.org/secretariat/289911](https://www.osce.org/secretariat/289911) [\[English\]](#)

- » *Counter-Radicalization Policies in Central Asia: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* by George Gavrilis (PONARS Eurasia) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Preventing Violent Extremism Regional Brief for Central Asia* (United Nations Development Programme - UNDP) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Preventing Violent Extremism in Kyrgyzstan* by Jacob Zenn and Kathleen Kuehnast (United States Institute of Peace - USIP) [\[English\]](#)

Additional informative publications on the field of countering violent extremism (in English) are downloadable [here](#).



# MODULE 2.0

## Understanding Drivers of Violent Extremism in a Contextualized Manner

This module offers a selection of frameworks and guiding questions which can be used to analyze and better understand the drivers of violent extremism in a specific context; this includes understanding how to identify push and pull factors as well as group dynamics that drive violent extremism in a particular context. This module prepares participants to be able to identify opportunities for prevention initiatives.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 2.1 Why should countering violent extremism programs and policies be contextualized?
- 2.2 What are drivers of violent extremism?
- 2.3 How do we identify drivers of violent extremism in our context?
- 2.4 What are some of the risks of research on violent extremism and how do we avoid them?



## 2.1

# Why should countering violent extremism programs and policies be contextualized?

*Is a countering violent extremism policy or program that has been successful in one context guaranteed to work in your local context?*

*Are the forms of violent extremism active in your local context the same as those in another context? How so? How are they different?*

The previous module explored how countering violent extremism uses a number of approaches to address the issue of violent extremism. Remembering that there are many forms of violent extremism, it is important to understand the local threat of violent extremism and what is causing it. This is because violent extremism is an intensely local issue and is rooted in people's lived experiences. Since radicalization and recruitment are usually facilitated by personal relationships and through local networks, they need to be understood on the local level.

Because of these issues, violent extremism develops in different ways in different contexts. This also means that a countering violent extremism policy or program that is successful in one context or to one particular form of violent extremism may not be as successful if that policy or program is simply transplanted into another context. Therefore, countering violent extremism

efforts must be adapted for every context. However, this adaptation will face challenges if it is based on assumptions, possibly resulting in ineffective efforts or even causing more harm than good. 🌐



## 2.2

## What are drivers of violent extremism?

Good countering violent extremism programs and policies are rooted in a local and contextual understanding of the drivers of violent extremism. This must be based on evidence gathered from reliable research. For the context of this handbook, we offer the following definition of drivers:

>> **Drivers of violent extremism** are causes or reasons why groups or individuals might be attracted to supporting or engaging in violent extremism.

In this module, we explore how to understand drivers and look at approaches that can help you to identify the drivers of violent extremism and the sources of resilience in your local context.

Video 2, from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) shows the stories of three former violent extremists and what drove their interest in violent extremism. The video will also provide an overview of some commonly accepted drivers of violent extremism to help us understand violent radicalization:



## 2.2



## VIDEO 2

## Preventing violent extremism through education



By: [UNESCO](#)

Original Link:

<https://youtu.be/79MTkVumCcQ>

Downloadable Link:

The video can be downloaded [here](#).

Russian Subtitles:

**Advanced**

(recommended for use with downloaded versions)

**Basic**

(recommended for use with YouTube)

Instructions on using these subtitles are available [here](#).

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. The first two men in the video relate stories from their younger lives about encountering violence and conflict. How did these experiences influence their choices regarding violent extremist groups?
2. What other factors did you see in the video that might be considered drivers of violent extremism?
3. This video was produced in order to explain how education can promote resilience to violent extremism. What were the benefits described and how might they help prevent students from being attracted to violent extremism?



# 2.2

The video offered a basic framework to understand radicalization. The terms “push factors” and “pull factors” are often used when discussing radicalization. Although there are other models used to understand radicalization, this is the most widely used one.

>> **Push factors** are any condition or grievance that creates a sense of frustration, marginalization, and disempowerment which encourage people to seek out remedies including, but not limited to, joining extremist groups.<sup>43</sup>

Push factors are sometimes described as the “underlying” or “structural” factors of violent extremism, but may better be understood as factors that create unmet needs and cannot alone explain the problem of violent extremism without the following factors:

>> **Group dynamics and relationships** are factors that shape the issues, environment, and community in ways that make individuals or communities more vulnerable to violent extremism.

Sometimes called “enabling factors,” these dynamics and relationships frame how critical issues (including identified push factors) are being discussed and addressed and include the

ways groups represent themselves and others they may have differences with. At the core of this are relationships in the community: are they intact or damaged? Are there divisions or is there distrust between ethnic groups or the government and citizens? These factors also include social, political, and religious belief systems that can influence local understandings of these issues and create community support for violent extremism or an environment that enables its actions.

>> **Pull factors** are forces that can be attractive to potential recruits and specifically draw them into radical organizations, such as a sense of kinship, heroism, adventure, economic gain or self-realization.<sup>44</sup>

Also referred to as “individual incentives,” these factors are more effective when violent extremist groups claim that their goals are to resolve the issues that have been identified as push factors.

**Sources of resilience:** Of course, there are also factors that can help explain why groups or individuals might not be attracted to supporting or engaging in violent extremism (which can be described as “protective factors”). These

government or cultural norms that promote coexistence and dialogue. Examples of factors that can help pull groups and individuals away from violent extremism are non-violent alternatives to addressing grievances or fulfilling unmet needs that may also provide a sense of kinship, heroism, adventure, economic gain, or self-realization. 🌐

<sup>43</sup> Slachmuis, “Transforming Violent Extremism,” 8.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

## 2.3

## How do we identify drivers of violent extremism in our context?

*What questions do we need to ask in order to understand radicalization in my context?*

*Who do we talk with to understand the most salient drivers of violent extremism?*

*How do we map these drivers of violent extremism across different communities?*

As discussed in the previous module, radicalization is highly specific to context and local dynamics. Therefore, countering violent extremism programming needs to be tailored to address and undermine the drivers of radicalization, or build sources of resilience against violent extremism in the local context to be most successful.

Too often, researchers and practitioners will exclaim that we do not understand what drives violent extremism. While we may not fully understand the problem, a growing body of research has produced many great insights on how men and women come to be radicalized. Indeed, many interesting studies are included in the 2.6 Further Learning Opportunities section at the end of this module.

The following section will provide a simple set of questions to guide you as you try to understand

the nature, motivations, and pathways of violent extremism in your context. However, they are only starting points to begin an assessment in your local context.

### **2.3.1 What is the risk of violent extremism in your context and what are its forms?**

An important first step is understanding what forms of violent extremism and what violent extremist groups are present in your context. For example, are there organized or informal violent extremist groups operating or recruiting in your local context? To whom do they direct their violence? For instance, is it directed against the government, groups of people based on some identity factor(s), a foreign government or group, or are they even acting in support of the government (with or without government approval) and direct their violence against the government's opponents?

The importance of this first question is best explained in the Ankara Memorandum on Good Practices for a Multi-Sectoral Approach to Countering Violent Extremism:

Each violent extremist group should be



*Too often, researchers and practitioners will exclaim that we do not understand what drives violent extremism. While we may not fully understand the problem, a growing body of research has produced many great insights on how men and women come to be radicalized.*



# 2.3

evaluated separately, since a one-size-fits-all approach does not work in the case of violent extremism. Thus, responses and interventions should be group-specific. States can encounter different types of violent extremism and should acknowledge that each form has both unique and common characteristics. Any countering violent extremism policy or program should take into account these differences and similarities. Radicalization involves similar stages, regardless of the ideologies of violent extremist groups.<sup>45</sup>

Considering this, it may be important to ask the remaining questions multiple times separately for different forms of violent extremism. It may even be helpful to inquire why certain forms of violent extremism are not present in a particular context, possibly to identify sources of resilience.

## 2.3.2 Why are people drawn to violent extremism?

Perhaps the most frequent question that

is asked about violent extremism is simply, “Why?” Indeed, it is the central question when conducting an assessment on violent extremism in a particular context. However, some people may refuse to even explore it out of concerns that it can be seen as sympathizing with violent extremists and prefer to simply consider them to be “brainwashed” instead. But as the former Secretary-General wrote in the Plan of Action,

Nothing can justify violent extremism but we must also acknowledge that it does not arise in a vacuum. Narratives of grievance, actual or perceived injustice, promised empowerment and sweeping change become attractive where human rights are being violated, good governance is being ignored and aspirations are being crushed.<sup>46</sup>

It is here that we can explore the push factors, group dynamics and relationships, and pull factors we defined in the previous section.



<sup>45</sup> Global Counterterrorism Forum, “Ankara Memorandum on Good Practices for a Multi-Sectoral Approach to Countering Violent Extremism,” 3.

<sup>46</sup> United Nations Secretary-General, “Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism,” 1-2.

# 2.3

## **Push factors: What are the sources of grievances and tensions?**

As defined above, push factors are conditions or grievances that create a sense of frustration, marginalization, and disempowerment which encourage people to seek out remedies including, but not limited to, joining extremist groups or embracing violent extremist worldviews. These factors may include structural issues such as “demographic imbalances, poverty, inequality, discrimination, or polarized environments and transitional societies.”<sup>47</sup> See the table below for an incomplete collection of potential push factors, which features a list of seven political drivers of violent extremism from a report by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and a list of eight drivers identified in a report from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP):

*Both of these lists are from development organizations. Do you think this influences their perspectives on the issue of violent extremism?*

*Which of these drivers are present in your context?*

*What do you believe is missing from these lists?*

United States Agency for International Development	United Nations Development Programme
1. Denial of basic political rights (“political exclusion”) and civil liberties.	1. The role and impact of global politics;
2. Highly repressive regimes that engage in gross violations of human rights.	2. Economic exclusion and limited opportunities for upward mobility;
3. Endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected elites.	3. Political exclusion and shrinking civic space;
4. The presence of safe havens, poorly-governed or ungoverned areas.	4. Inequality, injustice, corruption and the violation of human rights;
5. Pre-existing, protracted and violent local conflicts that can be exploited by violent extremist organizations seeking to advance their own agendas.	5. Disenchantment with socio-economic and political systems;
6. State sponsorship of violent extremist groups.	6. Rejection of growing diversity in society;
7. Discredited regimes with weak or non-existent oppositions. <sup>48</sup>	7. Weak state capacity and failing security; and
	8. A changing global culture and banalization of violence in media and entertainment. <sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Delphine Michel and Camille Schyns, “EIP Explainer: Understanding Radicalisation,” *European Institute of Peace*, accessed May 26, 2016, <http://www.eip.org>, citing Tore Bjørgo, ed., *Root Causes of Terrorism: Myths, Reality and Ways Forward*, New Edition (London; New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>48</sup> Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter, “Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism” (United States Agency for International Development, February 2009), 27.

<sup>49</sup> “Preventing Violent Extremism through Inclusive Development and the Promotion of Tolerance and Respect for Diversity: A Development Response to Addressing Radicalization and Violent Extremism,” Discussion Paper (New York City: United Nations Development Programme, March 2016), 10.

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These lists are not comprehensive and do not include every potential push factor of violent extremism. However, it is important to note that the presence of any or even all of these factors cannot alone explain radicalization. Indeed, differing opinions on this issue have created great disagreements in the countering violent extremism community.

Two of the greatest disagreements revolve around whether religion and unemployment are drivers of violent extremism. Countless hours of work and millions of dollars have been spent exploring these factors, leading to a growing consensus that there is little to no link between these factors and radicalization. However, in later modules we will discuss how religious leaders and economic opportunities can be important allies and entry points in working to counter violent extremism.<sup>50</sup>

While push factors are unable to fully explain radicalization in a particular context, they are an important starting point. They expose the pressing issues in a community and help us begin

to understand how these issues can shape the context and the environment where division, distrust, and violent extremism can take root.

### ***Group dynamics and relationships: How are these conditions and grievances being discussed and resolved?***

As defined above, group dynamics and relationships are factors that shape the issues, environment, and community in ways that make individuals or communities more vulnerable to violent extremism.

Evaluating these factors involves understanding the community and the means by which individuals try to make sense of their grievances and how they might be able to find remedies to their unmet needs and grievances. As the authors of the United States Agency for International Development report acknowledge, “reflecting on the processes and group dynamics through which individuals turn to violent extremism has proven to be a far more compelling and rewarding approach.”<sup>51</sup> They highlight the benefits of this analysis because

countering violent extremism is more effective if it goes beyond push factors saying, “even if [practitioners] can better ‘underlying conditions’ for a majority of the population, [development] programs still may fail to alter significantly the perceptions, worldviews, grievances and motivations of that small subset of individuals who are inclined to violence.”<sup>52</sup>

As the expert Randy Borum has written, this approach is beneficial because violent extremism is most often a group-related problem, and we know that some of the key lessons from the study of groups include the following:

- Group contexts cultivate extreme attitudes: Individual opinions and attitudes tend to become more extreme in a group context
- Group decision making is often more biased and less rational, than individual decision making
- Group perceptions are colored by group membership
- Groups have internal norms and rules that control member behavior<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> See J.M. Berger, “Making CVE Work: A Focused Approach Based on Process Disruption,” ICCT Research Paper (The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague, May 2016).

<sup>51</sup> Denoeux and Carter, “Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism,” 61.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>53</sup> Randy Borum, “Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories,” *Journal of Strategic Security*, Perspectives on Radicalization and Involvement in Terrorism, 4, no. 4 (2011), 20-21. Emphasis in original.

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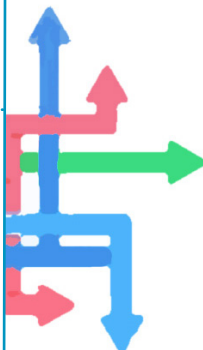
Borum also developed a four-stage conceptual model for the process of ideological development, which may be helpful in explaining how group dynamics and relationships can influence the radicalization process (see below).<sup>54</sup>

As the adapted model shows, just simply experiencing a grievance is not enough to bring someone to the point of adopting a violent

extremist mindset. Violent extremists see these grievances as part of a larger struggle that labels some person or groups of people as an enemy who is causing their pain. However, group dynamics and relationships present in a community or a specific context can be very important to the shaping of how these grievances are perceived or reflected in the community.

This model also demonstrates the various ways that countering violent extremism programming can intervene by helping to address grievances, to stop the blaming of issues on certain groups of people, or to suggest alternative responses.

Notice that this model was adapted with a fifth stage: action. Despite all of the division, polarization, and even hatred that can arise out of grievances, this stage is still necessary to explore because even in the most divided places, most people will not choose to support or engage in violence. Indeed, as demonstrated by the many different arrows, the actions people take to respond to grievances and divisions are many. Where violent extremists and their worldviews come in to this model is by 1) shaping the discussion and the framing of an issue and by 2) encouraging violent responses. During this crucial fifth stage, violent extremist worldviews try to drive individuals and groups to act violently against those they believe are their enemies rather than responding to their grievances in other ways.

<b>"It's not right"</b>	<b>"It's not fair"</b>	<b>"It's your fault"</b>	<b>"You're evil"</b>	<b>"I need to act"</b>
Social and economic deprivation (or other grievances)	Inequality and resentment	Blame or attribution of fault	Generalizing and stereotyping Dehumanizing and/or demonizing the enemy (or the "cause" of the grievance)	
Grievance	Injustice	Attribution	Reaction	Action
Push factors	Group dynamics and relationships		/	Pull factors

<sup>54</sup> Adapted from Randy Borum, "Understanding the Terrorist Mindset," Mental Health Law & Policy Faculty Publications (2003), 228.

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So how do we turn these insights into lines of inquiry to better understand radicalization in our context? We can start by answering the following questions:

*How are the identified push factors being discussed and resolved?*

*How are different parts of the community representing themselves, other community members, and the government? Do they see themselves as victims and others as causes of problems or even enemies?*

*Are relationships in the community intact or damaged? Are there divisions or is there distrust between ethnic groups or the government and citizens?*

*How are social, political, and religious belief systems influencing or shaping local understandings of these issues?*

This last question on belief systems is important because it can help us to begin to understand how violent extremist ideas can spread, since the question of “whether an individual comes to accept such ideas depends on how far their peers do and the extent to which they are seen as worthy of imitation.”<sup>55</sup> In the following section, we will explore how these ideas of supporting

or engaging in extremist violence can be made appealing.

***Pull factors: What are the reasons why an individual or group would want to engage in violence because of these issues? Why a particular group and not another?***

As defined above, pull factors are forces that can be attractive to potential recruits and specifically draw them into radical organizations, such as a sense of kinship, belonging, identity, heroism, adventure, economic gain or self-realization. Watch Video 3 on the next page about a former member of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a woman from Belgium, and take note of the reasons that attracted her to travel to Syria to join ISIL:

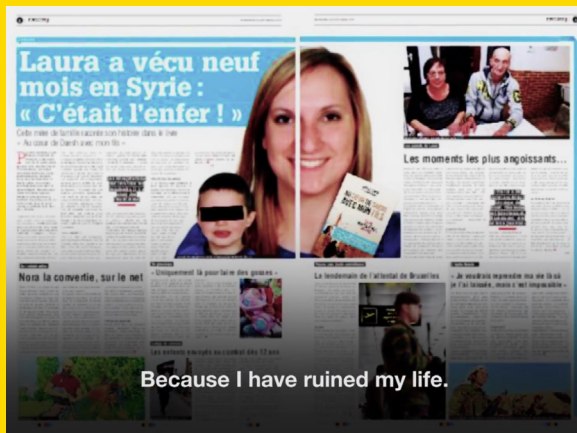
<sup>55</sup> Jamie Bartlett, Jonathan Birdwell, and Michael King, “The Edge of Violence: A Radical Approach to Extremism” (London: Demos, 2010), 12.

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## VIDEO 3

## The Promises of ad-Dawlah to Women



By: [The International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism \(ICSVE\)](https://www.icsve.org/)

Original Link:

<https://youtu.be/Ed99vbD7Lr8>  
[Russian]

<https://youtu.be/qZknfoA-O2k>  
[English]

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What were the specific promises that the ISIL recruiter made to her that convinced her to take her four-year-old son and travel to Syria?
2. This video appears to have used many clips from ISIL propaganda videos. What are some of the emotions that you think ISIL's video producers wanted you to feel with those clips? How would those emotions or ideas appeal to people from your context?



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As we see from the video, not all of these pull factors we can identify need to be tied to violence. Nor do they necessarily need to be because of the group's stated goals. For example, social movement theory teaches us that "people are often drawn into movements for reasons other than those directly related to the aims of the group itself, and that the group can serve to articulate, shape, and emphasize grievance."<sup>56</sup> Think about how ISIL has worked to shape what the war in Syria is about, as an example. How is that perspective different? Therefore, in your context, it might be helpful to ask the following question:

*What are some ways that local violent extremist groups shape, reframe, or propagate falsehoods about local conflicts in order to connect it to their own agenda and attract potential recruits?*

Other helpful questions for understanding local pull factors are:

*What are the reasons why an individual or group would want to engage in violence because of these issues?*

*What are the real or perceived things about violent extremist groups that appeal to potential recruits?*

*Why would someone join a particular violent*

*extremist group and not another group—whether violent or non-violent?*

Together, push factors, group dynamics and relationships, and pull factors help us to map out pathways of radicalization in order to understand why particular individuals or groups might be drawn to violent extremism. Of course, nothing about these questions can predict who might become a violent extremist, nor do they create a "profile" of a violent extremist. However, they point out priorities and important points of intervention when designing local countering violent extremism policies and programs.

## 2.3.3 Who is being drawn to violent extremism?

Countering violent extremism programs are most effective when they target individuals and groups that are the most vulnerable to being drawn to violent extremism. This inquiry requires an analysis into recruitment patterns in a target area. Again, while no profile of a "typical" violent extremist is possible, research can identify patterns and criteria that can be helpful to identify what kinds of vulnerable individuals and drivers of violent extremism ought to be

focused on in a particular area. Here, as with the rest of these questions, it is important to ensure a gender-sensitive approach: do not overlook women and girls! Too often, the question of *who* is only asked of men and boys.

## 2.3.4 Where are people being drawn to violent extremism?

Further analysis on recruitment patterns and community discussions can reveal geographical locations and particular venues (sometimes called "hotspots") where radicalization is occurring. Examples may include after-school programs, formal and informal religious settings, prisons, or in online spaces. However, while insights from this inquiry are helpful for shaping policy or defining the geographical scope of countering violent extremism programming, the insights should not cause us to disregard other areas. Just because the problem may be focused in some hotspots does not mean that it is not occurring in other areas. Indeed, violent extremist recruiters can be adept at shifting to other areas or trying to reach potential recruits through other platforms when their efforts or tactics are revealed.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 20.

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## 2.3.5 How are people being radicalized?

Since no predictive profile can be drawn, John Horgan (a researcher on radicalization and violent extremism) suggests that the “elusive search for the root causes of violent extremism should give way to efforts to detect routes to extremism, and that instead of trying to identify profiles, [violent extremism] experts ought to concentrate on the pathways to violence.”<sup>57</sup>

This inquiry can further direct countering violent extremism efforts by finding out how individuals come in contact with violent extremism and how they can come to accept it. Examples of potential pathways include social and traditional media, families, forcible recruitment and coercion, violent extremist recruiters, political/government officials, religious leaders, and so forth.

This line of inquiry helps to close the critical gap between understanding someone’s *support for violence* and understanding someone’s *actual engagement in violence*.<sup>58</sup>

Here, it is important to expand on one of these pathways: forcible recruitment and coercion. While it is more likely for violent extremists to

join willingly, there may be occasions where an individual is forced to engage in violent extremism through threats or violence. In such cases, individuals may engage in violence without truly supporting it. But the line between “voluntary” and “coerced” members is not a black-and-white distinction. Indeed, it can be considered to be a spectrum of how much pressure recruits received *before* joining and *after* joining (to maintain their membership or commit specific actions). While most legal jurisdictions do not accept this as a defense for engaging in the most serious crimes (such as murder), understanding this does help countering violent extremism practitioners design more targeted disengagement and rehabilitation programming.

## 2.3.6 How do we find answers to these questions?

But how are we to actually find the answers to these questions? This can be through **evaluating current research** and **conducting new research**:

### **Evaluating current research**

The first step should be an analysis of the

research that has already been done in your local context and in the field of countering violent extremism. Perhaps some of their findings will have already addressed some of the questions above, or they can point out important research gaps that can highlight needs for additional research. Indeed, many helpful resources are included in the Further Learning Opportunities sections of this handbook.

However, we must maintain a healthy level of skepticism about what we read, as many (even prominent) resources have serious concerns with methodology or with findings and sometimes overstate or overgeneralize from what they learn. A recent analysis of research on terrorism and violent extremism revealed that 34 percent of the items in the study sample were either methodologically or empirically poor, whereas 11 percent were both.<sup>59</sup> For example, a series of interesting research reports from the RAND Corporation in places like Palestine and Yemen argued that their research showed that the “best way to undermine violent extremism is to strengthen those factors that motivate individuals to reject political violence.” However, it also

<sup>57</sup> Denoeux and Carter, “Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism,” 61.

<sup>58</sup> James Khalil, “A Guide to Interviewing Terrorists and Violent Extremists,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, September 28, 2017, 4.

<sup>59</sup> Peter Neumann and Scott Kleinmann, “How Rigorous Is Radicalization Research?” *Democracy and Security* 9, no. 4 (September 1, 2013): 360–82.

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argues that “redirected pathways do not diminish a propensity toward violence.”<sup>60</sup> While this latter finding may dismiss the good countering violent extremism work many organizations are already doing, its rationale for this was based on a couple survey questions geared only towards political activism and not the kinds of non-violent activism common in countering violent extremism programming.<sup>61</sup> These two findings are intuitive when we understand that violent extremism is often a form of political violence, but unless we read through the project’s methodology, we might have been convinced not to engage in what could have been effective programming! Therefore, appropriate care is necessary from falling into the many pitfalls we may encounter while exploring studies on violent extremism.

## **Conducting new research**

*Who should you talk to when attempting to study violent extremism in your local context?*

*How do you gather the necessary information to answer your research questions?*

*What do you do with your findings?*

If we have identified research gaps in our context, including as we begin to plan our own

local countering violent extremism strategy or activities, conducting our own research may be needed. While this handbook cannot guide you through all of the steps of research—including defining the more specific research questions, finding a research sample, designing data collection tools and approaches, and analyzing and sharing findings—this section will offer some general recommendations:

- Talk to a broad range of practitioners and donors and locals before determining the scope of your research.
- Once research has begun, it is often helpful to speak with a broader range of people, and not simply specific groups (for example, vulnerable individuals, former violent extremists, government officials, academics, and so forth).
- Ensure that you are talking to both men and women as well as young men and young women for a better understanding.
- Determine the appropriate tools to gather the necessary information, whether through surveys, focus group discussions, interviews, dialogues, workshops, or other means.
- Sometimes it may be helpful to have a gradual

approach to research, focusing on specific questions at first and doing more rounds of research later to gain a better depth of understanding later or as work progresses.

- Use the research as a means of building trust between different parties, such as government and civil society actors, who may have different understandings of the problem and use different terms when talking about it, which may be helped through researching together.
- When necessary, talking about things like identity and security issues as proxy issues to begin talking about violent extremism, which can allow you to have better access to difficult areas or groups of people or get the conversation going.
- Support youth-led research in order to empower youth and allow them to guide the creation and implementation of research projects.
- Research is most effective when it is action-oriented and tied to immediate problems or activities. 🌐

<sup>60</sup> Eric Robinson et al., “What Factors Cause Individuals to Reject Violent Extremism in Yemen?” (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017): 35.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

## 2.4

## What are the some of the risks of research on violent extremism and how do we avoid them?

*What are some risks of researching violent extremism?*

*How is researching violent extremism different than other topics?*

*How can you avoid common pitfalls when studying violent extremism in your local context?*

Setting out to understand the dynamics of radicalization and opportunities for interventions in your context can feel like an intimidating task. The following ideas can help us to be successful and to avoid some of the risks of this kind of research:

- **Maintain a Do No Harm approach to the research conducted.** Evaluate the risks of conducting research in the local community and assess if the research may draw unnecessary attention to the subject of violent extremism or to those participating in the research.
- **Be conscious of how your research team may be perceived by participants.** The role of the researchers (or data collectors) can affect your results, especially when those they talk with might have sensitivities regarding their identity, gender, and perceived neutrality regarding certain issues.

- **Participants must feel comfortable enough to participate and to give more accurate responses.** Similarly, participants in your research may fear repercussions because of the answers they give, especially when they are not clear about what the information is being used for and whether the information will be given to the police.
- **Be particularly cautious when involving children in research.** As with the above points on safety, child protection requires even more responsibility. Obtain parental consent.
- **Ensure the security of researchers themselves.** Violent extremism is a sensitive issue, so be cautious about how the research will be done. Get permissions from government officials when necessary.
- **Have clear definitions and be consistent with their use.** As we discussed in the previous module, having clear definitions allow us to speak with the same language and come to the same understanding together.
- **Be appropriately skeptical of what you are told by respondents.** Captured or former violent extremists have many reasons to give inaccurate answers, such as fear of retaliation

or simply because they do not remember. They may overstate their involvement to appear more important or understate it to make themselves appear more innocent. A healthy skepticism keeps us from accepting everything we are told at face value, and using other sources (including other participants) to verify claims can help us validate information we receive.

- **Be realistic about what your findings tell you and how far you can draw conclusions from them.** Often, we talk with a relatively small group of people in our research, as talking with larger samples of people is more expensive and time-consuming. Therefore, be careful to generalize what you have learned too much, especially if you did not speak with women or other important groups.

Finally, many of the above pitfalls or concerns can be avoided by being upfront about our research. Especially if you choose to publish or share your research findings, it is important to explain both the methods that we used to get them as well as the limitations of that approach to those who will read or listen. Many research reports will include a “methodology” section with this information as well as a “limitations”

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section that acknowledges where there might be problems drawing some conclusions. Therefore:

- **Be transparent regarding your methodology and the limitations of your research when sharing it.** This allows others to be informed consumers of the information you share, but also enables others to take your successful approaches and use them in other areas (such as neighboring cities), allowing for a greater understanding of violent extremism across your context. 🌐




# 2.5 Key Takeaways


This module explored how we can understand the drivers of violent extremism in a contextual manner. We explored a set of basic questions to help us guide an assessment on violent extremism in your local context. Importantly, we also reviewed potential opportunities and risks involved with this kind of research. Some of the most important lessons are below:

 **Violent extremism and radicalization are highly context-specific.**


Since radicalization is rooted in people's lived experiences, understanding violent extremism needs to be understood on the local level. Too often, research is conducted by those from outside the community, so listening to the voices of those at the local level is key.

 **Violent extremism and radicalization are complex issues, but we have learned a lot about them that are helpful in guiding countering violent extremism programs and policies.**

All too often, we believe we do not understand violent extremism or radicalization at all. While that may have been more true in the past, we are coming to understand the problem more and more. Therefore, it is important to review recent research.

 **Preventing and countering violent extremism policies and programs are more effective when they are built on evidence-based research.**

When we base our approaches and policies on false assumptions, they are less effective and may even cause harm. Action research, tied to specific countering violent extremism projects or problems, supports a well-designed program that links the problem and drivers of radicalization to the project and provides potential solutions.

 **Safety and security are critical when studying violent extremism.**

Both researchers and research participants must feel safe and comfortable to make the process most effective and accurate. The perceptions of the participants may affect the results.

## 2.6

## Further Learning Opportunities

First [United Nations Secretary-General report on the threat posed by ISIL \(Da'esh\) to international peace and security](#) (available in Russian and English)

*Read paragraph 26 of the report. What are the drivers that the former Secretary-General has identified that have led people to join ISIL? Which ones can be considered push factors? Group dynamics and relationships? Pull factors? Do you think any of these factors are relevant to your context? Why?*

The following publications explore issues surrounding radicalization in your region in Russian, Kyrgyz or English and can help illuminate local issues or potential drivers of violent extremism. However, these are not shared to endorse their findings and conclusions. As you read them, explore the methodology they used and ask yourself the following questions:

*Does this report provide important insights into the problem of violent extremism that might be helpful in my local context?*

*Did the methodology of this report allow for a variety of perspectives, or was it limited in some way?*

*Would the methodology of this report be something that can be adapted to my context?*

*Do the writers of this report make any inaccurate assumptions that might lead to improper conclusions?*

*Does this report expose any gaps in research or understanding regarding violent extremism that are relevant to my local context?*

Watch the following video, "Not in Our Name," which features a number of stories about radicalization in Central Asia. What are some of the reasons why individuals decided to go to Syria or become radicalized? What impacts does radicalization have on the community? Watch the video at <https://www.facebook.com/CurrentTimeAsia/videos/704638173225285/> [Russian]

- » *The North Caucasus Insurgency and Syria: An Exported Jihad?* (The International Crisis Group) [Russian] [English]
- » *Syria Calling: Radicalisation in Central Asia* (The International Crisis Group) [Russian] [English]
- » *Kyrgyzstan: State Fragility and Radicalization* (The International Crisis Group) [Russian] [Kyrgyz] [English]

» *"Hizb ut-Tahrir" in Kyrgyzstan: Conditions and Trends* by N. Esenamanovna and R. Veytsel [English]

» *Central Asia amid Global Threats* by A. Amrebaev, B. Babajanov, and F. Talipov (Search for Common Ground) [Russian] [English]

» *The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalization in the Central Asian Republics* by John Heathershaw and David W. Montgomery (Chatham House) [Russian] [English]

» *How Can We Explain Radicalisation among Central Asia's Migrants?* by Edward Lemon and John Heathershaw (BBC) [Русский] [Ўзбекча] [English]

Additional studies on radicalization and violent extremism (in English) can be downloaded [here](#).

# 2.6

## SUGGESTED READINGS

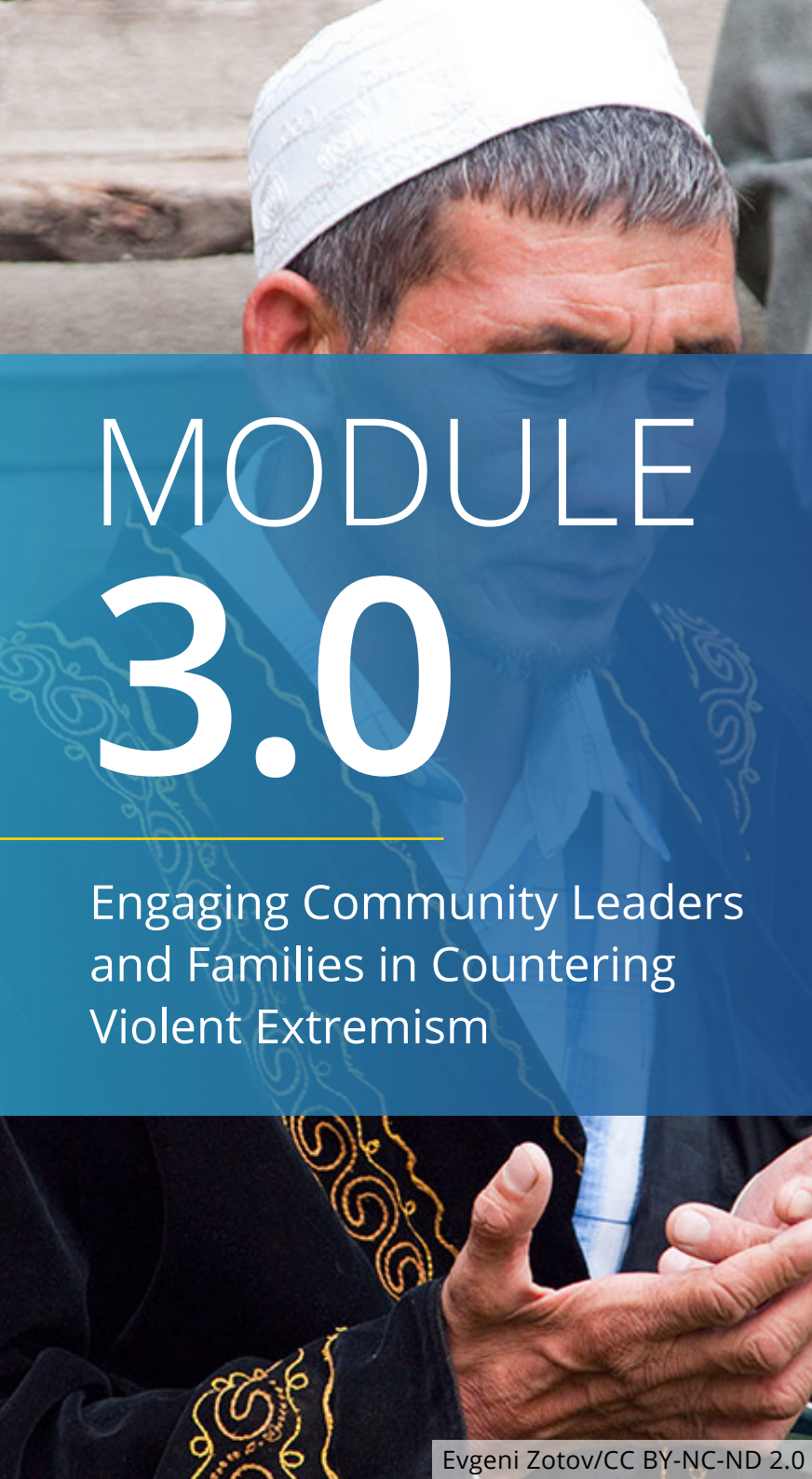
- » *Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism* by Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter (United States Agency for International Development - USAID) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review* by Harriet Allan et al. (Royal United Services Institute - RUSI) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Radicalisation Research: Gap Analysis* by Daniela Pisoui and Reem Ahmed (Radicalisation Awareness Network - RAN) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Beyond Radicalization: Towards an Integrated Anti-Violence Rule of Law Strategy* by Colm Campbell [\[English\]](#)
- » *Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories* by Randy Borum [\[English\]](#)
- » *Rethinking Radicalization* by Faiza Patel (Brennan Center for Justice) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Conducting an Extremism or Terrorism Assessment: An Analytical Framework for Strategy and Program Development* by Guilain Denoeux with Lynn Carter (United States Agency for International Development - USAID) [\[English\]](#)

- » *Understanding Radicalization: A Literature Review of Models and Drivers* by Neven Bondokji, Kim Wilkinson and Leen Aghabi (West Asia-North Africa Institute) [\[English\]](#)

The radicalization and recruitment of children is a serious and unique issue. The following publications focus on the recruitment and use of children in violent extremist groups. Some resources connect this issue to the justice system. As you review them, how does it appear that the recruitment and use of children different than that of adult men and women? How would this impact countering violent extremism programming, especially given the sensitivities surrounding working with children? Download the publications from [here](#).

Additional readings on factors driving violent extremism (in English), can be downloaded [here](#).





# MODULE 3.0

## Engaging Community Leaders and Families in Countering Violent Extremism

This module highlights the role that communities might play in efforts to counter violent extremism, such as engaging with diverse community leaders, including religious leaders and other customary leaders, who are often best positioned to offer support and guidance to families or those potentially vulnerable to radicalization. It also explores initiatives that have sought to understand how family members can play a role in countering violent extremism. For instance, the module explores how this can happen when families are a conduit of values and traditions, positively shape the worldviews of children and youths, and identify early signs of vulnerability to radicalization, among other problems. This can also happen through engaging family members in disengagement and rehabilitation efforts for radicalized individuals.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 3.1 What is individual resilience? What is community resilience?
- 3.2 What are the benefits of a locally-driven approach to countering violent extremism?
- 3.3 What are the roles of community leaders in countering violent extremism?
- 3.4 What are the roles of religious leaders in countering violent extremism?
- 3.5 How can families contribute to community and individual resilience and the broader countering violent extremism agenda?
- 3.6 How do we overcome some of the potential risks of involving community leaders and family members in countering violent extremism efforts?

## 3.1

# What is individual resilience? What is community resilience?

The previous modules have largely focused on the issue of resilience to the appeal of violent extremism, such as in Module 2 as it explored the drivers of radicalization and sources of resilience at the individual level. However, individual resilience is very different than the concept of community resilience, although the two terms are certainly linked. As defined in Module 1,

**>> Resilience is where individuals or communities have the positive capacities of “knowledge, skills and abilities to protect against factors that might lead to radicalization and recruitment.”<sup>62</sup>**

Individual resilience is their capacity to reject the idea of violence or violent extremism when it may be tempting by leveraging personal protective factors and by reducing or removing personal risk factors. Therefore, individual resilience can be seen, for example, when individuals, despite having grievances and being urged to “do something” about them, reject the idea that violence and violent extremism are legitimate responses and pursue other

strategies instead. For individuals, resilience can be built by establishing or strengthening personal protective factors and by reducing or removing personal risk factors. Programs that focus on building and strengthening individual resilience are usually tailored and implemented by trained professionals and practitioners in the community to work with individuals according to their unique needs. This meaning also resonates with the broader definition of the individual resilience used in the humanitarian sector, which might define resilience as the ability to withstand external crises.<sup>63</sup>

Community resilience, on the other hand, is a community’s positive capacities to reject violent extremism and having effective mechanisms for being able to prevent it, identify it, intervene against it, and contribute to the disengagement of those who come to support it or engage in it. For example, resilient communities would have community-level opportunities to express their problems or grievances and discuss solutions. They would be able to address the factors that may create vulnerability to radicalization.

*For individuals, resilience can be built by establishing or strengthening personal protective factors and by reducing or removing personal risk factors.*

<sup>62</sup> Hedayah, “Introduction to Countering Violent Extremism” (unpublished).

<sup>63</sup> For example, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent defines resilience as “the ability of individuals, communities, organisations or countries exposed to disasters, crises and underlying vulnerabilities to anticipate, reduce the impact of, cope with, and recover from the effects of adversity without compromising their long term prospects.” *Road to Resilience* (Geneva, 2012), 3.

# 3.1

“Generally, building community resilience for [countering violent extremism] purposes,” according to Hedayah, “means enhancing community-based participatory research, strengthened community partnerships, and participatory approaches.”<sup>64</sup>

Even though they may be different, individual resilience and community resilience are linked because if all individuals are more resilient and better equipped to resist radicalization, the overall community will also be more resilient and safer. Vice-versa, the existence of community-level approaches and mechanisms to address grievances (community resilience), might be able to reduce the impact and importance of personal risk factors.

This concept of resilience emphasizes that successful countering violent extremism programming and policy at the community level requires broad, local engagement with a variety of actors in order to build skills and techniques to understand local drivers and to prevent and counter them—rather than simply instilling virtues of peace or tolerance.<sup>65</sup> A resilience-

mind approach requires research into how communities may be vulnerable to drivers of violent extremism and how community actors can reduce these individual and community-level vulnerabilities and provide additional tools to resist radicalization.

Practitioners can build community resilience by sustaining or strengthening existing factors of resilience across all areas of a particular community. For example, this can be done by increasing protection for children and youth by building their critical thinking skills and their relationships with community institutions, increasing the awareness of parents and community members to the threat of radicalization, and helping communities create strategies to address those threats. In this module, we will explore a variety of methods to engage community leaders and families in countering violent extremism in ways that build community resilience. 🌐



<sup>64</sup> Hedayah, “Introduction to Countering Violent Extremism” (unpublished).

<sup>65</sup> Ken Menkhaus, “Making Sense of Resilience in Peacebuilding Contexts: Approaches, Applications, Implications,” Paper No. 6 (Geneva: Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, 2013), 6.

## 3.2

# What are the benefits of a locally-driven approach to countering violent extremism?

A growing recognition that countering violent extremism needs to be more focused on the local level where radicalization is occurring has led to a shift in focus as well as a growing support for community-based and grassroots organizations as they work in this space. For example, **the Global Community Engagement Resilience Fund**<sup>66</sup> (GCERF) was recently established to provide grants to local organizations and communities. The Fund's goals to strengthen community resilience are based on the ideas that strengthening community resilience can complement traditional approaches to address violent extremism and that focusing on the local context is important because:

- the drivers of violent extremism are context specific and often locally-driven, meaning that they require locally-driven approaches;
- community actors “are closest to, and understand, the challenges in more detail” than national and international actors;
- “community actors face cultural, political,

economic, and coordination barriers to address these drivers;” and

- international support can help local actors to overcome these barriers.<sup>67</sup>

The Secretary-General’s Plan of Action encourages community resilience by calling on Member States to

Develop joint and participatory strategies, including with civil society and local communities, to prevent the emergence of violent extremism, protect communities from recruitment and the threat of violent extremism, and support confidence-building measures at the community level by providing appropriate platforms for dialogue and the early identification of grievances.<sup>68</sup>

For these efforts to be most effective, they must be locally centered and expanded to include a greater focus on empowering community-level stakeholders such as family members, civil society organizations, teachers, religious leaders, youth activists, coaches and other local actors

as key partners in designing, implementing, and evaluating the countering violent extremism agenda in their local context.

## 3.2.1 What are the different levels that programming can focus on to build community resilience?

*If you were a doctor working to stop an epidemic, how would you work to cure it?*

*How would you stop it from spreading?*

*What groups or institutions would you work with?*

While an epidemic may seem unrelated to the problem of violent extremism, some practitioners find it helpful to think of it this way, reminding us that violent extremism is a complex problem that needs a broad approach. That means understanding that countering violent extremism programming can work with:

- **small groups or individuals** who are already radicalized (the micro-level),
- **larger groups or communities** who are at a

<sup>66</sup> [www.gcerf.org/](http://www.gcerf.org/) For a video from the organization on the importance of a local approach to countering violent extremism and a number of tools available for local actors, see <https://youtu.be/DfwDwOmudDc>. [English]

<sup>67</sup> “Strategy to Engage Communities and Address the Drivers of Violent Extremism (2017-2020),” Global Community Engagement Resilience Fund, 7.

<sup>68</sup> United Nations Secretary-General, “Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism,” 16.

# 3.2

higher risk of vulnerability in supporting or engaging in violent extremism (the mid-level), and with

- **entire populations** to increase awareness and reduce the potential of vulnerability to violent extremism (the macro-level).

Just as communities are made up of a variety of groups and individuals with different needs, community resilience requires directing specific activities to the various parts of the community according to their needs. Recall the Countering Violent Extremism Cycle from Module 1 and the many levels of involvement and their respective responses. In a given community, you might have broad awareness-raising activities that engage the community in dialogue about local issues, tolerance, and violent extremism (general prevention). At the same time, you may implement projects targeted to vulnerable individuals or particular segments of the community that evidence shows are more vulnerable to radicalization (specific prevention). Targeted intervention programs can be developed for those determined to be sympathetic or supportive of violent extremism (early intervention and diversion). This

determination is usually made through the use of research and clinical assessment tools.

While many of these activities would focus on individuals and targeted segments of the community to build individual resilience, these different programs would complement each other and strengthen community resilience due to the fact that they are linked. However, resilient communities are also those which have the approaches and mechanisms in place to drive this process themselves. 🌐

## 3.3

## What are the roles of community leaders in countering violent extremism?

The term “community leaders” includes a broad range of community stakeholders who may or may not have leadership roles in the community. It would include local government officials, local police, journalists, local charities and civil society organizations, teachers and educational institutions, religious leaders, activists, social clubs, coaches and more. While these diverse stakeholders may not appear to have a lot in common, they often share a number of things in common that are important for countering violent extremism such as a responsibility for other people, credibility and respect from community members and the power to bring them together for activities (sometimes referred to as a “convening power”), and implementing activities in the community.

Because of these qualities, community leaders are important to strengthening resilience to violent extremism. Their perspectives at the community level can help them to be well-positioned to understand the local dynamics and drivers of violent extremism. They can also share the perspectives from the grassroots level to those outside the community or at the policy level, giving important insights and helping to improve efforts to better meet community

needs. Community leaders can also be trusted stakeholders that can implement countering violent extremism programs that would be more likely to reach vulnerable members of the community who may not feel comfortable engaging with people or organizations from outside the community they may not know.

The decision of which community stakeholders to engage in a particular activity should be guided by a review of their standing in the community, their potential to promote resilience in the community, and the opportunities and risks of engaging them (for example, whether certain parts of the community do not trust these stakeholders or whether engaging them in countering violent extremism efforts will harm the public perceptions of their other activities). However, with evidence-led activities, a collaborative attitude, and a Do No Harm approach, engaging community leaders and stakeholders in countering violent extremism can effectively build community resilience, especially when these local actors have ownership over the process. 🌐



UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

## 3.4

## What are the roles of religious leaders in countering violent extremism?

One group of community stakeholders that requires special consideration are religious leaders. Religious leaders are often important and respected leaders in local communities. Like other community leaders, they can have the power to convene discussions, reach out to those in the margins of society, and may have resources and volunteers available for community efforts. In contexts where violent extremism claims to be connected to a particular religious practice, religious leaders may be sources of resilience in a particular community by using their status as authorities on religious interpretation to dispel violent extremist interpretations of the tenants of their faith. However, they may sometimes be reinforcing them. For these reasons, religious leaders are often considered important partners in countering violent extremism programming.

For example, the **Mohammadia League of Moroccan Scholars** (*Rabita Mohammadia des Oulemas au Maroc*)<sup>69</sup> partners with other organizations to implement initiatives that

promote youth engagement with youth councils and other organizations. The League also works to shift narratives around religion and violent extremism and partners on projects inside prisons that promote the disengagement of violent extremists prisoners. They also drafted a report that evaluated how traditional Islamic dispute and conflict resolution can complement contemporary conflict resolution practices.<sup>70</sup>

Women religious leaders are also critically important local stakeholders that build community resilience. Again in Morocco, the elite religious school, The Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams and Spiritual Guides (*L'Institut Mohammed VI Pour La Formation Des Imams, Morchidines, et Morchidates*), trains male and female religious leaders. According to the program's director, Abdeslam El-Azaar, the female spiritual guides (*morchidates*) may be the most effective. "Women, just by virtue of their role in society, have so much contact with the people—children, young people, other women, even men," he said. "They are the

primary educators of their children. So it is natural for them to provide advice. We give them an education so they can offer it in a scholarly way." These women work in mosques, schools, and homes to challenge violent extremist narratives and their interpretations of religion.<sup>71</sup> In Kyrgyzstan, female religious specialists called *atincha* are being trained by a local faith-based organization called the **Women's Progressive Social Union (WPSU) or "Mutakalim"**<sup>72</sup> to become engaged in reducing the risk of radicalization among women in target communities. *Atincha* have traditional community roles, especially regarding religious education, and are mostly found in Kyrgyzstan's southern regions. They have started to play important roles in resolving religious issues among women, as well as conflict. However, some *atincha* (or women posing as *atincha*) have also been accused of spreading violent extremist narratives and even facilitating recruitment, so not all stakeholders are convinced of the importance of working with

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.arrabita.ma/default.aspx>

<sup>70</sup> Read the report here: <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/SFCG-Morocco-ADR-and-Mediation-In-Morocco-Synthesis-Report.pdf> [English].

<sup>71</sup> Dina Temple-Raston, "The Female Quran Experts Fighting Radical Islam in Morocco," The Atlantic, February 12, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/02/the-female-quran-experts-fighting-radical-islam-in-morocco/551996/>.

<sup>72</sup> <http://www.mutakallim.kg/>

# 3.4

*atincha* to build community resilience or may be skeptical of their potential. Therefore, it may sometimes be important to build the resilience of religious actors themselves as well as transform the perceptions of other stakeholders in order to better involve them in building community resilience to violent extremism.

However, care must be taken when engaging with religious leaders and those who are religious. Oftentimes, we may focus on the most prominent religious leaders who might be considered to be “moderates” and not those along the margins of society who are unheard by the wider society, or who practice more observant or conservative forms of a particular religion. Since radicalization often occurs along the margins of a society, it is important to include a broad range of partners to be most effective. Countering violent extremism programming may also end up excluding those who are not religiously observant or who are not religious at all when we design projects for interreligious dialogue, for example. In addition, followers of local or traditional religions may be excluded when the focus is on major world religions.<sup>73</sup>

Because of the diversity of religious belief and practice, it may sometimes be important to work on protecting religious freedom. Followers of minority religions (such as Christians and Jews in the Central Asian region), or specific sects of the same religion (such as those who practice Shi’a or Salafi forms of Islam), or those who choose not to be religious at all, may feel marginalized because their beliefs are not the most common form of belief or because they feel like their beliefs are not respected. In the most serious cases, this marginalization can create tensions between religious groups and contribute to the individual and community vulnerability to radicalization when these factors intersect with other drivers.

For example, while Kyrgyzstan is known for being one of the most religiously tolerant countries in the Central Asian region and the country’s constitution guarantees religious freedom, the Kyrgyz government, civil society, and religious leaders work to better improve religious freedom.<sup>74</sup> This is due to the fact that issues regarding freedom of religion laws can become court cases that can cause grievances

“  
*Since radicalization often occurs along the margins of a society, it is important to include a broad range of partners to be most effective.*”

<sup>73</sup> Extremely Together, “Countering Violent Extremism: A Guide for Young People by Young People” (Geneva, Switzerland: Kofi Annan Foundation), 18.

<sup>74</sup> See <https://www.sfcg.org/promoting-freedom-religion-belief-kyrgyzstan/>



# 3.4

and marginalization, particularly for marginalized or minority religious groups. Therefore, these efforts are important to build community resilience. They also build relationships and collaboration between community groups, religious communities, government institutions, and lawyers to improve the laws and regulations about religion in the country. The Ministry of Education is also engaging in partnerships to create a concept to reform religious education. Search for Common Ground also works in countries across the Middle East and Africa to promote interreligious dialogue and the protection of religious sites when they become the targets of extremist violence, including participating in the creation of the Universal Code of Conduct on Holy Sites.<sup>75</sup> The Universal Code offers practical guidelines for safeguarding holy sites and for promoting peace and reconciliation between people of different ethnic and religious communities in order to better

protect them through cooperation between leaders of diverse religions and relevant state authorities.<sup>76</sup>

Interreligious understanding and respect can help insulate communities from the risks of radicalization and violent extremism. For example, watch the following video about religious leaders in one of Morocco's historically marginalized cities. As you watch, pay attention to the ways violent extremism affects the people in the video:

<sup>75</sup> Search for Common Ground, the Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights, One World in Dialogue, and Religions for Peace were the partner organizations involved in leading this process. Read more about the Universal Code of Conduct on Holy Sites at <https://www.sfcg.org/universal-code-of-conduct-on-holy-sites/> [English]. The code itself is available at [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/c4af5d\\_1baa49c3ed2c40ad9be79a83ecbb783a.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/c4af5d_1baa49c3ed2c40ad9be79a83ecbb783a.pdf) [English] / [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/c4af5d\\_da3f49d1465b4ee29df3c848759477f7.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/c4af5d_da3f49d1465b4ee29df3c848759477f7.pdf) [Russian]. For a video on Search's project in Nigeria to convene local religious leaders to protect places of worship to mitigate conflict, see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_Ov7dsruGYo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Ov7dsruGYo). [English]

<sup>76</sup> See the one-page summary at [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/c4af5d\\_d2b0acd64ac2457ab9c887212d89ee26.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/c4af5d_d2b0acd64ac2457ab9c887212d89ee26.pdf). [English]

## 3.4



## VIDEO 4

## A Young Imam in Morocco: A Story of Bridge-Building



By: [Search for Common Ground](#)

Original Link:

<https://youtu.be/StMWYkepds4>

<https://vimeo.com/105565369>

Downloadable Link:

The video can be downloaded [here](#).

Russian Subtitles:

**Advanced**

(recommended for use with downloaded versions)

**Basic**

(recommended for use with YouTube)

Instructions on using these subtitles are available [here](#).

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. The priest defined fundamentalism and radicalism as “the exclusion or the elimination of the other.” In what ways does exclusion contribute to violence and violent extremism? What might be some examples of exclusion in your area that may create vulnerability to violent extremism?
2. After watching the video, how do you see religious leaders as sources of community resilience?
3. The young conservative imam in the video (who has a sizeable social media following) decided to intervene in the case against the man who threatened him, choosing instead to talk with him and try to convince him to turn away from violent extremism. What can be the role of religious leaders in disengagement and/or deradicalization activities? Do you think that the man was more or less receptive to the imam because he was conservative, rather than practicing another form of Islam? What about if he was a Christian priest instead? Why? What does this tell you about choosing the most credible religious actors in a situation like this? 🌐

## 3.5

## How can families contribute to community and individual resilience and the broader countering violent extremism agenda?

Perhaps the most critical part of resilient communities and individuals are families. Families are often the first to identify signs of vulnerability and potentially early radicalization (although outward signs are not always appropriately captured) and the first to try to prevent it. As described in the Global Counterterrorism Forum's *The Role of Families in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: Strategic Recommendations and Programming Options*,

Families are vital to preventing and countering violent extremism. From shaping attitudes toward non-violence to serving as a “front line” actor in identifying signs of possible radicalization to violence, preventing such radicalization’s onset, and intervening in the radicalization process, families represent key, often underutilized, partners in preventing and countering violent extremism efforts. Yet, even as the need for family-centered countering violent extremism programming is acknowledged, engaging families presents challenges – from

finding credible partners, to managing risk, and identifying the best intervention opportunities.

The document (found below in the 3.8 Further Learning Opportunities section) includes a number of practical recommendations and options for programming. Therefore, a resilience approach must ensure that families are equipped and supported in their efforts to protect their family members from the influences of violent extremism. Another study revealed that often a radicalized person’s links with their parents (especially the mother) are the last to be broken in the radicalization process but were the first to be repaired during the disengagement process.<sup>77</sup> Parents are therefore closely involved in both processes and need support in both.

Many families are already engaged in this. For example, one study on foreign fighters in Jordan by the West Asia-North Africa Institute revealed a variety of methods families used to try and prevent family members from joining armed groups and violent extremist groups in Syria as well as pressuring them to return home:

The sister of one fighter explained that her parents decided to get him married to divert his attention from joining the fight. There was no intra-familial discussion around his radical ideas, and no external help was sought. Two months later he departed for Syria. It was reported that two other sets of parents had observed their sons’ radicalization, but did not do enough to stop them. [...] Mothers explained that each time the fighters called they pressured them to return and counselled that their actions were not jihad. Fathers likewise asserted pressure, but usually by expressing anger at their sons’ choices. Spouses and siblings levelled additional forms of emotional pressure. One wife encouraged her husband to return, falsely telling him that she was pregnant with a male child; a brother repeatedly referenced their father’s deteriorating health; and a mother blamed her son for his father’s hypertension and diabetes that she said had started after he had left for Syria.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> See “Formers and Families,” European Commission Migration and Home Affairs (2018) [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/content/formers-and-families\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/content/formers-and-families_en). [English]

<sup>78</sup> Neven Bondokji, “Journey Mapping of Jordanian Fighters” (Amman: WANA Institute, 2017), 10, 14. For a video that shows one Kyrgyz family trying in vain to convince their family member to come back from Syria and about families in Kyrgyzstan leaving for Syria, see <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/27391837.html> [Russian] and <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-syria/27405010.html>. [English]

# 3.5

The study revealed that while families could be active in trying to prevent the radicalization of their sons and daughters, they “appear to have lacked the skills and tools to identify their sons’ radicalization and act accordingly.”<sup>79</sup> In addition to the things the families could do within the home, they may also need to find help in the community. Unfortunately for the families in this study, there was no “clarity around safe channels to inform authorities about such plans.”<sup>80</sup> However, the study noted that the level of awareness had increased in Jordan in the time since their family members had left and there was now more help available at the local level through community and tribal leaders.

This question of whether families decide to seek help about the radicalization of a family member from those outside the family or not are shaped

by the society as well as gender. Another study in Jordan, for example, revealed that while most Jordanian parents in the research were willing to go to the authorities or a local religious leader if they believed their son was at risk of radicalization, none of them were willing to reach out to the authorities if they believed their daughter was at risk.<sup>81</sup>

Of course, because the West Asia-North Africa Institute’s study focused on the families of foreign fighters, their sample would not include successful examples of families intervening in the radicalization of their sons or daughters. In one study by Search for Common Ground in Lebanon, for example, a young man recounted how he was invited to join a terrorist organization and offered a sum of money. “I did not accept to belong to this organization,” he

said, “because I did not know its background. My parents were telling me that I should not listen to anyone if I do not know him.”<sup>82</sup>

What these examples show us is that there is an opportunity for countering violent extremism efforts to successfully empower families to be more resilient to violent extremism. Indeed, plenty of efforts like this are already underway. For example, **PAIMAN Alumni Trust**<sup>83</sup> is a network of women leaders in Pakistan that coordinates a community youth and mothers group and conducts trainings for them to identify signs of radicalization. They also provide “support services and economic alternatives for radicalized young men and boys who return to their rural villages to begin a new life.”<sup>84</sup>

In another example, the **Women without Borders** organization<sup>85</sup> and its Sisters Against

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>81</sup> See Al-Hayat Center for Civil Society Development and Search for Common Ground, “Women and Violent Radicalization in Jordan,” United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and the Jordanian National Commission for Women, March 2016.

<sup>82</sup> Dallin Van Leuven et al., “Youth and Contentious Politics in Lebanon: Drivers of Marginalization and Radicalization in Tripoli” (Search for Common Ground). This report is not yet published.

<sup>83</sup> <http://paimantrust.org/>

<sup>84</sup> Kathleen Kuehnast, “Engaging and Educating Women and Girls in the Prevention of Violent Conflict and Violent Extremism,” United States Institute of Peace, April 3, 2014, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2014/04/engaging-and-educating-women-and-girls-prevention-violent-conflict-and-violent>. [English]

<sup>85</sup> <http://www.women-without-borders.org>

# 3.5

Violent Extremism platform have created a Mothers School program that links women-led organizations and supports their introduction of local training programs for mothers regarding the threat of radicalization.

Watch the following video for an introduction to this program:



## 3.5



## VIDEO 5

### Mother's School



By: [Women without Borders](#)

Original Link:

<https://rebrand.ly/Video05>

<https://youtu.be/hi6M5UGS7gA>

Russian Subtitles:

[Advanced](#)

[Basic](#)

(recommended for use with YouTube)

Instructions on using these subtitles are available [here](#).

#### REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. One woman recounted how she stepped in to prevent her son from being radicalized by a family member. One element of the Mothers School model is to raise awareness of radicalization and to educate mothers about warning signs. Are there always warning signs that family members can spot? What might be some examples of warning signs?
2. The main message of the video is that women (and particularly mothers) have power to prevent the radicalization of their children. To what extent do you believe that this is true in your context? In what ways do the benefits from the Mothers School extend beyond the women's families? 🌐

## 3.6

## How do we overcome some of the potential risks of involving community leaders and family members in countering violent extremism efforts?

As with any countering violent extremism effort, involving community leaders and family members can present some unique risks that must be taken into account when designing and implementing these activities through focusing on the local and grassroots levels. The first two were highlighted by the United Nations Human Rights Council:

- Due care should be taken when devising and implementing such programs to ensure that they have no direct or incidental effects that would result in discrimination, stigmatization and racial or religious profiling. This is particularly important, as targeting specific communities may lead to further marginalization and grievances. Fully and inclusively engaging communities in designing the programs aimed at them is the best way to avoid unintended negative consequences and to guarantee that such programs address the political, social, security-related and other issues identified by the community as matters of concern.
- Grass-roots organizations, especially those

representing disadvantaged groups, are frequently small-sized. They face particular difficulties, as rules to counter the financing of terrorism tend to favor large, well-known organizations and require strict reporting and auditing requirements. Grassroots organizations often do not have the administrative infrastructure necessary to comply with the imposed reporting and auditing requirements. These circumstances frequently result in the inability of small organizations to attract the funding needed for their operations and have a negative impact on the groups supported by them.<sup>86</sup>

Additional risks include:

- the more limited capacities of local or grassroots organizations to conduct research or the appropriate monitoring and evaluation of activities compared to national and international organizations;
- efforts being complicated by the “gatekeeper effect” where self-appointed representatives of the community (such as religious, ethnic, or municipal leaders) pressure organizations to

conduct activities through them rather than through broader and more representative groups;<sup>87</sup> and

- putting undue pressure on families, religious leaders, or other community members on identifying radicalization when signs are not always visible, which may result in unfair marginalization or discrimination against them.

Therefore, countering violent extremism efforts must anticipate and proactively address these potential risks in order to ensure a Do No Harm approach.

*What other risks can you identify that you would add to this list?*

*Which of these risks do you believe might be more relevant to your context?*


<sup>86</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council, “Report on Best Practices and Lessons Learned on How Protecting and Promoting Human Rights Contribute to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism,” 11, 14.

<sup>87</sup> Special thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this risk.


# 3.7

## Key Takeaways


This module is the first in a series of modules that explores the challenges and opportunities of a whole-of-society approach to countering violent extremism. In particular, this module explored the unique issue of community resilience and the importance of a variety of community members and relationships to make communities resilient to the risks of radicalization. Some of the most important takeaways from this module include:

 **Resilient communities have many defensive factors that help protect them from the rise and spread of violent extremism.**


Resilient communities have many complementary factors that help them to reject violent extremism as well as being able to prevent it, identify it, intervene against it, and contribute to the disengagement of those who come to support it or engage in it. Widespread individual resilience to radicalization is also linked to increased community resilience.

 **Countering violent extremism is most effective at the local level.**


Because the drivers of violent extremism are locally rooted, community members are best positioned to identify and counteract them.

 **Both male and female religious leaders are important partners in countering violent extremism, but should be brought into a broader network of community leaders.**

Overly focusing on specific religious leaders may result in missed opportunities to include informal or marginalized religious leaders or communities, including those considered to be more conservative. Diverse networks of religious leaders and religious observers working towards common goals can encourage tolerance and cooperation and therefore contribute to greater community resilience.

 **Resilient families are crucial components to communities that are resilient to violent extremism.**

However, so-called early signs of vulnerability or potential radicalization may not always be discernible, and beliefs that families should have “done something” to prevent the radicalization of a family member may lead to the discrimination or even the securitization of families. In the most extreme cases, families that have members that are vulnerable, sympathetic, or supportive of violent extremism create significant vulnerabilities for others in the family.

 **Local and grassroots organizations face barriers to fully participating in the countering violent extremism field.**

Like women-led and youth-led organizations, these groups may be more disadvantaged than others because of their smaller size and lack of reputation at the national or international levels, which might favor more national or established organizations as partners.



## 3.8

## Further Learning Opportunities

Search for local media articles on individuals or families that have gone to Syria and Iraq. Were community members aware of their radicalization? Were these individuals or families part of any religious or community groups? Are these examples of strengths or gaps? What do their stories tell you about the concept of community resilience?

The following resources promote the idea of community resilience and a local approach to countering violent extremism:

- » *Ankara Memorandum on Good Practices for a Multi-Sectoral Approach to Countering Violent Extremism* (Global Counterterrorism Forum - GCTF) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Developing a Community-Led Approach to Countering Violent Extremism* (World Organization for Resource Development and Education - WORDE) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Going Local: Supporting Community-Based Initiatives to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism in South and Central Asia* by Rafia Bhulai (Global Center on Cooperative Security - GCCS) [\[English\]](#)
- » *How Close Is “Whole of Society” Movement against Violent Extremism* by Eric Rosand and

Madeline Rose (International Peace Institute - IPI) [\[English\]](#)

- » *Communities First: A Blueprint for Organizing and Sustaining a Global Movement against Violent Extremism* by Eric Rosand (The Prevention Project) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Strategy to Engage Communities and Address the Drivers of Violent Extremism* (Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund - GCERF) [\[English\]](#)

Other resources on this topic can be downloaded [here](#).

The following resources demonstrate the benefits and successes of local approaches to community security and offer examples of how communities have worked with the police for greater security or improved security themselves in the face of sectarian violence and violent extremism, with a focus on the Middle East region:

- » *Good Practices on Community Engagement and Community-Oriented Policing as Tools to Counter Violent Extremism* (Global Counterterrorism Forum - GCTF) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)

- » *Investing in Iraq’s Peace: How Good Governance Can Diminish Support for Violent Extremism* by K. Proctor and B. Tesfaye (Mercy Corps) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Havens in a Firestorm: Perspectives from Baghdad on Resilience to Sectarian Violence* by Ami C. Carpenter [\[English\]](#)
- » *Local Community Resistance to Extremist Groups in Syria: Lessons from Atarib* by Haid Haid (Chatham House) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Resisting Hayat Tahrir al-Sham: Syrian Civil Society on the Frontlines* by Haid Haid [\[English\]](#)

The following resources are helpful in developing an understanding the benefits and good practices of engaging with religious leaders and religious beneficiaries in countering violent extremism programming to promote community resilience:

- » *Fostering Social Resilience against Extremism: Leaders for Interreligious Understanding and Counter Extremism Toolkit* (Lebanese International University) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Dialogue with Religious Leaders and Institutions in Support of their Role in the Prevention and Resolution of Conflicts and in Countering Extremism in Central Asia* by Shahrbanou

# 3.8

Tadjbakhsh (United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia)

[\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)

Other resources on this topic can be downloaded [here](#).

Finally, the following resources discuss the role of families in countering violent extremism programming and good practices on supporting families in this role:

» *The Role of Families in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: Strategic Recommendations and Programming Options* (Global Counterterrorism Forum) [\[English\]](#)

Other resources on this topic (in English) can be downloaded [here](#).



# MODULE 4.0

A Multisectoral Approach to  
Countering Violent Extremism:  
Opportunities for Collaboration  
between Government and Civil  
Society

This module offers guiding principles for engaging state and civil society actors in enabling more effective state responses and engaging a multisectoral approach. It explores the reasons why collaboration may not occur or be limited. The module then guides the participants towards identifying sectors or institutions where this type of collaboration would be ripest for their context.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 4.1 What is the value in government, civil society, and community collaboration in responding to violent extremism?
- 4.2 What are the reasons why people might not collaborate?
- 4.3 Are there risks when this collaboration is not effective?
- 4.4 What are the best practices when building effective government, civil society, and community cooperation?

## 4.1

# What is the value in government, civil society, and community collaboration in responding to violent extremism?

*What are the strengths of government actors in responding to violent extremism?*

*What are some of the challenges governments may face in countering violent extremism?*

*What are the strengths of civil society actors (defined broadly) in responding to violent extremism?*

*What are some of the challenges civil society may face in countering violent extremism?*

To answer these questions, we must understand what we mean by civil society:

**>> Civil society** is the broad term for organizations and institutions that act in the interests of citizens—including informal collectives, labor unions, activists, charities, religious institutions, and more.

Civil society does not include government institutions or businesses.<sup>88</sup>

Just like how all of us have different skills, relationships, and responsibilities, government and civil society institutions bring unique capacities to the efforts to prevent and counter

violent extremism.

On top of leading all counter-terrorism policies and programs, **governments** also play a central role in countering violent extremism. Governments often set the agenda by passing laws that define violent extremism and drafting national strategies and action plans to counter it. Governments bring a vast amount of resources to both of these efforts and are often held to account for their success: when violent extremism spreads or violence occurs, governments are sometimes blamed for not preventing attacks or doing enough to counter violent extremism.

These responsibilities of counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism may create challenges for governments, who may understandably prioritize the “big wins” and “fast results” of coercive counter-terrorism measures over the longer-term and non-coercive measures and goals of countering violent extremism.

These responsibilities may also tempt governments to sometimes blur the lines between the two. For example, the United

Kingdom’s countering violent extremism program “Prevent” was originally part of the country’s secret counter-terrorism strategy and was only made public in 2006 when the government recognized the need to increase public awareness and to leverage the support of local citizens and civil society. The 2009 ‘refresh’ of the program also shifted intelligence gathering to the “Pursue” stream.

However, the Prevent program faced extensive public distrust and fears that the program was meant to spy on citizens or gather intelligence. It also made Britain’s Muslims feel marginalized, since the priority areas were determined not by the local risk of radicalization, but only based on which neighborhoods had higher concentrations of Muslim residents. Prevent also focused simply on the threat of violent extremism among its Muslim residents. It was only in 2010 that the government finally announced, “Prevent will now address radicalization to all forms of terrorism.”<sup>89</sup> However, the damage had already been done, and Prevent continues to be viewed as a “toxic brand.”<sup>90</sup>

<sup>88</sup> There is also some disagreement as to whether the media or educational institutions are included in the sphere of civil society, but these sectors will be specifically discussed in later modules.

<sup>89</sup> Secretary of State for the Home Department, *Contest: The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering Terrorism* (Norwich: The Stationery Office, 2011), 62.

<sup>90</sup> Josh Halliday and Vikram Dodd, “UK Anti-Radicalisation Prevent Strategy a ‘Toxic Brand,’” *The Guardian*, March 9, 2015, sec. UK News, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/mar/09/anti-radicalisation-prevent-strategy-a-toxic-brand>. [English]

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Despite making numerous positive changes and increasing its collaboration with and support of local civil society, these perceptions (often based on misunderstandings) have continued. As part of a review, the European Union's Commissioner for Human Rights shared his concerns that Prevent "runs the risk of isolating the very communities whose cooperation is most needed to fight violent extremism. Reinforcing community support and gaining the confidence of communities should be the government's priority."<sup>91</sup> Because of these issues in spite of the positive reforms the British government has done, Prevent has become an important international case study in countering violent extremism.

The United Nations' Human Rights Council highlighted the need for a foundation of trust in countering violent extremism programming:

Initiatives related to preventing and countering violent extremism tend to be more successful when there is a pre-

existing relationship with the community. In cases in which the State authorities have not previously engaged with a community, or if engagement happened largely through security forces, such programs that are carried out by the authorities, or that visibly involve them, may cause further tensions.<sup>92</sup>

These dynamics and pressures of government's responsibilities might sometimes be hard for **civil society** actors and citizens to consider. However, civil society can help to maintain and even rebuild trust between governments and citizens or among other groups. Civil society groups also bring unique resources and skills that make them natural partners in countering violent extremism. They are already active in the prevention space by providing opportunities and capacity building to youth, often focus on high risk groups of people, or encouraging active citizenship and inclusive communities. And since civil society groups are rooted in the

local context, they can often bring an important perspective on the drivers and patterns of radicalization in their areas. They can also provide spaces for constructive engagement between governments and their citizens. Therefore, the Human Rights Council advises that

Civil society should be viewed as a key ally in endeavors to prevent violent extremism. Civil society organizations may be best placed to implement activities relating to preventing and countering violent extremism, including through partnerships with relevant authorities, in particular in contexts in which State involvement has proven counterproductive or would undermine trust between authorities and communities.<sup>93</sup>

This was echoed in the former Secretary-General's Plan of Action advising that "National [action] plans [on countering violent extremism]

<sup>91</sup> Commissioner for Human Rights, "Memorandum on Surveillance and Oversight Mechanisms in the United Kingdom" (Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe, May 17, 2016), 9.

<sup>92</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council, "Report on Best Practices and Lessons Learned on How Protecting and Promoting Human Rights Contribute to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism," A/HRC/33/29 (The United Nations General Assembly, July 21, 2016), 11.

<sup>93</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council, "Report on Best Practices and Lessons Learned on How Protecting and Promoting Human Rights Contribute to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism," 13.

## 4.1

should dedicate funding for implementation by government and non-governmental entities and promote public-private partnerships, where applicable.<sup>94</sup>

However, in many communities where countering violent extremism policies and programs are needed, traditional, coercive counter-terrorism activities may have increased tensions in what may already be marginalized communities.

In a recent workshop on the role of civil society in countering violent extremism, the participants noted that “strengthening the state-citizen relationship lies at the heart of effective [countering violent extremism] efforts” and recommended that “sustained engagement between the community and local authorities, including the police, is critical to repairing any breaches of and building trust between the government and communities.”<sup>95</sup> These efforts can also be helpful to police officers, who may not be aware of new trends in local areas.

One of the methods often used to raise that

awareness and build trust and collaboration between police forces and the community is by adopting community-oriented policing practices, which encourages public consultations on local issues and the development of joint strategies with the police to address them in holistic ways. These practices encourage non-securitized approaches to local problems and enlist community support to help address the underlying causes. These issues do not necessarily need to be specific to identified local drivers of violent extremism when the relationship between the police and citizens is already identified as a driver. This is because the transformation of the relationship is key, which may have better initial results when partnerships focus on pressing issues or “easy wins” rather than complex issues like radicalization. However, as trust increases and the collaboration becomes more effective, these partnerships can focus on more difficult issues.

The Secretary-General’s Plan of Action recommends governments to

Adopt community-oriented policing models and programs that seek to solve local issues in partnership with the community and are firmly based on human rights so as to avoid putting community members at risk. This would increase public awareness and vigilance and improve police understanding and knowledge with regard to communities, thus enhancing their ability to be proactive and identify grievances and critical issues at an early stage.<sup>96</sup>

*What are some local issues where you believe police and citizen partnerships would be effective?*

In summary, the collaboration of government, civil society, and community in countering violent extremism can include the following benefits:

- **Multiplies efficiency and impact:** Bringing together different perspectives offers unique benefits to addressing a complex problem. Effective collaboration reduces redundant work, helps to form shared understandings and goals, and leads to collective impact.

<sup>94</sup> United Nations Secretary-General, “Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism,” 13.

<sup>95</sup> Royal United Services Institute and The Prevention Project, “CVE Practitioner Workshop: Opportunities and Challenges for Civil Society in Pushing Back Against Violent Extremism,” 2

<sup>96</sup> United Nations Secretary-General, “Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism,” 16.

## 4.1

- **Expands the breadth of stakeholders actively engaging in countering violent extremism and expands the toolkit available:** Collaboration expands the kinds of tools and activities available to a society working to countering violent extremism. Because different stakeholders have different strengths and different access to unique segments of the community, collaboration allows a greater number of options available when working to counter violent extremism. For example, governments often are not always able to conduct necessary research themselves, but actively benefit of the research of civil society and academia (some of which the governments themselves commission and pay for). Governments also bring an important understanding of the form and drivers of the problem, having access to captured or former violent extremists.
- **Highlights common goals and allows stakeholders to share the burden:** Both governments and civil society are working towards the same purpose (such as protecting people better and improving security) through different means. This allows different stakeholders to feel that they do not have

to do everything alone to build community resilience to violent extremism.

- **Builds shared understandings of the problem and increases communication:** Through increased communication, stakeholders are more aware of how other stakeholders see the problem of radicalization, what responses are needed, and what they are working on to build resilience to violent extremism.
- **Increases system-wide cooperation and builds mutual trust:** Effective collaboration on countering violent extremism can open the door to improved relationships in other areas of mutual interest, such as education and governance reform. When governments and civil society organizations successfully collaborate, this can even result in reduced scrutiny they may have had for each other. 🌐

*Civil society can help to maintain and even rebuild trust between governments and citizens or among other groups. Civil society groups also bring unique resources and skills that make them natural partners in countering violent extremism.*

## 4.2

## What are the reasons why people might not collaborate?

**Inaccurate information:** People and organizations may not understand the benefits of collaboration. They may not be aware of the motives or actions of potential partners, or they may have been inaccurately represented in rumors or assumptions. They may not have enough knowledge about countering violent extremism or may lack understandings on the drivers of violent extremism. They may not even know that others are working in the same space or are also willing to collaborate.

**Incompatible attitudes:** Past negative experiences or fear may prevent people and organizations from collaborating. The environment may be characterized by a spirit of competition instead, such as when multiple organizations are competing for resources or access to particular areas. Even if a particular group has a desire to collaborate, they may be discouraged from doing so because of community attitudes that would disprove of it. There may also be stereotypes or prejudices that discourage collaboration.

**Different interests or priorities:** Another important reason is different interests which is not the same of incompatible attitudes

(incompatible attitudes are due to external circumstances while different interests or priorities are intrinsic of the organization, institution, or government department). To identify the interests and priorities behind the action of different actors is the first step of the negotiation process to establish collaboration.

**Lack the skills or resources to collaborate:** Even when there is interest in collaborating on countering violent extremism, people and organizations may lack the skills to do so—or even to do it well. These skills can include effective communication, fundraising, and advocacy, but can be anything related to the design and management of countering violent extremism programming.<sup>97</sup> In addition, even if these skills are present, people and organizations may not have enough resources to dedicate for collaboration, such as time, staff, or funds. 🌐



<sup>97</sup> Drawn from Lena Slachmuis, “The Common Ground Approach: Three Day Training Resources” (Search for Common Ground, 2018), 93.



## 4.3

## Are there risks when this collaboration is not effective?

*What are the potential reactions citizens or civil society might have when they distrust their government?*

*What happens to the effectiveness of government programs and policies when mutual trust is low?*

Just as relationships of trust open doors to opportunities, distrust can close them. Indeed, when distrust is high:

- governments and civil society have fewer tools and opportunities to respond to the problem of violent extremism;
- those vulnerable to the appeal of violent extremism will be less likely to voluntarily participate in government or civil society programs that can rebuild their resilience or provide alternative paths to meet their needs;
- groups are less likely to share information about the work they do and the successes or challenges they have; and
  - government and civil society actors are less likely to collaborate or combine their resources to a common goal.

When trust in governments is damaged,

societies may witness changing forms of political participation—whether apathy or increased activism and increased protests—which can differ on the group or individual levels. Civil society organizations, including human rights defenders, may increase their criticism of government policies.

At the same time, government actions against violent extremism may sometimes increase tensions, marginalization, or even conflict in ways that can increase radicalization and the spread of violent extremism—especially when efforts to counter violent extremism are reduced in favor of security-oriented counterterrorism approaches. For example, the Lebanese government's security plan to bring a stop to the clashes in Tripoli, which included mass arrests and setting up checkpoints throughout the city, resulted in tight scrutiny on young Sunni men. This appeared to drive the radicalization of many young men. As one young man recounted during a recent research project, "The [Lebanese] state is the one who wants the young people to go to [fight in] Syria because of the restrictions on them." He recounted how he had been accused

of supporting terrorism and of intending to go "to Syria for jihad" (an accusation he denied) and threatened with imprisonment and said in frustration, "I want ISIL to come to protect us" and withdrew from the discussion.<sup>98</sup> His frustration with the security forces was shared by many others who participated in the research.

When distrust for governments is high, communities may sometimes see civil society as a more legitimate actor to work locally on preventing and countering violent extremism. A recent international survey showed that when people believe that the 'system' is failing them, non-governmental organizations were seen as the most trusted institution—more than businesses, the media, and the government.<sup>99</sup> Where relationships of trust exist between the government and civil society, they can engage in important conversations to promote more effective government responses to violent extremism—conversations which may be too sensitive in environments characterized by distrust. 🌐

<sup>98</sup> Van Leuven et al., "Youth and Contentious Politics in Lebanon" (unpublished).

<sup>99</sup> "2017 Executive Summary," Trust Barometer (Edelman, January 2017), 17.

## 4.4

## What are the best practices when building effective government, civil society, and community cooperation?

Our combined experience in the field of countering violent extremism has offered the community of practice some guiding principles and good practices when encouraging collaboration between government and civil society actors. They include:

**Build trust.** Build trust gradually among stakeholders, using both informal and formal initiatives. Informal initiatives can include simply sharing information on ongoing projects, evaluations, and research findings to avoid repetition or competing activities. Formal initiatives may include conducting research or implementing activities together. Relationships of trust encourage partners to collaborate and share information and resources as well as making efforts more effective.

**Formalize collaboration** in regional or national strategies or action plans when possible and appropriate. According to the Secretary-General's Plan of Action, "National plans should be developed in a multidisciplinary manner, to include countering and preventing violent extremism measures, with input from

a wide range of government actors, such as law enforcement, social service providers and ministries of education, youth and religious affairs, as well as non-governmental actors, including youth; families; women; religious, cultural and educational leaders; civil society organizations; the media; and the private sector. Analyses of local and national drivers of violent extremism form an important point of departure for developing national plans."<sup>100</sup>

**Be careful using channels** to coordinate on countering violent extremism for different purposes. When collaboration becomes a reality, avoid leveraging these new relationships or growing trust to bring up other issues where collaboration is lacking, even if it is tempting. This may undermine progress that has been made.

**Do not use programs** to prevent and counter violent extremism as a cover for broad law enforcement or intelligence gathering activities. As the United Nations Human Rights Council warned, "While such an approach may yield short-term benefits, there is a grave risk that it will result in undermining the community's trust

in public authorities. It may have a negative impact on the ability of law enforcement actors to operate within the respective community, which may lead them to resort to ever more intrusive measures, potentially setting into motion a vicious circle of violence and abuse."<sup>101</sup>

**Use broad collaboration** to reduce the initial fears to engage. Bring in a wide spectrum of government and civil society actors – including religious groups, the media, and so forth – to reduce pressures that may be faced when beginning to collaborate for the first time.

**Respect concerns over confidentiality.** Due to the sensitivity around violent extremism, visibility and publicity must be tailored to avoid risks to the stakeholders. Especially when collaboration is just beginning, maintain the confidentiality of your partners when requested. It is helpful to set these guidelines early.

**Define roles and responsibilities** collectively and discuss limitations. For clear collaboration, identify, respect, and speak to everyone's needs and limitations early in the process. This requires everyone to understand the motivations and

<sup>100</sup> United Nations Secretary-General, "Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism," 12.

<sup>101</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council, "Report on Best Practices and Lessons Learned on How Protecting and Promoting Human Rights Contribute to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism," 12. Emphasis added.

# 4.4

priorities of each partner.

Recognize that personal collaboration and institutional collaboration are different things that require specific efforts. Understand that government agencies or civil society groups are groups of people. Collaboration must be able to continue if a person leaves that organization or is promoted. Therefore, effective collaboration requires the building of personal as well as institutional relationships.

Be patient. Understand that governments or organizations may not be able to change the ways they operate quickly.

The following modules will offer good practices for engaging and collaborating with other actors, but these guiding principles and good practices can also be helpful in establishing collaboration with these other sectors. 🌐






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# 4.5 Key Takeaways



**This module outlined the benefits of collaboration between government and civil society actors when relationships of mutual trust can be built and maintained. It explored some potential barriers to cooperation and risks that may arise when distrust is present. But with care and open communication, collaboration between government and civil society actors can increase the effectiveness and impact of countering violent extremism work. Some of the most important considerations include:**

-  **Governments bear responsibilities to protect their citizens from violent extremism.** Governments lead counter-terrorism operations and strategies within their borders and may collaborate with other governments already, including leading on countering violent extremism efforts. Sometimes, governments may be tempted to favor the “hard” measures over the “softer” approaches of countering violent extremism.
-  **Governments and civil society organizations bring unique skill sets and resources to preventing and countering violent extremism.**

Governments and civil society organizations have both strengths and weaknesses when it comes to countering violent extremism. These strengths often overlap but can also mitigate the weaknesses of the other sectors of society, making collaboration only more necessary and effective.

-  **Collaboration may not be occurring because of trust deficits or a lack of accurate knowledge or skills.** Therefore, efforts to build cooperation must determine why collaboration is not already occurring or is limited. Reducing those barriers can encourage more effective cooperation.
-  **When government actors collaborate with local communities and listen to their needs, damaged relationships can be repaired.** Top-down and securitized approaches to counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism are less likely to be locally rooted and might contribute to marginalizing communities.
-  **High levels of distrust reduces the number of tools and opportunities for countering violent extremism and may encourage governments to favor security-based approaches.** Without civil society, other institutions, or people

(particularly those vulnerable to the appeal of violent extremism) willing to cooperate with government-led programs, governments are left with fewer options that include involuntary participation and more securitized approaches.

-  **Some unhealthy government and civil society approaches risk exacerbating tensions or issues that drive violent extremism.** When the lines between counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism have been blurred or when communities perceive actions to be heavy-handed or discriminatory, marginalization and even radicalization can increase.
-  **Collaborating in the countering violent extremism space requires long-term commitments built on mutual respect and common understandings of the problem.** Just as countering violent extremism is a long-term process, collaboration to address the problem requires a long-term commitment as well. This collaboration is helped when both personal and institutional relationships of trust are built. Frequent communication and information sharing maintain common understandings and coordination.

## 4.6

## Further Learning Opportunities

- » *Ankara Memorandum on Good Practices for a Multi-Sectoral Approach to Countering Violent Extremism* (Global Counterterrorism Forum - GCTF) [[Russian](#)] [[English](#)]

The following publications provide an overview of responses to the problem of violent extremism by different agencies in the justice sector (police, courts, and prisons), highlighting human rights and good practices. These resources may be particularly helpful for government actors, but can also support civil society actors who seek to engage in these spaces. Read through a few of these publications and evaluate the following questions:

*While the justice sector is the responsibility of governments, where are the opportunities that you see for civil society to contribute to effective responses in this sector? Do these publications expose any gaps in your context? If so, how can government and civil society actors work together to close these gaps?*

Because the justice sector is a part of governance, sometimes it is difficult for civil society to have an influence on the way the police, courts, and prisons deal with violent extremists and violent extremism. Advocacy or engagement in this space can sometimes

present risks for civil society.

*What are some of the risks that civil society might face in your context when trying to engage in these spaces? How can civil society and government actors work together to reduce these risks?*

- » *Human Rights and Criminal Justice Responses to Terrorism* by Ulrich Garms and Conor McCarthy (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime - UNODC) [[Russian](#)] [[English](#)]
- » *Handbook on the Management of Violent Extremist Prisoners and the Prevention of Radicalization to Violence in Prisons* by Shane Bryans (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime - UNODC) [[Russian](#)] [[English](#)]
- » *Key Principles and Recommendations for the Management of Violent Extremist Prisoners and the Prevention of Radicalization to Violence in Prisons* (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime - UNODC) [[Russian](#)] [[English](#)]
- » *Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Community-Policing Approach* (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe - OSCE) [[Russian](#)] [[English](#)]
- » *Rome Memorandum on Good Practices for Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders* (Global Counterterrorism Forum - GCTF) [[Russian](#)] [[English](#)]
- » *Addendum to Rome Memorandum on Legal Frameworks for Rehabilitation and Reintegration* (Global Counterterrorism Forum - GCTF) [[English](#)]
- » *Recommendations on the Effective Use of Appropriate Alternative Measures for Terrorism-Related Offenses* (Global Counterterrorism Forum - GCTF) [[English](#)]
- » *The Rabat Memorandum on Good Practices for Effective Counterterrorism Practice in the Criminal Justice Sector* (Global Counterterrorism Forum - GCTF) [[Russian](#)] [[English](#)]
- » *Handbook on Criminal Justice Responses to Terrorism* (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime - UNODC) [[English](#)]
- » *Prison Management Recommendations to Counter and Address Prison Radicalization* (Global Counterterrorism Forum - GCTF) [[English](#)]
- » *Responses to Returnees: Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Their Families* by Marije Meines (Radicalisation Awareness Network - RAN) [[English](#)]

# 4.6

## SUGGESTED READINGS

The following publications are helpful guidelines for the collaborative development of national strategies and national action plans to countering violent extremism (see the Further Learning Opportunities section of Module 1 for examples of regional and national strategies and national action plans).

- » *Creating Inclusive National Strategies to Counter Violent Extremism* by Allison Peters (Inclusive Security) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Guidelines and Good Practices: Developing National Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Strategies and Action Plans* (Hedayah) [\[English\]](#)
- » *12 Principles for National Action Plans* (International Centre for Counter-terrorism - ICCT) [\[English\]](#)
- » *National Action Plans on Preventing Violent Extremism: A Gendered Content Analysis* by Rosalie Fransen et al. (The Women's Alliance for Security Leadership - WASL) [\[English\]](#)

Additional publications that focus on partnerships between civil society and community actors with the security services can be downloaded [here](#).

Another space that requires particular care and the collaboration of government and civil society actors is that of disengagement, deradicalization, rehabilitation, and reintegration. For publications that offer guidance on these issues, click [here](#) to download them.

# MODULE 5.0

Understanding Gender  
Dynamics to Radicalization,  
Violent Extremism and Engaging  
Women and Girls

This module explores the gender dynamics that affect radicalization and violent extremism. It introduces the topic of gender and offers insights on how to incorporate a gender-sensitive approach to countering violent extremism. It unpacks myths and stereotypes about women and girls' engagement in violent extremism and underscores the critical importance of gender-sensitive research. The module offers an analysis of the gendered ways men and women can be drawn into extremist narratives or even engaging in violent extremism themselves. Finally, this module offers good practices on engaging women and girls in countering violent extremism efforts.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 5.1 What is gender and how is it relevant to countering violent extremism?
- 5.2 What are the gendered ways that women and girls are drawn to violent extremism?
- 5.3 What are the gendered ways that men and boys are drawn to violent extremism?
- 5.4 How do we best engage and support women and girls in countering violent extremism?

## 5.1

# What is gender and how is it relevant to countering violent extremism?

In all societies, what are considered to be “appropriate” actions and behaviors are created and spread through our interactions within that society. Think back to when you were a child. What was your first day at school like? Were you scared? Were you unsure of what to expect? How did you figure those expectations out? Whether it is going to school, starting a new job, or traveling to a new country, we have all experienced this. Indeed, we have been experiencing this since our births when it comes to our gender. The World Health Organization’s definition of gender is below:

>> **“Gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men – such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed. While most people are born either male or female, they are taught appropriate norms and behaviors – including how they should interact with others of the same or opposite sex within households, communities and workplaces.”**<sup>102</sup>

Think of how babies might be dressed in different colors and those colors might be considered “male” or “female” colors. As boys

and girls grow up, they are given different toys to play with and are taught how to behave. In these ways, boys and girls are taught what it means to be “male” or “female.”

Gender is different than someone’s genetic sex. While our DNA determines our sex, gender is a *learned* part of our identity—somewhat similar to culture or religion.<sup>103</sup> This is why the socially acceptable or preferred behaviors of men and women can be different in different cultures or parts of the world, such as how:

- In some parts of the world, two male friends walking and holding hands is considered a normal way to show friendship. In other parts of the world, this may be considered to be not “manly.”
- In some parts of the world, men propose marriage, but in some parts of the world, women make the proposal (and in some cultures, the men are not allowed to refuse) and in others, marriages are arranged by other family members.
- In Russia, medicine is considered a “feminine” profession due to its association with

“caregiving” and most doctors in Russia have historically been women. In other parts of the world, however, women were historically not allowed to become doctors and even now most doctors in those places are still men.

None of these above examples of acceptable behaviors or the values we put on certain forms of labor are based on genetic sex differences, but on how different cultures confer power and status and form acceptable behaviors in various roles. They also demonstrate that men and women can experience privileges or discrimination in different contexts or how different cultures value different forms of labor. These are called gender norms.

>> **Gender norms are the roles, responsibilities, and standards of a particular society, culture and community that are socially acceptable for men and women, based on their actual or perceived sex.**

The key message here is that men and women and even boys and girls experience issues differently. In the field of countering violent extremism, understanding the importance of gender has allowed us to explore the ways

<sup>102</sup> “Gender,” World Health Organization, 2018, <http://www.who.int/gender-equity-rights/understanding/gender-definition/en/>. [English]

<sup>103</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2B3ea7IGwLA> for examples of gender differences across the world. [English]



## 5.1

that men and boys as well as women and girls experience violent extremism differently. This includes specifically studying how they are radicalized differently (or similarly), the unique reasons they may find appeal in particular violent extremist groups, as well as the roles they may have in these groups if they decide to join or support them.

The benefits of taking gender into consideration when researching violent extremism and designing and implementing countering violent extremism efforts include how it enables programs to:

- Be more effective, as we are able to design interventions that are specific to the unique ways that different people are drawn to violent extremism;
- Avoid ignoring the risks women and girls may have to the appeal of violent extremism; and
- Challenge the violent forms of masculinity and femininity that violent extremist groups promote and try to socialize their supporters and recruits into.

Countering violent extremism efforts can either be “gender-sensitive” or “gender-blind”:

- >> **Gender-blind:** *“Projects, organizations, staff, and activities that **do not** recognize or that deny the gender dimensions and implications of their work.”<sup>104</sup>*
- >> **Gender-sensitive:** *“A project, organization, or activity that is designed, implemented, or assessed by taking into account the different roles, needs, and interests of women and men.” It also means being careful to ensure that both men and women are involved in the solutions and that both men and women are benefitted by them.<sup>105</sup>*

It also means being careful to ensure that both men and women are involved in the solutions and that both men and women are benefitted by them.

A common misconception about gender sensitivity is that it simply means women, but gender sensitivity takes both men and women’s needs into consideration. Incorporating a gender perspective into our countering violent extremism efforts means that we think about

how gender issues and norms intersect with the problem of violent extremism, which is called gender analysis. The World Health Organization offers this definition:

- >> **Gender analysis** *identifies, assesses and informs actions to address inequality that come from: 1) different gender norms, roles and relations; 2) unequal power relations between and among groups of men and women, and 3) the interaction of contextual factors with gender such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, education or employment status.<sup>106</sup>*

Indeed, these ideals have been recommended in Security Council Resolutions 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security and 2242, which specifically encourages gender sensitivity and analysis in countering violent extremism efforts. It encourages the United Nations and Member States to

ensure the participation and leadership of women and women’s organizations in developing strategies to counter terrorism and violent extremism which can be conducive to terrorism, including

<sup>104</sup> Cordula Reimann, “Trainer Manual: Mainstreaming Gender into Peacebuilding Trainings” (Center for International Peace Operations, 2016), 60. Emphasis added.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>106</sup> “Glossary of Terms and Tools,” World Health Organization, 2018, <http://www.who.int/gender-equity-rights/knowledge/glossary/en/>. [English]

# 5.1

through countering incitement to commit terrorist acts, creating counter narratives and other appropriate interventions, and building their capacity to do so effectively, and further to address, including by the empowerment of women, youth, religious and cultural leaders, the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism and violent extremism which can be conducive to terrorism;<sup>107</sup>

Indeed, the following modules will focus on these issues. What does gender sensitivity and analysis look like on the programmatic level? The next sections will explore how gender is used by violent extremist groups to entice and recruit men and women, before evaluating how to support and engage women in countering violent extremism.

## 5.1.1 Gender-sensitive research

Gender-sensitivity is an approach to analysis. It means asking the right questions in order to properly understand the problem: specifically, how women, men, girls, and boys experience

violent extremism and how they might find appeal in it differently. Conducting gender-sensitive research can begin as easily as changing the question “*Why are people drawn to violent extremism?*” into “*Why are **men** drawn to violent extremism?*” and “*Why are **women** drawn to violent extremism?*” In this way, we remain conscious that men and women (as well as girls and boys) may have separate reasons for supporting or engaging in violent extremism.

A deeper analysis requires exploring the gender norms in your context and how violent groups manipulate these norms to encourage “real men” and “real women” into adopting their own norms or even create new, more violent gender norms that people may find appealing. As encouraged in Security Council Resolution 2242, we should also

conduct and gather gender-sensitive research and data collection on the drivers of radicalization for women, and the impacts of counter-terrorism strategies on women’s human rights and women’s organizations, in order to develop targeted and evidence-based

policy and programming responses.<sup>108</sup>

Therefore, the following two sections will explore the gendered drivers of radicalization for women and men, providing guidance on how to conduct a gendered analysis in your context. 🌐

<sup>107</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 2242, S/RES/2242 (October 13, 2015), [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2242\(2015\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2242(2015)), 6.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 7.

## 5.2

# What are the gendered ways that women and girls are drawn to violent extremism?

Too often, researchers and policymakers overlook women and girls' roles in supporting, perpetuating, and engaging in violent extremism. This results in gender-blind approaches that analyze their roles solely through the lens of traditional gender roles. This can be perpetuated when our analyses of the drivers and the nature of violent extremism in a particular context only engage the 'elites' of the target communities (such as local government officials, academics, religious leaders, and community leaders), often on the assumption that such elites understand these trends well. But since violent extremism often occurs along the margins of a society, we must delve deeper and include a broader range of society in order to fully understand a particular context. Women are only one such example of a part of society that is often excluded from these research efforts. When gender-sensitive research is conducted, it shows that women can be just as likely to hold extreme views and are usually supporting or engaging in violent extremism along with men.

Too often, women are assumed to only support

violent extremism when they are coerced or because of connections to male violent extremists. For example, when researchers spoke with intelligence and law enforcement officials in the Balkans and Central Asia, they were told that women who joined ISIL were "zombies" who followed or were being controlled by their male relatives or husbands.<sup>109</sup> The term "black widows" has frequently been used to refer to female Chechen fighters and suicide bombers, even though most of them are not actually widows of killed violent extremist husbands as the name implies. Indeed, there is an inconsistency and gender bias in the way women's involvement in violent extremism is framed: It is "assumed that men take part in violent radicalism due to a personal desire to change their societies, while women are not assumed to have this same agency."<sup>110</sup> While it is always important to remain sensitive to any constraints to a person's agency and the degrees of coercion that all actors may face, a gender-sensitive analysis cannot deny that women, men, and youth have their own motivations for finding



*Women can be just as likely to hold extreme views and are usually supporting or engaging in violent extremism along with men.*



<sup>109</sup> Anne Speckhard and Ardian Shajkocvi, "Beware the Women of ISIS: There Are Many, and They May Be More Dangerous Than the Men," August 21, 2017 <https://www.thedailybeast.com/beware-the-women-of-isis-there-are-many-and-they-may-be-more-dangerous-than-the-men>. [English],

<sup>110</sup> Chitra Nagarajan, "We Need to Dispel Some Myths about the Relationship between Women and Violent Extremist Movements," *Ventures Africa* (blog), accessed November 5, 2018, <http://venturesafrica.com/features/women-and-violent-extremist-movements-victims-and-agency/>. [English]

# 5.2

appeal in violent extremism and engaging in a variety of violent and non-violent roles.

For example, ISIL is particularly skillful at manipulating traditional gender roles to appeal to both men and women.<sup>111</sup> When ISIL had the goal of building an ‘ideal’ Islamic State, they promised potential supporters that life within their so-called “caliphate” would allow both men and women to build it. This recruitment campaign was initially successful, bringing in tens of thousands of men and women from across the world.

Looking at ISIL as a brief case study reveals that ISIL’s success with this unprecedented recruitment effort comes from a number of factors. First, unlike many other violent extremist groups, ISIL recognized that it needed women recruits and supporters and actively tried to recruit them. ISIL also recognized that it needed to appeal to women differently than men.

The first way that ISIL appealed to women was

by exploiting issues faced by women in countries across the world in their home countries and highlighting the plight of Syrians suffering from the war there. It framed women’s lives outside of the “caliphate” as being without freedom or safety. ISIL described their lives as shackled by not being able to live the “ideal” life as Muslim women observing ISIL’s interpretations of Islam, politically subjugated and oppressed, economically poor, and unsafe because of the threat of sexual violence—which ISIL recruiters claimed were all remedied in areas under their control.<sup>112</sup> Essentially, ISIL created and exploited push factors in areas outside their control.

The second way was to create an appeal to membership in and support of ISIL. As you may remember from Video 3 in Module 2, ISIL attracted women with promises of wealth, stable livelihoods, romance, and the chance to support ISIL’s “state-building” project as mothers, wives, teachers, nurses, recruiters, propagandists, and even militants. ISIL offered exciting and

empowering opportunities with women who sympathized with it. These “pull factors” were enticing to many women from Central Asian, many of whom saw ISIL as a chance to seize their autonomy and personal agency, particularly when their circumstances left them feeling trapped. For example, one of four Kyrgyz women who had been preparing to take their children to Syria without their husbands told a researcher that their husbands were “against religion, against Islam. My friends do not want to live with them anymore.”<sup>113</sup> They found Syria a better option than a secular life in Kyrgyzstan.

While women were largely forbidden from participating in combat roles, women were still recruited with the same violent messages. ISIL even reserved the right for women to be called upon to fight when it suited the group. For example, uncovered marriage certificates of recruits showed both the husband and wife declaring in the marriage conditions for the wife that if the leader of ISIL “consents to her

<sup>111</sup> For a thorough analysis of ISIL’s gendered recruitment strategies, see Dallin Van Leuven, Dyan Mazurana, and Rachel Gordon, “Analysing the Recruitment and Use of Foreign Men and Women in ISIL through a Gender Perspective,” in *Foreign Fighters under International Law and Beyond*, ed. Andrea de Guttery, Francesca Capone, and Christophe Paulussen (T.M.C. Asser Press/Springer Verlag, 2016), 97–120.

<sup>112</sup> See Charlie Winter, “Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade” (Quilliam Foundation, February 2015).

<sup>113</sup> International Crisis Group, “Syria Calling: Radicalisation in Central Asia,” Europe and Central Asia Briefing N°72 (Bishkek/Brussels, January 20, 2015), 8.  
[Russian] [English]

## 5.2

carrying out a suicide mission, then her husband should not prohibit her.”<sup>114</sup> Indeed, when ISIL became surrounded it appeared to remove its ban on women engaging in combat (at least on the local levels), with women fighters and suicide bombers being employed in Libya, Mosul, and Eastern Syria. Some of the violent extremist group’s communication channels have even openly called on women to fight.<sup>115</sup> These examples demonstrate the potential repercussions of failing to acknowledge and counter the radicalization of women.

*What are some of the gendered ways that violent extremist groups active in your context appeal to women and girls?* 🌐



<sup>114</sup> Asaad H. Almomhammad and Anne Speckhard, “The Operational Ranks and Roles of Female ISIS Operatives: From Assassins and Morality Police to Spies and Suicide Bombers” (The International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism, 2017), <http://www.icsve.org/research-reports/the-operational-ranks-and-roles-of-female-isis-operatives-from-assassins-and-morality-police-to-spies-and-suicide-bombers/>, 3. [English]

<sup>115</sup> See Rita Katz, “How do we know ISIS is losing? Now it’s asking women to fight,” Washington Post, November 2, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2017/11/02/how-do-we-know-isis-is-losing-now-its-asking-women-to-fight-for-it/?utm\\_term=.ba210b6daad8](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2017/11/02/how-do-we-know-isis-is-losing-now-its-asking-women-to-fight-for-it/?utm_term=.ba210b6daad8) and Tom Westcott, “Islamic State deploys female snipers in desperate bid to hold Libya’s Sirte,” Middle East Eye, 24 September 2016, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/libya-deploying-female-snipers-desperate-bid-to-hold-sirte-1924056392> and Dalia Ghanem-Yazbek, “Sisters in Arms,” Carnegie Middle East Center, October 2016, <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/64929>. [English]

## 5.3

## What are the gendered ways that men and boys are drawn to violent extremism?

Like women, ISIL appeals to men in highly gendered ways to try to attract recruits. Watch Video 6 on the next page, which analyzes the group's recruitment videos. As you watch it, look for the gendered ways that ISIL tries to appeal to men and boys using gendered motivations:



## 5.3



## VIDEO 6

ISIS videos are sickening. They're also really effective.



By: [Vox](#)

Original Link:

<https://youtu.be/18lf1kpBgRk>

Russian Subtitles:

[Advanced](#)

[Basic](#)

(recommended for use with YouTube)

Instructions on using these subtitles are available [here](#).

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. The expert in the video explains how the men and boys ISIL tries to appeal to may be lacking a sense of purpose, dignity, or respect. Think of your own environment. How might these issues affect how the men and boys see themselves as “manly”? How could this affect their vulnerability to violent extremism?
2. How does the video make the foreign recruits look like heroes? How might this be compelling to young men and boys in your context?
3. This video uses many clips from a number of videos which feature foreign fighters from all over. What are the gendered ways you see these clips try to appeal to men and boys in your context?

## 5.3

The gendered ways that ISIL appealed to men can be seen throughout the violent extremist group's propaganda. It promotes a violent form of masculinity that is characterized by dominance over other men and women. In fact, ISIL fighters in Syria and Iraq often called non-fighters in the territory they controlled as "commoners." In this way, the group appealed to Muslims living in Western countries under the idea that the "modern day slavery of employment, work hours, wages," leaves them subjugated to "a kāfir [infidel] master." They claimed that they do not "live the might and honor that every Muslim should live and experience" in Syria and Iraq.<sup>116</sup>

ISIL would also put its child recruits in front of other children to recruit more children. After the children's training, the "lion cubs (*ashbal*) of the caliphate" are paraded in front of other children and beaten in front of them by their adult commanders, being told not to flinch.<sup>117</sup> These

public demonstrations are meant to exemplify the 'manliness' of these new recruits and encourage other children to follow their lead.

Like many violent extremist groups, ISIL calls on men and boys to perform their gender roles as "protectors" of women and children. Using the violence of the Syrian conflict as their cause, ISIL claims that joining it would allow recruits to defend women and children as "guardians of the faith and protectors of the land."<sup>118</sup>

Finally, ISIL leveraged one final tool to attract male recruits: women. Not only did the group actively attempt to recruit local and foreign women to marry its fighters, but the group has also engaged in the particularly sinister practice of sexual slavery.<sup>119</sup> This has become an effective recruitment tool. As one researcher reports, "The women are used as a reward... By marrying [the women] off and encouraging children immediately, [ISIL] retains the men and makes

it less likely that they will go back to their home countries."<sup>120</sup>

*What are some of the gendered ways that violent extremist groups active in your context appeal to men and boys?* 🌐

<sup>116</sup> P. Martin, "Ten revealing quotes from ISIS," Blue Force Tracker, 2015.

<sup>117</sup> John Horgan and Mia Bloom, "This Is How the Islamic State Manufactures Child Militants," VICE News, July 8, 2016, <https://news.vice.com/article/this-is-how-the-islamic-state-manufactures-child-militants>. [English]

<sup>118</sup> Winter, "Women of the Islamic State," 41.

<sup>119</sup> See Amnesty International, "Escape from Hell: Torture and Sexual Slavery in Islamic State Captivity in Iraq" (London: Amnesty International, December 2014).

<sup>120</sup> Lee Ferran and Randy Kreider, "Why Young Western Women Would Join ISIS," ABC News, February 20, 2015, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/young-women-join-isis/story?id=29112401>. [English]



## 5.4

# How do we best engage and support women and girls in countering violent extremism?

As one woman explained, “Countering violent extremism programs are not in fact putting women on the frontlines of prevention and countering violent extremism. Women are already there.”<sup>121</sup>

While this statement is true, women’s leadership and participation in countering violent extremism has too often been limited to local efforts to build community resilience. But as discussed above, women’s full contribution to this field would require us to ensure that women are involved at all levels and at all stages of countering violent extremism programming and policy. This includes from the policymaking level to the grassroots level and roles among government institutions as well as civil society organizations. Women should be engaged and supporting in the design, implementation, and evaluation of countering violent extremism projects. Women should lead and participate in research to learn about the local dynamics regarding the radicalization of both men and women.<sup>122</sup>

However, gender norms across the world often work to limit women’s full engagement. These norms, of course, are different according to the different societies where women are trying to get involved. Watch Video 7 on the next page for a great example of the kinds of barriers that one young woman in Yemen has to overcome to become a respected local peacebuilder:



*Women should lead and participate in research to learn about the local dynamics regarding the radicalization of both men and women.*



<sup>121</sup> Sophie Giscard d’Estaing, “UN Calls for Women’s Engagement in Countering Violent Extremism: But at What Cost?” *50.50 Inclusive Democracy*, November 9, 2015, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/sophie-giscard-destaing/gender-and-terrorism-un-calls-for-women-s-engagement-in-countering-viol>. [English]

<sup>122</sup> For a series of videos explaining the value of including women in solving security issues (as well as other resources) go to <https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/training-resources/why-women/>.

## 5.4



## VIDEO 7

## Breaking the mold: Woman mediator challenges gender norms in Yemen



**By:** [Search for Common Ground](#)

**Original Link:**

<https://youtu.be/gdDv4BBj-1c>

**Downloadable Link:**

The video can be downloaded [here](#).

**Russian Subtitles:**

**Advanced**

*(recommended for use with downloaded versions)*

**Basic**

*(recommended for use with YouTube)*

*Instructions on using these subtitles are available [here](#).*

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. *What barriers did this woman have to overcome? Which of these barriers were specifically because of gender norms in her home country of Yemen?*
2. *Would this woman face similar barriers in your local context?*
3. *What are the specific barriers women in your local context might face when trying to get engaged in countering violent extremism or other security or community issues?*

Even young girls can be involved in this kind of work. In one example of engaging young women in the countering violent extremism space, Search for Common Ground identified and trained a small number of girls in Jos, Nigeria to be local peacebuilders. In that community, sectarian violence between Christians and Muslims was dividing the community and leading to horrific attacks. Watch the following Video 8 on the process of engaging these young girls:

## 5.4



## VIDEO 8

## Naija Girls: Ending violence in Northern Nigeria



**By:** [Search for Common Ground](#)

**Original Link:**

<https://youtu.be/-IOHG37pe3w>

**Downloadable Link:**

The video can be downloaded [here](#).

**Russian Subtitles:**

**Advanced**

*(recommended for use with downloaded versions)*

**Basic**

*(recommended for use with YouTube)*

*Instructions on using these subtitles are available [here](#).*

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What were the common perceptions that Christians and Muslims had about each other in this Nigerian city? How could they contribute to violence?
2. The video explained that these young girls are often overlooked in the conflict, even though (as you can see from the video) they are victims as well. Why might that be? How is this similar or different to your context?
3. What are the changes in the girls that happened because of this project?
4. How did the positive outcomes from the project impact the community, whether immediately after the project or in the future?
5. What might be some of the risks in engaging women and girls in countering violent extremism programming?

# 5.4

Indeed, there are a number of risks that we might face when trying to ensure women and girls' full participation in the field of countering violent extremism. A few examples would include the following:

- Women and girls may only be incorporated as participants in programs and activities, rather than as leaders.
- Women and girls may sometimes be relegated to only working on research and programming that just target women and girls or “women’s issues” rather than the full scope of countering violent extremism.
- Countering violent extremism policies may risk the securitization or instrumentalization of women and girls’ concerns (such as, “We need gender equality because it helps to counter violent extremism”) rather than because they are the right thing to do. This would be problematic because if the risk of violent extremism decreases, these efforts to promote gender equality can be cast aside.
- Women and girls may face unique security risks when they are expressing leadership in this field because their empowerment is seen particularly threatening to violent extremist

groups or traditional male leaders.

- If the parents of girls or the male relatives of women and girls are not also engaged in these processes, they may sometimes resist women and girls’ full participation due to a lack of understanding.

With these potential risks in mind, the following selection of good practices from the Global Counterterrorism Forum are helpful in ensuring the engagement of women and girls in all levels of the countering violent extremism field:

- Include women and girls and gender mainstreaming in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of all policies, laws, procedures, programs and practices related to countering violent extremism.
- Ensure that countering violent extremism efforts counter women and girls’ involvement in violent extremism, including by identifying gender dynamics in radicalization leading to terrorism and preventing it among women and girls.
- Recognize and promote the different roles of women and girls as critical stakeholders in countering violent extremism, including in developing more localized, inclusive, credible,



resonant, and effective approaches.

- Protect the human rights of women and girls, including their equality, non-discrimination, and equal participation, and ensure that countering violent extremism efforts do not stereotype or instrumentalize, women and girls.
- Involve men and boys in mainstreaming gender, advancing women and girls’ participation in countering violent extremism, and inclusive efforts to prevent and respond to violent extremism.
- Ensure the security of women and girls involved in countering violent extremism, including in civil society, taking into account when labeling their efforts as such might be dangerous or counterproductive.
- Prioritize engagement at the grassroots level with women in civil society and civil society working in the field of women’s rights, to build upon local practices and support local ownership.
- Increase the participation of women at all levels, especially those marginalized, and mainstream gender in the security bodies and other public authorities involved in countering violent extremism.<sup>123</sup> 🌐




<sup>123</sup> Global Counterterrorism Forum and the Secretariat of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, “Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism,” 2014.


# 5.5 Key Takeaways

This module introduced the concept of gender and how it is an important consideration when trying to understand the drivers of violent radicalization. It dispelled many stereotypes and assumptions about women's motivations and involvement with violent extremism. Using ISIL as a case study, this module explored how women and men have shared drivers as well as distinct radicalization dynamics. Finally, we evaluated how women and girls may face additional barriers to leading and contributing to countering violent extremism efforts. This module offered a number of good practices to overcome these barriers. Some of the most important takeaways from this module include:

-  **Gender is an important factor in understanding and countering violent extremism for both men and women.**  
Countering violent extremism efforts needs to target gender-specific drivers of violent extremism to be most effective.
-  **Women and men supporting and engaging in violent extremism are driven by a variety of gendered motivating factors.**  
Despite some assumptions and stereotypes,

women and men share similar potential drivers of radicalization with some important gender differences that highlight specific gender norms or language.

-  **Women and girls are taking diverse roles in violent extremist groups.**  
Women and girls are leaders, financiers, recruiters, spies, smugglers, and even fighters in violent extremist groups.
-  **Women and girls are required partners in countering the radicalization of both men and women.**  
Women should not be limited to just addressing the issue of women and violent extremism. As important members of society, women in all levels of society should be engaged in countering the radicalization of both men and women.
-  **Women are already working in the countering violent extremism field.**  
Since women are already engaged at various levels of society in countering violent extremism, support should be provided for those women and women-led organizations that have already developed expertise in this field.

-  **Women and girls need to be better incorporated at all levels of preventing and countering violent extremism.**  
This would be crucial at the policymaking level, but women also need to be better incorporated in the security services and in civil society organizations.

## 5.6

## Further Learning Opportunities

- » *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security* [[Russian](#)] [[English](#)]
  - » *United Nations Security Council Resolution 2242* [[Russian](#)] [[English](#)]
  - » *Women in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in Europe and Central Asia: A Training Manual* by Anne Speckhard and Ardian Shajkovci (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women) [[English](#)]
- The following reports provide insights as to the gendered drivers of radicalization for women. However, additional studies are included in the Further Learning Opportunities section for Module 2.
- » *Women and Radicalisation in Kyrgyzstan* (The International Crisis Group) [[English](#)]
  - » *Women and Violent Extremism in Europe and Central Asia: Executive Summary and Recommendations* (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women) [[English](#)]
  - » *Women and Violent Extremism in Europe and Central Asia: The Roles of Women in Supporting,*

- Joining, Intervening in, and Preventing Violent Extremism in Kyrgyzstan* by Anne Speckhard, Ardian Shajkovci, and Chinara Esengul (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women) [[English](#)]
- » *Women and Violent Extremism in Tajikistan* by Anna Matveeva and Bahrom Faizullaev (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women) [[English](#)]

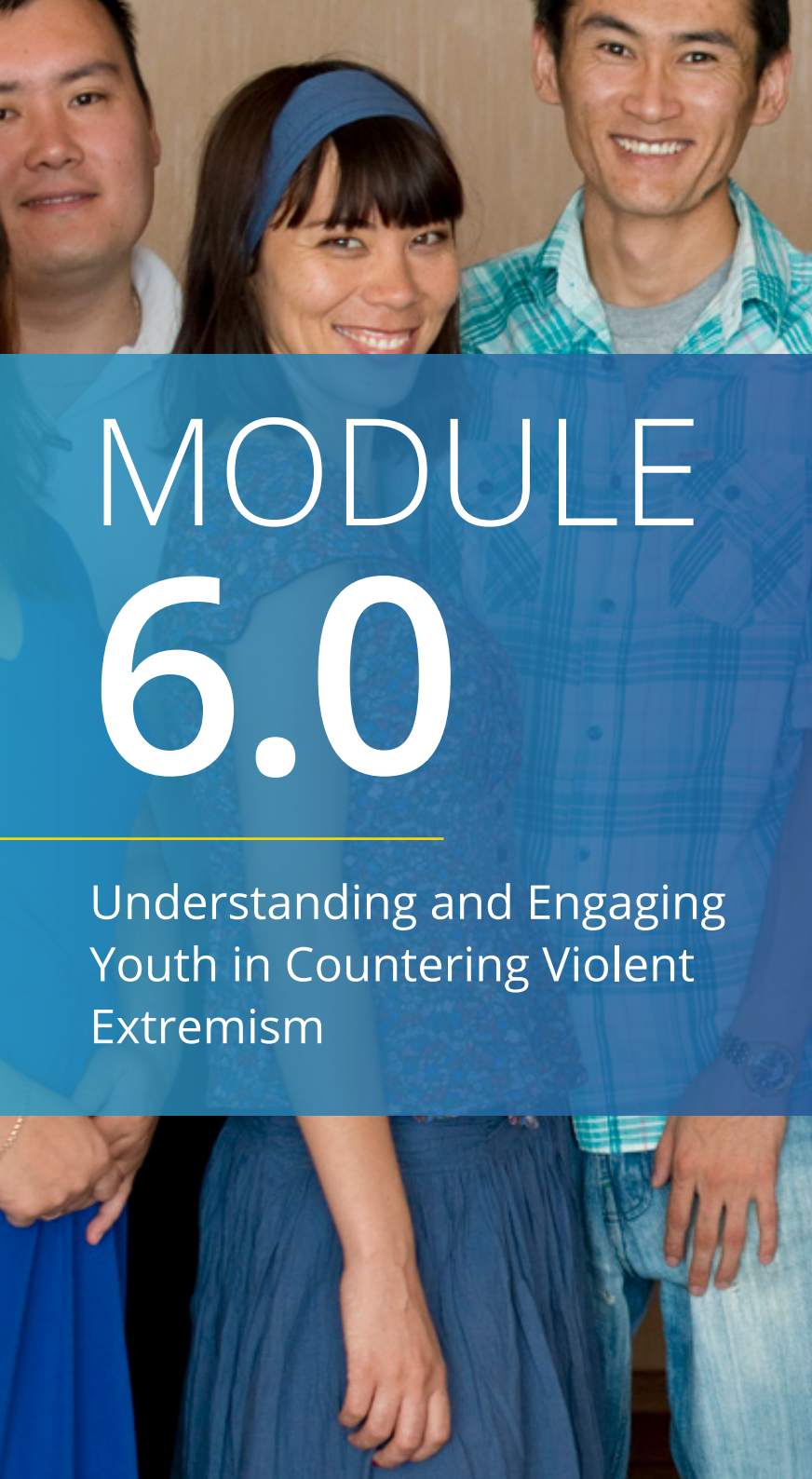
**SUGGESTED READINGS**

- » *Inclusive Security, Sustainable Peace: A Toolkit for Advocacy and Action* (International Alert) [[English](#)]
- » *Engaging and Recruiting Girls in Peacebuilding Programs* by Adriana Grau and Lakshitha Saji Prelis (Search for Common Ground) [[English](#)]
- » *Uncomfortable Truths, Unconventional Wisdoms: Women's Perspectives on Violent Extremism and Security Interventions* by Sanam Naraghi Anderlini et al. (The Women's Alliance for Security Leadership - WASL) Security Brief (2016) [[English](#)]
- » *A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism*

(Hedayah and Global Center on Cooperative Security) [[English](#)]

- » *Different Roles of Women in Countering Violent Extremism* (Hedayah and Global Center on Cooperative Security) [[English](#)]
- » *Women and Violent Extremism* by Becky Carter (Governance and Social Development Resource Centre - GSDRC) [[English](#)]
- » *Women and Countering Violent Extremism* by Iffat Idris with Ayat Abdelaziz (Governance and Social Development Resource Centre - GSDRC) [[English](#)]
- » *The Role of Gender in Violent Extremism* (Radicalisation Awareness Network - RAN) [[English](#)]

Additional resources on the gendered dimensions to radicalization as well as women and girls' roles in countering violent extremism (in English) can be downloaded [here](#).



# MODULE 6.0

## Understanding and Engaging Youth in Countering Violent Extremism

This module offers guidance for understanding young people's roles in society, drawing upon other initiatives which constructively engage young people in the context of countering violent extremism. It includes tools that highlight social, cultural and emotional dynamics that are key when seeking to understand the variety of relationships, networks and needs within the youth population in a particular context that can affect countering violent extremism policy and programming. It explores the ways in which youth engagement can be fostered at the policy, programmatic, and grassroots levels, including the leadership and ownership of programming. Finally, the module also explores the opportunities and risks within the relationships that young people establish with other stakeholders, such as the security sector and local authorities. It offers examples where youth have been able to build collaborative relationships with government stakeholders in countering violent extremism, including within the civil society and government sectors.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 6.1 Why is it important to engage and support youth in countering violent extremism?
- 6.2 How can we engage youth in countering violent extremism?
- 6.3 What are the different levels of participation that youth might have in countering violent extremism programming and how do they affect effectiveness?
- 6.4 What are some of the barriers that might hinder youth engagement in countering violent extremism?
- 6.5 What are the potential risks of engaging youth in countering violent extremism?

## 6.1

# Why is it important to engage and support youth in countering violent extremism?

*What does it mean to be engaged?*

*When was the last time you really felt engaged, when something captured your attention? What did it feel like to be engaged?*

In the previous module, we investigated the benefits of women's contributions in countering violent extremism and how to better engage women and girls in the field. This is also true in regards to youth, who make up the majority of the population in Central Asian countries! In this module, we will explore good practices on supporting and engaging youth in countering violent extremism and how building youth leadership and transforming youth into active players in countering violent extremism can result in more effective programming. This is called for in the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, which acknowledged that

We will not be successful unless we can harness the idealism, creativity and energy of young people and others who feel disenfranchised. Young people, who constitute the majority of the population

of an increasing number of countries today, must be viewed as an asset and must be empowered to make a constructive contribution to the political and economic development of their societies and nations. They represent an untapped resource. We must offer them a positive vision of their future together with a genuine chance to realize their aspirations and potential.<sup>124</sup>

Unfortunately, despite the fact that the vast majority of youth do not engage in violent extremism, youth are often more likely to be attracted to violent extremism than other age groups. Violent extremist groups have proven themselves to be very good at engaging young people and providing them with avenues that promise (often falsely) to help them achieve their goals and resolve their grievances, which only resonates more with youth when they have a sense of exclusion and marginalization.

This has sometimes led to what can be described as a "policy panic" that causes governments and civil society groups to see youth through

a security lens.<sup>125</sup> For example, they may see the demographic growth of youth populations (sometimes referred to as "youth bulges") as a source of heightened risk of violence and violent extremism as societies are not able to provide opportunities for them, rather than seeing the potential of youth and the importance of political, social, cultural and economic inclusion of young men and women.

This is made worse by problematic policy assumptions about how youth unemployment and a lack of education might lead to violence and violent extremism. For example, research has not shown a causal relationship between unemployment, lack of opportunities, and lack of education and involvement in violent extremism, although it is likely that they intersect with driving factors. In addition, societies may have policy panics about the crisis of migration (including forced migration) and the influx of youth into urban centers or of foreign youth into their countries, fearing that they will strain economies and services, compete for limited jobs, or even become potential security threats

<sup>124</sup> United Nations Secretary-General, "Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism," 3-4.

<sup>125</sup> See Graeme Simpson, "The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth and Peace and Security," United Nations General Assembly and Security Council, March 2018 (A/72/761-S/2018/86), 7.



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or violent extremists. As explained in the United Nations-sponsored Progress Study on Youth, Peace, and Security,

The “policy panic” fed by these myths and assumptions, which are not based on sound evidence, is further alienating young people and diminishing their trust in their Governments and the multilateral system. Instead of offering proactive prevention approaches to violent conflict, it risks cementing young people in these roles, giving them a sense that there are no alternative pathways available to them. In addition, policy panic has driven policy and programmatic approaches that view education and employment as stand-alone solutions to the problem of youth participation in violence or recruitment into violent extremism, despite the lack of supporting evidence.<sup>126</sup>

Despite these misperceptions, youth can also be (and often are) a source of potential for positive change and even active players in countering violent extremism, particularly when they are given opportunities and enabled to pursue the

right experiences or initiatives.

But how can we transform these perceptions and enable youth to fulfill their potential in this area? It begins by understanding youth as they are and not as we assume they are, which is not possible unless we are engaging with youth in relationships of trust or on an equal footing.

Youth bring an added value to countering violent extremism efforts through a number of ways. The first would be through the value of their unique perspective. Different generations offer different perspectives on community challenges and problems, and young people have a similar frame of reference to other young people. As such, young people may be able to offer a useful perspective or insight to a challenge facing youth, like violent extremism, because they are able to relate to the problems and experiences that other young people face.

The second added value would be through the unique solutions and ideas youth can offer. Today’s youth organize differently than previous generations, particularly thanks to the rise of new technologies and platforms for social exchanges. For example, youth in some areas

prefer to organize at the grassroots level around a particular cause, rather than as a more formal organization that may focus on a number of issues. Young people’s comfort with working with new technology and social media can improve program effectiveness.<sup>127</sup> Youth are also quite innovative and often come up with creative approaches to counter violent extremism that use tools like technology, art, sports, activism, and so forth.

The third added value is that young people engaged in countering violent extremism may have the ability to better reach vulnerable and/or already radicalized individuals, especially their peers. Youth that might be vulnerable to radicalization and already radicalized youth are often distrustful of government institutions or civil society organizations and may be unwilling to participate in activities that aim to strengthen their resilience. Therefore, young people’s special position in the community may be very helpful in reaching these youth, who are more likely to trust and engage with their peers. Young leaders can also be able to better establish trust with already radicalized youth and support their disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration

<sup>126</sup> Simpson, “The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth and Peace and Security,” 7.

<sup>127</sup> See Module 9 for examples of youth leveraging technology as a tool in countering violent extremism.

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processes.

These are just a few examples of the reasons why engaging youth in countering violent extremism efforts is important. This module will offer a number of good, real-world examples of how youth are engaged and making an impact in this field.

## 6.1.1 The development of the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda

The shift from seeing youth as victims or perpetrators of violent extremism to partners in countering violent extremism is fast becoming the new normal for the international community. Indeed, the need to effectively engage young men and women in building peace and countering violent extremism was formalized during the year of 2015. This section explores how this happened and how youth themselves played a number of very important roles at

the policy level throughout that year to make it a reality. For example, the 21-year-old Crown Prince Al Hussein Bin Abdullah II of Jordan led an open debate at the Security Council on the role of youth in countering violent extremism and promoting peace during Jordan's presidency of the United Nations Security Council in April of that year.

In August, the United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding, organized the Global Forum on Youth, Peace, and Security in Amman, Jordan.<sup>128</sup> This Forum brought together 11,000 young people from over 110 countries alongside key United Nations, donor, and intergovernmental organizational leaders. This youth forum adopted the **Amman Youth Declaration**, which specifically called for a global policy framework to recognize the positive contributions that young women and men make toward preventing violence and promoting peace.<sup>129</sup>

The following month of September featured the Global Youth Summit Against Violent Extremism, which was held on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly, brought in youth leaders in countering violent extremism from around the world together to showcase their projects and ideas and to highlight the importance of the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda.<sup>130</sup> Young people working to address drivers of violent extremism and facilitate the disengagement and deradicalization of radicalized youth from over 70 countries helped to develop the **Youth Action Agenda** to Prevent Violent Extremism and Promote Peace.<sup>131</sup> This gave young people an opportunity to articulate at the international policy level what violent extremism means to them, what they are doing to address it, and ways other stakeholders can engage them as partners.

These numerous events and key documents helped to transform perceptions about youth

<sup>128</sup> "Amman Youth Declaration Adopted at Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security," *Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth* (blog), August 24, 2015, <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2015/08/amman-youth-declaration-adopted-global-forum-youth-peace-security/>. [English] The Inter-Agency Working Group is co-chaired by the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, Search for Common Ground, and the United Network of Young Peacebuilders.

<sup>129</sup> The declaration is available from: <http://www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/pdf/AMMAN%20YOUTH%20DECLARATION.pdf> [English]

<sup>130</sup> See <https://www.counterextremism.com/global-youth-summit>, which includes a video featuring many of the projects. [English]

<sup>131</sup> Youth Action Agenda to Prevent Violent Extremism and Promote Peace <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/FINAL-Youth-Action-Agenda-1.pdf>. [English]

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and countering violent extremism and helped to form the basis of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace, and Security. The resolution was adopted in December and urged Member States to “consider ways to increase inclusive representation of youth in decision-making at all levels in local, national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflict, including institutions and mechanisms to counter violent extremism.”<sup>132</sup>

The Resolution was later reaffirmed in June 2018 with Security Council Resolution 2419 (2018), which called on “all relevant actors, to consider ways to increase the inclusive representation of youth for the prevention and resolution of conflict, including when negotiating and implementing peace agreements, to take into account, the meaningful participation and views of youth, recognizing that their marginalization is detrimental to building sustainable peace and countering violent extremism as and when

conducive to terrorism.”<sup>133</sup>

This recognition is also growing in the Central Asian region. That same month, the Government of Uzbekistan and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) organized an international conference in Tashkent and Samarkand on this subject. The conference brought hundreds of experts from the region and beyond as well as 50 youth from the Youth Union of Uzbekistan to discuss the issue of violent extremism. It resulted in the drafting of the “Samarkand Declaration on Increasing the Role of Youth in Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism.” The Declaration argued that an

effective response to the problems of violent extremism and terrorism should not be based on power methods only. Implementation of preventive mechanisms and proactive steps are much more effective measures to neutralize the growing challenges of violent extremism and terrorism.<sup>134</sup>

It also concluded that

Youth organizations should play an active role in the implementation of youth policy. It is necessary to create sustainable mechanisms for their involvement in the decision-making process and implementation of these decisions at all levels, including the international.<sup>135</sup> 🌐

<sup>132</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250, S/RES/2250 (December 9, 2015), [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250\(2015\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250(2015)), 3.

<sup>133</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 2419, S/RES/2419 (June 6, 2018), [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2419\(2018\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2419(2018)).

<sup>134</sup> Available from <https://www.un.int/uzbekistan/news/samarkand-declaration-increasing-role-youth-countering-violent-extremism-and-radicalization> [English]

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

## 6.2

## How can we engage youth in countering violent extremism?

Despite this growing consensus, youth engagement in countering violent extremism is still lacking in many areas.<sup>136</sup> This can be for a number of reasons. Sometimes, youth are seen by stakeholders as simply “beneficiaries” or “target groups” of governance or programming, but not as leaders or changemakers in their own right or as partners we can engage. Other stakeholders simply may not know how to reach out and maintain the engagement of youth. Or they may keep youth at low levels of engagement without offering opportunities of leadership or ownership. The following section explores how youth can be better engaged in countering violent extremism.

### 6.2.1 What are young people seeking, or what do they need?

Engaging youth must be based on

1. the recognition that most young people are not involved in violence or violent extremism and are already contributing to their societies in positive and constructive ways and

2. a robust understanding of their individual needs, to include the need of being considered credible partners.

From this foundation, it is possible to embrace youth as critical, trustworthy partners for constructive change, including in the field of countering violent extremism. Similarly, youth who find appeal in violent extremism are often seeking ways to meet their own individual needs that can range from employment to a strengthened sense of belonging. A key gap in engaging youth in countering violent extremism is that programming fails to meet their needs, focusing instead on the broader society’s needs for security. Therefore, practitioners who try to reach vulnerable youth need to have a solid understanding of youth’s needs and offer real opportunities to meet them. Vulnerable and radicalized youth may not be interested in participating in or leading countering violent extremism activities out of their own needs to secure their own futures, such as getting an education, starting a career, or building a family. In some cases, violent extremist groups may

seem to offer more appealing opportunities to meet youth’s needs compared to governments, civil society, and other groups. Therefore, it is key to ensure that countering violent extremism efforts are based on a thorough understanding of individual needs, contexts, and practical opportunities. In particular, youth-led initiatives can be particularly successful as youth leaders may be more credible than others to interact with vulnerable and already radicalized peers. At the same time, youth-led initiatives can also increase the sense of empowerment of the young leaders themselves, who may find respect and support for their efforts from the government and civil society groups.

### 6.2.2 Where can young people be included in countering violent extremism?

For youth to fully contribute to countering violent extremism requires them to be involved at the 1) policy level, 2) practitioner level and 3) the grassroots level. Youth should be empowered in all three areas, enabling them

<sup>136</sup> When using the terms youth or young people here, they refer to two distinct groups: 1) youth leaders and activists that should be empowered to lead countering violent extremism efforts at the grassroots, programmatic, and policy levels, given their added value, and 2) vulnerable and/or already radicalized youth. The two groups do not necessarily have a connection to each other or even have much in common besides their age. However, youth leaders might be best placed to interact with vulnerable or radicalized youth.

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to be able to be involved in and even lead the decision-making process, be engaged in countering violent extremism initiatives and research, and be fully supported on the projects and initiatives they lead in their communities and/or with their peers. Indeed, youth should even be included before the implementation of programming and with strategy development efforts, as they are critical players for understanding the nature and threat of violent extremism in a specific area. They are also critical players for the designing of activities to respond to each stage of the radicalization process, from simple vulnerability to engagement in violent extremism.

Resolution 2250 promotes five pillars through which young people can be engaged meaningfully to shape the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda: Participation, Protection, Prevention, Partnership, and Disengagement and Reintegration. Again, when we use the term “engaged” we are referring to the full spectrum of participation, from participation

to implementation to leadership. The following examples demonstrate how youth-led organizations have been leaders in countering violent extremism:

- In Tunisia, the youth advocacy organization **Youth Against Terrorism** works to build resilience to violence and violent extremism by improving relations between citizens and the police through programs and training. In addition, they have helped to revise educational curricula to better foster critical thinking and introduced Islamic principles that promote peace.<sup>137</sup>
- In Somalia, the youth-led organization, **Elman Center for Peace and Human Rights**, works in partnership with the Internal Security Ministry to comprehensively disengage, rehabilitate, and reintegrate imprisoned children and youth who were ex-combatants, violent extremists, or military defectors. Since it began, over 3500 youth have completed the program and registered as alumni.<sup>138</sup>
- In Cameroon, the youth-led **Local Youth**

**Corner Cameroon** organization runs the “Creative Skills for Peace” project, which seeks to prevent youth radicalization and recidivism by providing alternatives to violence to young violent offenders. Working in eight prisons, the project has helped provide educational and entrepreneurial opportunities to inmates.<sup>139</sup>

- For a video by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) with youth from Western Europe working in the countering violent extremism field and their experiences, go to [https://youtu.be/\\_sUD-LMvbYc](https://youtu.be/_sUD-LMvbYc). [English, with subtitles in Russian and many other languages]

## 6.2.3 What are specific roles that youth might have in countering violent extremism programming that can improve effectiveness?

In addition to the different spaces where youth can be engaged and take a leading role in countering violent extremism, the manners in

<sup>137</sup> YouthPower Learning, “Promising Practices in Engaging Youth in Peace and Security and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: Summary of Key Interventions and Examples” (Making Cents International, 2017), 5.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>139</sup> To see a brief explanation of the project, go to <https://youtu.be/Lu5TDJrtbtE>. [English]

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which youth are brought aboard as partners or leaders can greatly improve the outcomes of those activities. A few select roles and activities are discussed below.

## ***Transforming relationships that have been barriers to trust and collaboration***

Sometimes, supporting youth engaged in countering violent extremism or engaging them in new efforts will first require transforming relationships that may have previously created barriers to their involvement or even sources of distrust. This can include the need to facilitate collaborative relationships, built on trust, between youth and security institutions or government leaders. This can be through seizing opportunities for groups that distrust each other to work towards common goals, which can be an effective way to transform the relationships between them.

For example, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) established 17 youth centers in southern Kyrgyzstan following the violence in Osh, with the purpose of engaging youth from different ethnic groups to work in their communities and with local governments

on decision-making processes. Together the diverse youth and local leaders ran programs to promote tolerance, reconciliation, and conflict transformation. These centers became positive influences on the local communities and their leaders, parents, and teachers recognized these youth as sources of positive change. Other communities began to request centers to be established in their areas as well.<sup>140</sup>

## ***Mapping youth-led organizations and youth efforts***

Mapping what youth are already doing to build resilience to violent extremism is important to understand what skills and activities are already in place. This would likely lead to improved outcomes. This process is made even more effective when it is youth-led. The purpose of youth-led mapping exercises is to:

- identify youth leaders;
- understand how youth are already organizing to counter violent extremism (such as whether they are providing practical opportunities for vulnerable youth or creating alternative narratives);
- understand how youth-led groups (registered and unregistered) are structured;
- understand their methodology and how they are capturing community and individual needs;
- explore the ways youth influence their communities; and
- engage youth in the whole process.<sup>141</sup>

Developing and conducting a youth-led mapping exercise in your context can help you learn about what youth are already doing to build resilience to violent extremism and what youth-led organizations are active in your area. Consider the following benefits this can offer:

- Meet different youth leaders throughout the country;
- Explore the issues that most concern young women and young men, to include their individual needs;
- Hear about different types of initiatives important to these youth leaders;
- Engage young people both locally and as part of a community's decision-making structure, reinforcing the importance of their work (and

<sup>140</sup> Marla Zapach and Gulnara Ibraeva, "Final Evaluation - Kyrgyzstan" (United Nations Peacebuilding Fund - Immediate Response Facility (IRF), 2012).

<sup>141</sup> Lakshitha Saji Prelis et al., "Mapping Youth Leaders for Peacebuilding," Search for Common Ground, 2014, 9.

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- when possible, can lead to the creation of opportunities for youth-led efforts);
- Identify the diversity of youth perspectives and voices that make up the rich texture of the context (this is especially important when working in countries torn apart by conflict and protracted violence);
- Explore and understand how young women and young men leaders are guiding their peers; and
- Identify different methods of leadership and organizing capabilities.<sup>142</sup>

## Research

Another important avenue for engaging youth in countering violent extremism is through research. Youth-led research improves outcomes by allowing diverse groups of youth and other stakeholders to learn about each other and build upon their commonalities while reaching their research objectives. Research topics relevant to countering violent extremism may include (but are not limited to):

- Researching drivers of violent extremism in a particular context;

- Mapping youth-led organizations or other civil society groups that are working on countering violent extremism or related efforts (as discussed in the previous section);
- Researching the individual needs of vulnerable individuals in a specific area;
- Researching on the recruitment tactics of existing violent extremist groups (both online and offline);
- Researching on disengagement and deradicalization methods;
- Researching on how to foster the practical disengagement and full reintegration of radicalized individuals and to understand which resources, narratives, and practical opportunities can be used;
- Conducting risk and opportunity assessments on youth in particular areas to include their skills and capacities; and
- Identifying public perceptions on issues relevant to violent extremism and the level of tolerance towards ethnic, religious, and other minority groups.

These research topics do not have to be

limited to those involving youth. Youth-led research has additional benefits, such as building a foundation for youth leadership and advocacy, increasing access to communities and vulnerable populations where research by other stakeholders may be seen with more skepticism or distrust, improving community relationships with youth, shifting perceptions on youth from potential threats to credible partners and leaders, and greater flexibility in research application. As it is in the case of other research projects, youth-led research needs to comply with professional research standards and may need to receive technical advice. They also need to draw upon conflict sensitive and Do No Harm approaches.

Youth-led research for the purposes of countering violent extremism may embrace many different approaches, but the following two approaches are particularly recommended:

**Participatory Action Research**, which can be defined as “a process through which people investigate meaningful social topics, participate in research to understand the root causes of problems that directly impact, and then take action to influence policies through the

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

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dissemination of their findings to policy makers and stakeholders.”<sup>143</sup> This approach emphasizes focusing on immediate learning needs to shape and inform immediate solutions.

**The Listening and Learning approach**, developed by Search for Common Ground and based on the principles of participatory action research,

shifts the act of gathering information from a one-sided interview, where only [research] subjects share intimate and private information, to an exchange of experiences where the researchers themselves participate in the sharing of personal views, experiences, and emotions in a non-adversarial manner. By allowing vulnerability to be mutual, this two-sided participatory dialogue alters power dynamics and induces a more sincere and fruitful conversation.<sup>144</sup>

This approach builds greater trust with research participants and encourages the transformation of relationships and may be particularly helpful in contexts where distrust of researchers is high

or where they may be “research fatigue” when potential research participants may have already participated in multiple rounds of research without seeing programmatic responses to these previous research projects.

*What other research approaches might you recommend that can lead to effective research for the purposes of countering violent extremism?*

*How could these approaches improve youth engagement in the field of countering violent extremism?*

### **Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation**

Finally, including youth as partners and (as much as possible) as leaders in the design process is important to create programs and activities that will be more successful. In addition, youth should also be included in the monitoring and evaluation of designed programs and activities. Their observations on the effectiveness or the intended or unintended outcomes of programming may improve the quality of the overall process (see Module 10 for more information on monitoring and evaluation).

In the following section, we will explore how we can support the full inclusion and participation of youth in countering violent extremism. 🌐

<sup>143</sup> Cara Berg Powers and Erin Allaman, “How Participatory Action Research Can Promote Social Change and Help Youth Development,” *The Kinder & Braver World Project: Research Series*, Born This Way Foundation & the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University, December 17, 2012, 1.

<sup>144</sup> See Search’s 2017 Listening and Learning toolkit by Lakshitha Saji Prelis and H  l  ne Delomez at <https://www.sfcg.org/youth-led-research/>. [English]



## 6.3

## What are the different levels of participation youth might have in countering violent extremism programming and how do they affect effectiveness?

Youth participation is not simply a factor of whether youth are participating or not. In fact, youth participation may be so limited that it can be frustrating for youth, rather than empowering. As one young person from Central America complained, “We young people are only called up when it’s time to wave flags or put up posters. When we want to share proposals they don’t take us into account and when we voice criticism we are sidelined.”<sup>145</sup> Instead, we should consider youth participation, leadership, and ownership at any level (grassroots or even policy levels, for example) as being on a spectrum: from the **bottom**, where youths’ voices are used or co-opted by stakeholders or institutions to send their own messages, to the **top**, where young people lead projects with buy-in and support from other stakeholders.

In the *Measuring Positive Youth Development Toolkit* from YouthPower Learning and Making Cents International, the authors describe these various degrees as “steps” on a ladder. A summary of those steps are, from bottom to top:

**Youth are manipulated and not informed** — Stakeholders and institutions use youth’ voices or actions to send their own messages, possibly even altering the youth’s original intentions.

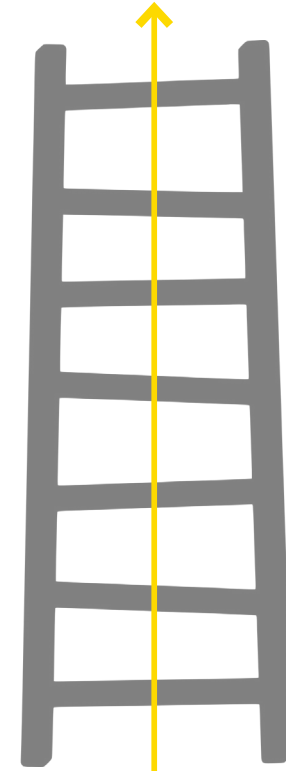
**Youth are “decoration”** — Youth are invited to attend events or participate in activities without understanding their purpose or being able to contribute to the central purpose.

**Youth are “tokens”** — In these cases, youth engagement is intended but poorly thought out. For example, youth may be invited to participate as observers or one or two youth may be invited to a committee. In the end, these young people may not be able to participate fully, and the intention may have only been to “appear” as if youth are participating.

*These first three are not considered forms of “participation” because of the way they exploit, rather than build, youth.* The other steps include:

**Youth are assigned but informed** — Young people are given roles or responsibilities and understand the purpose of the activities.

**Youth-initiated and shared decisions with other stakeholders**



**Youth are manipulated and not informed**

<sup>145</sup> Simpson, “The Missing Peace,” 12. For country reports on the discussions with youth, including in Kyrgyzstan, Palestine, Tunisia, and Yemen, go to <https://www.youth4peace.info/ProgressStudy/FocusGroupDiscussions>. [Russian] [English]

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**Youth are consulted and informed** — Youth provide input and perspectives that impact the design and implementation of activities, but other stakeholders still design and do the overall management.

**Stakeholder-initiated and shared decisions with youth** — Youth are involved from the beginning of the project and are able to influence the design and implementation of it.

**Youth-initiated and youth-directed** — Youth design and implement their own activities (whether or not they target other youth), but may seek input or support from outside stakeholders and institutions.

**Youth-initiated and shared decisions with other stakeholders** — Youth design and implement their own projects and include other stakeholders, with whom they share in the decision-making. Here, the inclusion of other stakeholders on an equal footing with youth empowers the youth even more than programs entirely initiated and directed by youth.<sup>146</sup>

*What do you think the top three principles are to youth participation, based on this section?*

*Would you add any additional levels of youth participation to this ladder? If so, what would they be?*

Let us look at some examples of youth engagement with different levels of participation. These examples are included in order to identify these levels and how they can increase or change over time with new or different activities.

In the first example, the Lebanese organization **MARCH**<sup>147</sup> used theatre to engage with young men and women from two neighborhoods in the city of Tripoli. These neighborhoods had been in violent conflict for years, with violent clashes taking place between Sunni and Alawite armed groups. Residents of both neighborhoods also traveled to Syria to fight for different sides of the conflict there, including with ISIL and al-Qaeda. However, MARCH was able to bring in many of these former fighters and transform their lives and the way they viewed those across the frontlines by using theatre. Watch the following short video, which introduces their work and

their first play. If you would like to gain a better perspective on the context in Tripoli, first watch the brief clip from a VICE News report in Video 9 below before watching Video 10 on the play.

<sup>146</sup> Adapted from Laura Hinson et al., “Measuring Positive Youth Development Toolkit: A Guide for Implementers of Youth Programs” (Washington, DC: YouthPower Learning, Making Cents International, 2016), 82-83.

<sup>147</sup> [www.marchlebanon.org](http://www.marchlebanon.org)

## 6.3



## VIDEO 9

### Lebanon's Illegal Arms Dealers



By: VICE News

1-minute clip:

<https://youtu.be/QGSCZM6yz3M>

Original Link:

<https://youtu.be/XxumsOQMxLE>

Downloadable Link:

The video clip can be downloaded [here](#).

Russian Subtitles:

**Advanced**

*(recommended for use with downloaded versions)*

**Basic**

*(recommended for use with YouTube)*

*Instructions on using these subtitles are available [here](#).*

## 6.3



## VIDEO 10

## "Love and War on the Rooftop" - The Documentary (Trailer)



By: [MARCH Lebanon](#)

Original Link:

<https://youtu.be/hZH1NyuB1o>

Downloadable Link:

The video clip can be downloaded [here](#).

Russian Subtitles:

**Advanced**

*(recommended for use with downloaded versions)*

**Basic**

*(recommended for use with YouTube)*

Instructions on using these subtitles are available [here](#).

MARCH's engagement with these youth did not stop after the play ended. For example, they learned that many of these young men and women were stateless because their births had not been registered, leaving them unable to work and without access to government services or education. This led MARCH to advocate for changes in the law and to partner with local organizations to create a café where the youth could be employed. This café was placed on Syria Street in Tripoli, the former frontline of the clashes, and was also intended to be a place where their transformed relationships could be spread to youth from both neighborhoods.<sup>148</sup> Watch the following Video 11 on the opening of the café and how it built upon the previous project:

<sup>148</sup> The café later moved down the street to a larger location that included social area, a multipurpose room, and even a recording studio: <https://youtu.be/OUR4eRqLs6c>.

## 6.3



## VIDEO 11

## The 'Qahwetna' Cultural Café (Trailer)



By: **MARCH Lebanon**

**Original Link:**

[https://youtu.be/jpD\\_-Xr1VeA](https://youtu.be/jpD_-Xr1VeA)

**Downloadable Link:**

The video clip can be downloaded [here](#).

**Russian Subtitles:**

**Advanced**

*(recommended for use with downloaded versions)*

**Basic**

*(recommended for use with YouTube)*

*Instructions on using these subtitles are available [here](#).*

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Refer back to the ladder of youth participation on page 101. What do you think was the level of participation of the youth in the play? Do you feel like this was enough? Why or why not?
2. How about later? What do you think was the level of participation of the youth when they were able to run the café and its activities to promote better relationships? How did their level of participation change?
3. What are the ways you can identify that this organization worked to expand the project's impact beyond those who were involved in the play or the café?
4. Reflect on the conflicts that led to the division and violence between these two neighborhoods. Why did this organization believe it was important to work in these ways? How does this compare with your context?

# 6.3

The example above demonstrates how the level of participation can be increased over time. It also demonstrates how barriers to youth participation can be identified and overcome in ways that empower youth. When we do this, we are able to not only change the lives of those youth who become engaged, but also change how their communities see them as well.

In the second example, the following video tells the story of Fatima Benoughazi in Morocco, a young woman who took her initial engagement on a youth leadership council far beyond the original project's goals, becoming a local leader in countering violent extremism. Fatima's first engagement happened during a time of personal depression when she was forced to leave medical school because of the danger from violent extremist groups in the area. Now, Fatima is a young leader in her community, fostering collaboration with youth and local leaders and building the resilience of youth to the appeal of violent extremism. For her efforts, Search for Common Ground awarded Fatima with a Common Ground Award in 2017. On receiving the award, Fatima expressed how this engagement had changed her life:

With this new mission, I have become a new and a different kind of healer. I provide preventative care and save lives, those lost not to a disease but to the futile violence of those too desperate, hateful, or fearful to find a productive purpose and to resolve differences through compromise. Obviously I am not a doctor, and I don't think I ever will be, but I repair and mend and build a society that is resistant to the poison of bigotry.<sup>149</sup>

Watch a video on Fatima's experience and approach on the next page:



<sup>149</sup> See Fatima's full speech at <https://youtu.be/auule1tUMuc>. [English]

## 6.3



## VIDEO 12

## Fatima takes a stand: A young Moroccan's journey to stop violent extremism



**By:** [Search for Common Ground](#)

**Original Link:**

<https://youtu.be/fVn7XhrlUeQ>

**Downloadable Link:**

The video can be downloaded [here](#).

**Russian Subtitles:**

**Advanced**

*(recommended for use with downloaded versions)*

**Basic**

*(recommended for use with YouTube)*

*Instructions on using these subtitles are available [here](#).*

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Refer back to the ladder of youth participation on page 101. What do you think was the level of participation at the beginning of her engagement? How did that engagement change over time?
2. What barriers to Fatima's engagement can you identify? Were they overcome? If so, how? Are there similar barriers in your context?
3. Who did Fatima work with? Try to list as many as possible. How do you imagine Fatima's interactions with them have affected the impact of her projects? What does this tell you about community resilience? 🌐

## 6.4

## What are some of the barriers that might hinder youth engagement in countering violent extremism?

Participation and leadership, unfortunately, are not simply a matter of creating an opportunity. The level of participation often depends on a number of factors that help create the conditions needed for meaningful engagement. By adapting the Positive Youth Development framework, we can set out and try to identify the barriers to youth engagement and leadership as well as measure the current levels and forms of youth engagement. This framework is different from other approaches to youth by rejecting stereotypes that underestimate the capabilities of youth and emphasize trying to correct what is “wrong” with them or their behavior. Instead, this framework emphasizes building the following four factors that contribute to healthy and meaningful youth development and engagement:

**Assets:** These include the personal assets youth possess (such as communication skills, education, self-control, critical thinking) but also the ability to establish trust with vulnerable and/or already radicalized peers. Assets also include the financial and physical resources they have that can facilitate their engagement with them. This may include things like technology, enough

free time, transportation, and so forth. This also intersects with the issue of disability. Disabled youth may also be further marginalized from participation in countering violent extremism and other relevant efforts. Therefore, it is important to be conscious of these factors and consider how to make the extra efforts needed to include and empower them.<sup>150</sup>

*What other factors might obscure the talents or potential of youth in ways that would reduce their participation or engagement in countering violent extremism programming? How could you find ways overcome these potential barriers?*

**Agency:** Do youth have (and perceive they have) the ability to leverage their assets and aspirations to seize control over their own lives and pursue their goals? When engaging with other stakeholders and institutions, are youth given the agency to shape the decision-making process to achieve their own goals?

**Contributions:** These include specific opportunities for engagement. It is helpful to divide these contributions into distinct activities. For example, do youth help design activities? Do they lead or contribute to research? Do they implement activities? Do they monitor and

evaluate activities?

**Enabling Environment:** As defined in one toolkit,

An enabling environment encourages and recognizes youth, while promoting their social and emotional competence to thrive. The term ‘environment’ should be interpreted broadly and includes: social (e.g., relationships with peers and other stakeholders), normative (e.g., attitudes, norms and beliefs), structural (e.g., laws, policies, programs services, and systems) and physical (e.g., safe, supportive spaces).<sup>151</sup>

Asking the following questions may be helpful in understanding this factor: Do youth have safe spaces where they can share their thoughts and frustrations? Do government or security institutions look at youth mobilization with distrust? Do national laws enable for youth to create formal youth-led organizations? Do communities or leaders see youth as potential partners for change?

A thoughtful reflection on these factors can help us identify potential barriers to youth participation in our context.

<sup>150</sup> For more detailed suggestions regarding including disabled youth, see Prelis et al., “Mapping Youth Leaders for Peacebuilding.”

<sup>151</sup> Hinson et al., “Measuring Positive Youth Development Toolkit,” 22. This framework is adapted from this toolkit.



# 6.4

Let us go back to Lebanon for another example from the great work of MARCH with youth in Tripoli. Watch the following video about how the organization has evaluated many of these factors through their engagement with the youth there and has been working to increase the assets, agency, contributions, and the enabling environment for these youth—many of whom (including most of the men) were former fighters. This project adopts a holistic approach and has reached over 200 at-risk young men and women from the two neighborhoods that were involved in the clashes so far. The young men are taught basic construction skills and the women learn graphic design. Together, they are paid to rehabilitate the shops that were damaged by gunfire and explosions on the old frontline streets. They are also required to participate in all side activities that take place at the café, including daily team-building lunches, stress management and life skills classes, sports activities, and language classes. These opportunities help them to build relationships in order to resolve the conflicts between them, build their personal skills, and bring them closer together.



## 6.4



## VIDEO 13

## Meet the People of Beb al-Dahab (Golden Door)



By: [MARCH Lebanon](#)

Original Link:

[https://youtu.be/4\\_xHIJ5DkT0](https://youtu.be/4_xHIJ5DkT0)

Downloadable Link:

The video can be downloaded [here](#).

Russian Subtitles:

**Advanced**

*(recommended for use with downloaded versions)*

**Basic**

*(recommended for use with YouTube)*

Instructions on using these subtitles are available [here](#).

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Refer back to the Positive Youth Development framework above. What are some of the limitations or barriers these youth had in terms of assets, agency, contributions, and the enabling environment?
2. What were the ways this project worked to address these limitations or barriers? How would this build their resilience to violent extremism?

## 6.5

## What are the potential risks of engaging youth in countering violent extremism?

However, engaging youth can also present additional risks or elements to consider. These may come from limited understandings. For example, government actors (such as in the security forces or local authorities) or civil society may not have the necessary tools or flexibility to understand young dynamics in their area. They may even embrace stereotypes of youth as troublemakers. Or when they engage youth, they may not give youth an equal say or equal representation at the discussion table. Other stakeholders may simply speak for the youth, instead of allowing the youth to speak for themselves.

On the other hand, youth may not be properly prepared for engagement, such as not being trained on the formal and the bureaucratic aspects of the public actions or the roles of those they will be engaging with. Youth may even fear that participation may cause them to be (or simply perceived to be) co-opted to a government or civil society agenda that may be adversarial to what the youth want to achieve.



Finally, the risks are that spoilers within both groups may be tempted to use the information gathered in that relationship in ways that may end up harming the other (such as passing

on information to violent extremist groups or making arrests based on confidential information offered by the youth and thus putting the concerned youth at risk). Perhaps the most common risk of this sort is that engagement and information sharing leads to justify more coercive activities rather than more collaborative approaches. Care must be taken to ensure that these risks do not result in harm. 🌐






# 6.6 Key Takeaways



This module explored prominent international documents that explain the benefits of investing in and engaging youth as participants, partners, and leaders throughout a project or program cycle focused on countering violent extremism. The module introduced a number of tools to evaluate youth participation in a particular context and promoted the use of youth-led mapping exercises and youth-led research. Some of the most important takeaways from this module include:

-  **Countering violent extremism efforts will not be as effective if they do not meet the needs of young men and women.**  
Violent extremism already appeals to some young men and women because it may appear to meet individual needs. Therefore, countering violent extremism efforts will not be effective if they do not address the same needs. Young people are particularly targeted by violent extremist groups that try to answer their needs. Youth leaders might be best placed to understand their peers' needs.
-  **Youth and youth leaders need to be given respect, dignity and agency in order for them to be partners and leaders in countering violent extremism.**  
Some of the critical factors needed to enable the

full participation and even leadership of youth in countering violent extremism is to treat them equally and give them respect, dignity and agency.

-  **Youth must be actively engaged in all levels of countering violent extremism as critical, trusted partners and leaders.**  
Enabling youth to be leaders in countering violent extremism at the grassroots, programmatic, and policy levels can increase the effectiveness and success of programs and policies. Youth bring unique perspectives that can also uncover the nature and drivers of violent extremism in a particular area.
-  **Youth are already working in the countering violent extremism field, and their efforts should be mapped and successful efforts should be supported.**  
Since youth are already engaged in countering violent extremism – from prevention to disengagement and deradicalization, practitioners need to map out these activities in full collaboration with youth themselves in order to build upon successes.
-  **Youth often organize and operate differently, which may create challenges to collaboration as well as opportunities to make programming more effective.**  
Youth and youth-led organizations might

operate differently to traditional or institutionally-led efforts and have unique strengths and challenges. However, these unique styles of organization can bring innovation to countering violent extremism programming, including being better able to reach vulnerable and even radicalized youth.

-  **The level of youth participation increases as youth are able to have a greater say in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of programs.**  
The degree of participation is at its highest when youth initiate programs and other stakeholders are engaged as partners, allowing youth to lead. Youth-led initiatives should be taken as the benchmark.
-  **Barriers may need to be removed and youth may need to be provided with additional resources in order for them to be able to engage in activities or lead programs.**  
There are a number of local factors that can promote or even create barriers to the engagement of youth in countering violent extremism, such as the assets youth have available, their agency to make decisions, the specific opportunities available for them, and whether their environment enables their participation and leadership.

## 6.7

## Further Learning Opportunities

- » *United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security* [[Russian](#)] [[English](#)]
- » *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth and Peace and Security* by Graeme Simpson (United Nations General Assembly and Security Council) [[Russian](#)] [[English](#)]
- » *Youth Strategy 2014-2017: Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future* (United Nations Development Programme - UNDP) [[Russian](#)] [[English](#)]

In the Executive Summary, it reads that “When young men and women understand their rights, they can become empowered to engage in civil society, public service and political processes, at all levels.” But as we have learned from this module, youth participation is more than just raising awareness; youth experience actual barriers that prevent or discourage them from participating fully on an equal standing with other stakeholders. What are the barriers identified in the strategy? What others can you identify in your context?

- » *Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle* by Anna Lührmann (United Nations Development Programme - UNDP) [[Russian](#)] [[English](#)]

Read the good practices for engaging youth in political participation. How can these good practices be applied to countering violent extremism programming and the broader Youth, Peace, and Security agenda? Look through the examples of initiatives in the Annex, perhaps starting with one from your region, and analyze them for how strongly they brought in youth as leaders. Were youth beneficiaries, partners, or leaders in these projects?

Please see this document for a host of resources, including international conventions, websites, and even youth-led organization mapping!

#### SUGGESTED READINGS

- » *Guide to the Development of Local Level Youth Action Plans* (United Nations Development Programme - UNDP) [[Russian](#)] [[Kyrgyz](#)]
- » *Youth in Central Asia – Kazakhstan* by Tolganay Umbetaliyeva, Botagoz Rakisheva, Peer Teschendorf (Friedrich Ebert Foundation - FES) [[Russian](#)] [[English](#)]
- » *Youth in Central Asia - Kyrgyzstan* (Friedrich Ebert Foundation - FES) [[Russian](#)]
- » *Youth in Central Asia - Tajikistan* (Friedrich Ebert

Foundation - FES) [[Russian](#)]

- » *Youth in Central Asia - Uzbekistan* (Friedrich Ebert Foundation - FES) [[Russian](#)]
- » *Youth-Led Research: Guidance Note Supporting the Design and Implementation of Youth-Led Research Projects* by Caitlin Kelly et al. (Search for Common Ground) [[English](#)]
- » *Youth-Led Research: Toolkit Listening and Learning Toolkit* by Lakshitha Saji Prelis and Hélène Delomez (Search for Common Ground) [[English](#)]
- » *Youth-Led Research: Two-Pager* (Search for Common Ground) [[English](#)]
- » *Draft Conclusions on the Role of the Youth Sector in an Integrated and Cross-Sectoral Approach to Preventing and Combating Violent Radicalisation of Young People* (Council of the European Union) [[English](#)]
- » *Countering Violent Extremism: A Guide for Young People by Young People* (Kofi Annan Foundation) [[English](#)]
- » *Youth Action Agenda to Prevent Violent Extremism and Promote Peace* (Global Youth Summit against Violent Extremism) [[English](#)]

## 6.7

- » *Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding: A Practice Note* by James Rogan et al. (United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development - IANYD) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding* (United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development - IANYD) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Guidance for International Youth Engagement in Prevent Violent Extremism and Countering Violent Extremism: Youth Responses to Resolution 2250 and the United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism* by Erin Marie Saltman and Jas Kirt (Institute for Strategic Dialogue - ISD) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Promising Practices in Engaging Youth in Peace and Security and Preventing or Countering Violent Extremism: Summary of Key Interventions and Examples* (Making Cents International) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Role of Youth in Peace Building via New Media: A Study on Use of New Media* by Youth for Peace Building Tasks by Sumit Narula [\[English\]](#)
- » *Mapping Youth Leaders for Peacebuilding* by Lakshitha Saji Prelis et al. (Search for Common Ground) [\[English\]](#)
- » *The Role of Youth in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: Holistic Approaches from Education to De-Radicalization* (Turkic Council) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Empowering Youth to Build Peace* (UNESCO) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Security Council Resolution 2250: Annotated and Explained* (UNOY Peacebuilders) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Mapping a Sector: Bridging the Evidence Gap on Youth-Driven Peacebuilding* by Rashmi Thapa (UNOY Peacebuilders and Search for Common Ground) [\[English\]](#)

# MODULE 7.0

## Education's Role in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

This module offers insights into how educational initiatives or reforms hold the potential to tackle the drivers of violent extremism and thus contribute to preventing violent extremism by building more resilient students. Participants are guided through a discussion around potential blockers or enablers within the education system – ranging from the content of the curriculum to the way in which drivers of violent extremism are managed within the school environment.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 7.1 What is the role of education in building resilience to violent extremism?
- 7.2 What are the factors in an educational environment that can influence individual or community resilience to violent extremism for better or for worse?
- 7.3 What are the educational countering violent extremism initiatives that are being implemented in formal and informal education spaces?
- 7.4 How can we manage drivers of violent extremism in school environments and develop appropriate educational initiatives to address them?
- 7.5 What are some risks of implementing countering violent extremism projects or policies in formal and informal educational spaces?

## 7.1

# Why is it important to engage and support youth in countering violent extremism?

Education is frequently cited as one of the most important tools for the prevention of violent extremism. Both the 2014 Abu Dhabi Memorandum for Good Practices on Education and Countering Violent Extremism and the 2016 Secretary-General's Plan of Action spell out a number of broad objectives and approaches to build community resilience and the resilience of learners to violent extremism in the context of education. Here, we use the term learners instead of students to highlight that learning takes place both inside and outside the classroom. Largely, these learning goals also align with Sustainable Development Goal 4.7:

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and

of culture's contribution to sustainable development.<sup>152</sup>

Schools are one of the most important places outside of the home where children, youth, and even adults acquire the skills, values, and connections they need in their personal and social lives, including "how to view and interact with other members of their society, contend with how their society treats them, and interrelate with peers."<sup>153</sup> For the millions of children and youth that are unable to get an education, this lack of opportunity can create marginalization that, if they intersect with drivers of violent extremism, can lead to radicalization. However, as we will learn in this module, schools and other educational spaces, both formal and informal, may also fail to prepare youth to meet challenges in life and in society in ways that may make some students more vulnerable to the appeal of violent extremism.

The idea of countering violent extremism approaches in the education space is built on the

idea that education should equip young people with the skills they need to "detect extremist propaganda, make informed decisions, and question the legitimacy of extremist content" and make learners more resilient to violent extremism.<sup>154</sup> But we must be realistic about what these efforts can achieve. As explained in UNESCO's *Preventing Violent Extremism through Education: A Guide for Policy-makers*,

Education cannot prevent an individual from committing a violent act in the name of a violent extremist ideology but the provision of relevant education of good quality can help create the conditions that make it difficult for violent extremist ideologies and acts to proliferate. More specifically, education policies can ensure that places of learning do not become a breeding ground for violent extremism. They can also ensure that educational contents and teaching/learning approaches develop learners'

<sup>152</sup> See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/47th-session/documents/2016-2-SDGs-Rev1-r.pdf> [Russian] <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/47th-session/documents/2016-2-SDGs-Rev1-e.pdf> [English]

<sup>153</sup> "Preventing Violent Extremism through Education: A Guide for Policy-Makers" (Paris, France: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2017), 36.

<sup>154</sup> Extremely Together, "Countering Violent Extremism," 15.



# 7.1

resilience to violent extremism. The role of education is, therefore, not to intercept violent extremists or identify individuals who may potentially become violent extremists, but to create the conditions that build the defenses, within learners, against violent extremism and strengthen their commitment to non-violence and peace.<sup>155</sup>

In this module, we will explore a variety of approaches to achieving these objectives in learners of all ages, with a focus on youth. 🌐



<sup>155</sup> UNESCO, 22.

## 7.2

## What are the factors in an educational environment that can influence individual or community resilience to violent extremism for better or for worse?

*Are those who have lower education levels more or less likely to be drawn to violent extremism? Why?*

While low literacy, a lack of education, and religious education have often been cited as drivers of radicalization, research on these factors have not supported these assumptions.<sup>156</sup> In particular, while there might be a correlation between lack of education and radicalization, it is not possible to trace a *causal* link. Indeed, some research has noted that the opposite may be true, including one study of 4,000 extremists which found higher rates of education among extremists than the general population.<sup>157</sup> Some have even suggested that pursuing degrees in certain scientific or technical disciplines, like engineering, may make learners more vulnerable to the appeal of violent extremism than those who pursue other degrees. These correlations in either direction, however, are not conclusive.<sup>158</sup>

Where education may increase vulnerability to violent extremism, to name a few examples, is

where

- the design of curricula or textbooks are not inclusive of approaches that promote tolerance and acceptance,
- student government is politicized and becomes a source of conflict,
- minorities are marginalized (such as not having access to education in their native language),
- religious expression or the expression of religious ideas is prohibited in ways that marginalize certain students,
- rote learning styles are more prominent than dynamic learning styles that foster critical thinking, or
- educational or nearby spaces become targeted by violent extremists as spaces for recruitment or radicalization.

Another potential source of grievance that may increase vulnerability to violent extremism is

when education creates unfulfilled expectations or a mismatch of skills compared to the kinds of economic opportunities available, or where there is a lack of opportunities to employ what was learned in a career. For example, a study of Middle Eastern and North African youth found evidence that those with secondary educations who are unemployed or underemployed have the highest risk of becoming radicalized.<sup>159</sup>

In another example, one United States Institute of Peace study in Kyrgyzstan observed that religious-based educational institutions were increasing because of a lack of government-funded programs that offered similar educational or social services to youth, including those whose parents are migrant laborers in Russia. One expert argued that these schools' focus on religious education over traditional education leave students unprepared for employment in Kyrgyzstan's economy, leading to increased vulnerability to violent extremism.<sup>160</sup>

<sup>156</sup> See Harriet Allan et al., "Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review" (London: Royal United Services Institute, October 16, 2015), 5, 7.

<sup>157</sup> Berger, "Making CVE Work," 6.

<sup>158</sup> See, for example, Diego Gambetta and Steffen Hertog, "Uncivil Engineers: The Surprising Link Between Education and Jihad," *Foreign Affairs*, March 10, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-03-10/uncivil-engineers>. [English]

<sup>159</sup> Kartika Bhatia and Hafez Ghanem, "How Do Education and Unemployment Affect Support for Violent Extremism? Evidence from Eight Arab Countries," Global Economy and Development Working Paper 102 (The Brookings Institution, March 2017).

<sup>160</sup> Jacob Zenn and Kathleen Kuehnast, "Preventing Violent Extremism in Kyrgyzstan" (United States Institute of Peace, 2014), 8

## 7.2

At issue here is more of a lack of job opportunities in ways that create grievances against governments or some other segment of society, rather than a failure in the quality of education itself. These examples further show how it is less a question of whether someone is educated enough, and more of a question of the quality of education and on whether someone is given the right practical, professional, and cognitive tools through education or opportunities outside of formal or informal educational spaces to deal with the issues they face. This also includes digital and information literacy, emotional learning, and individual coping strategies which might be crucial when facing challenges or failures in life. Indeed, this is the main approach of preventing and countering violent extremism through education: giving students the tools and approaches to build and maintain resilience against the appeal of violent extremism.

Importantly, many of these things are learned outside the classroom. Indeed, combining education with meaningful experiences makes

students more resilient. For example, a recent study on education and civic engagement programming with Somali youth found that “when education is combined with student-led community action projects, it can promote stability more than just education by itself.”<sup>161</sup> Building off of their baseline research where youth in schools were actually *more* likely to express support for the use of violence and other research that found that “youth who were more civically engaged were more likely to have participated in political violence,” the evaluation of the project found that this combination was key. It found that “a combination of formal education and civic engagement activities that focus on community action projects appear to be effective pathways to support stability-related outcomes. Importantly, these interventions were found to reduce young people’s vulnerability to being drawn into violent groups.”<sup>162</sup>

*Are there any particular vulnerabilities to violent extremism in educational spaces in your context? If so, what are they?* 🌐

*At issue here is more of a lack of job opportunities in ways that create grievances against governments or some other segment of society, rather than a failure in the quality of education itself.*

<sup>161</sup> Beza Tesfaye, “Critical Choices: Assessing the Effects of Education and Civic Engagement on Somali Youths’ Propensity towards Violence,” in *Contemporary P/CVE Research and Practice*, ed. Lilah El Sayed and Jamal Barnes (Hedayah and Edith Cowan University, 2017), 148-9.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 138, 148-9.

## 7.3

## What are the educational countering violent extremism initiatives that are being implemented in formal and informal education spaces?

Educational efforts for preventing and countering violent extremism can be divided into two main categories:

- **Education for countering violent extremism**, which are efforts “in which formal or informal education could be utilized as a tool to limit the push and pull factors leading to radicalization and recruitment,” and/or increasing learners’ resilience against violent extremism; and
- **Education about countering violent extremism**, which are efforts to educate the public on the risks of radicalization and violent extremism.<sup>163</sup>

While this handbook is an example of the second category, this particular module will focus on efforts in the first category. Education for countering violent extremism efforts can further be divided into the following categories, which may overlap in some activities or programs:

1. Often referenced in discussions about preventing and countering violent extremism through education is the idea of “education for all.” This refers to providing access to quality education to all as a means of reducing

the “root causes” of violent extremism. This includes curriculum design, improving teacher capacities, expanding girl’s access to education, integrating segregated communities in the schooling system (both students and teachers), providing safe school environments, and so forth. However, since their links to violent extremism are not supported by the evidence (as previously discussed), these issues should be addressed as fundamental human development goals rather than as potential national security threats. Therefore, this category of action will not be considered here as countering violent extremism programming and will not be discussed further in this module—while recognizing the purpose and goals behind the reasons why it is referenced so frequently. Indeed, these may be important components to ensuring the success of countering violent extremism through education programs, but should not be considered as part of this field of practice when implemented alone.

2. Curriculum reform at the central and local levels (such as removing intolerant content, as recommended in the Secretary-General’s

Plan of Action), including the introduction of specific curricula that address more targeted driving factors to build resilience. Examples of curricula are provided below. Like the related “education for peace” efforts, which is built on the recognition that education and the way education systems are set up have an impact on peace and conflict dynamics, these efforts focus on changing how education systems and curricula may influence the context and shape relationships between students and their teachers, schools, governments, and different identity groups. Curriculum reform is also about building resilience to violent extremism at the individual level, by empowering learners and reducing vulnerabilities they may have by offering skills and values such as a sense of identity and belonging, self-esteem, empathy, tolerance, and so forth. Ultimately, it focuses on ensuring that the topics and modules included at the national and local levels foster individual and community resilience to violent extremism.

3. Education reforms, including methodology reforms, which target changes to the way

<sup>163</sup> Sara Zeiger, “Education and Countering Violent Extremism,” CVE Research Brief 2 (Hedayah, December 2014), 2.

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education is delivered (pedagogies). This would include reforms such as providing hands-on learning experiences, encouraging dynamic and interactive learning styles to replace rote learning, and fostering safe spaces to discuss issues like respect and tolerance. Methodology reforms go beyond how education is delivered and are also often designed to increase critical thinking, digital and information literacy, critical thinking, a culture of dialogue, and respect for other perspectives, as well as social and emotional learning.

4. Raising the awareness of teachers and school staff of radicalization and violent extremism within educational spaces and by giving them tools to respond to sensitive issues, trauma, check their own biases in relation to issues of tolerance, and suspected radicalization.
5. Training learners to identify, see through, and be resilient to violent extremist propaganda, conspiracy theories, and other divisive or violent messages. The goal is fostering digital and critical literacy: the ability to critically

evaluate information and resist violent extremist propaganda. Learners can also be empowered to produce their own messaging to counter violent extremist messages.

6. Training and empowering teachers and learners to engage in actions that respond to grievances and address drivers of violent extremism in their context in constructive, non-violent ways. In educational settings, this may include civic engagement and volunteerism or things like leadership and peer-to-peer mentoring.
7. Offering targeted educational initiatives (such as vocational or skills training) as part of a program with a limited number of vulnerable individuals or learners in vulnerable areas. These initiatives are often coupled with other efforts from this list.
8. Using sports, arts, and cultural activities to build relationships across dividing lines, build partnerships, and foster positive identities.
9. Implementing specific countering violent extremism educational initiatives with

radicalized individuals to promote disengagement, deradicalization, rehabilitation, and reintegration (see sections 6.2.2 and 7.3.6 for examples from Cameroon, Pakistan, and Somalia).<sup>164</sup>

As the list above demonstrates, there are many ways to work towards the ambitious goal of countering violent extremism through education. However, **these efforts should only be considered as countering violent extremism efforts when they are used to address specific drivers of violent extremism in a particular context.**

One kind of tool used in these efforts is a specialized curriculum designed to increase the resilience of learners to violent extremism. The section below provides a number of examples of these curricula. These are already utilized in a number of programs and, like other countering violent extremism through education initiatives, may be implemented in **formal educational settings**, such as schools and universities, as well as **non-formal educational spaces**, such as clubs, extracurricular activities, special

<sup>164</sup> For a more complete list of examples and good practices to countering violent extremism through education, see the Abu Dhabi Memorandum for Good Practices on Education and Countering Violent Extremism and the Abu Dhabi Plan of Action for Education and Countering Violent Extremism, which are available in the 7.7 Further Learning Opportunities section below.

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workshops, community-based approaches, and more. They can even be offered in formal schools as special sessions that are provided by government or civil society trainers (rather than by classroom teachers or other school staff). Indeed, most educational initiatives in the countering violent extremism field are being offered outside of formal school settings.

*How would implementing countering violent extremism programs and policies in formal school settings be different than implementing them in non-formal educational spaces?*

The curricula below are designed to provide packages of skills and values that can build the resilience of learners. However, this is not a complete list nor are these the only tools to build these skills and values in learners. A wide variety of other skills and values have been recommended for educational initiatives that may build resilience to violent extremism, such as: debate, information and communication technology, digital literacy, intercultural and interreligious awareness, critical thinking, communications, vocational training, problem-solving, social inclusion, dealing with trauma and criticism, and other skills. Trainings to build these skills may be offered in countless combinations

and methods according to individual and local needs. Again, the choice of which skills and values should be built in a particular area and to specific learners as part of a countering violent extremism through education initiative should be made according to the specific drivers of violent extremism in the chosen context.

## 7.3.1 Global Citizenship Education

The first example of a relevant countering violent extremism framework is UNESCO's concept of Global Citizenship Education. Watch the two following videos for a brief introduction to the framework and its objectives:



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**VIDEO 14****Global Citizenship Education to prevent violent extremism**

By: **UNESCO**

Original Link:

<https://youtu.be/nhwVKKPDm4A>

Downloadable Link:

The video can be downloaded [here](#)

Russian Subtitles:

**Advanced**

*(recommended for use with downloaded versions)*

**Basic**

*(recommended for use with YouTube)*

*Instructions on using these subtitles are available [here](#).*

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**VIDEO 15****Learning to live together in peace through Global Citizenship Education****By: UNESCO****Original Link:****<https://youtu.be/KuKzq9EDt-0>**<sup>165</sup>**Downloadable Link:**The video can be downloaded **[here](#)**.**Russian Subtitles:****Advanced***(recommended for use with downloaded versions)***Basic***(recommended for use with YouTube)**Instructions on using these subtitles are available **[here](#)**.*

<sup>165</sup> Additional videos on Global Citizenship Education are available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPdtGrnj7sU&list=PLWuYED1WVJIMU8LoFM4VTCXiyFatiWYsm> and [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bV\\_AikD2rGg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bV_AikD2rGg). [English, including with French subtitles]



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Global Citizenship Education may be useful in contexts where identity differences (such as those listed below) are found to cause divisions that drive radicalization. It may also be a useful framework to encourage learners to become actively engaged in addressing local drivers of violent extremism in non-violent, effective, and collaborative ways and thereby building individual and community resilience to violent extremism. The framework aims to enable learners to:

- develop an understanding of global governance structures, rights and responsibilities, global issues and connections between global, national and local systems and processes;
- recognize and appreciate difference and multiple identities, e.g. culture, language, religion, gender and our common humanity, and develop skills for living in an increasingly diverse world;
- develop and apply critical skills for civic literacy, e.g. critical inquiry, information technology, media literacy, critical thinking, decision-making, problem solving, negotiation, peace building and personal and social responsibility;

- recognize and examine beliefs and values and how they influence political and social decision-making, perceptions about social justice and civic engagement;
- develop attitudes of care and empathy for others and the environment and respect for diversity;
- develop values of fairness and social justice, and skills to critically analyze inequalities based on gender, socio-economic status, culture, religion, age and other issues;
- participate in, and contribute to, contemporary global issues at local, national and global levels as informed, engaged, responsible and responsive global citizens.<sup>166</sup>

*In what ways do the Global Citizenship Education's learning objectives and Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 build resilience to the appeal of violent extremism?*

## 7.3.2 Active Citizens

Similar to the Global Citizenship Education's emphasis to encourage learners to become

actively engaged in resolving local issues, the British Council's **Active Citizens** program makes this goal its central purpose. The framework and its training materials, however, are directed to a more "elite" audience, being those who are "socially responsible, influential and engaged at a local community level." This could include youth activists, educators, religious leaders, and other community development professionals and volunteers. This audience is chosen specifically because of the program's goal of turning learners into local problem solvers.

Those who take part in the program will be given opportunities to:

- Develop a stronger sense of their own culture and identity through engagement with other cultures
- Have an increased knowledge and understanding of how their local community works and its links to the rest of the world
- Take action to improve society through sustainable initiatives
- Work effectively with diversity<sup>167</sup>

These skills are then utilized by learners as they

<sup>166</sup> Dina Kiwan and Mark Evans, "Global Citizenship Education: Topics and Learning Objectives" (Paris, France: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015), 16.

<sup>167</sup> "Active Citizens," British Council, 2018, <https://www.britishcouncil.org/society/governance-civil-society/active-citizens>. [English]

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help address local challenges, often supported by grants. This program has trained over 200,000 people across nearly 50 countries to address issues such as intercommunity tensions, providing access to sustainable livelihood opportunities, pollution, health, education, and civic engagement.<sup>168</sup> Specifically, Active Citizens has been used to encourage countering violent extremism initiatives, such as in Syria, where learners ran peace committees in Tartous, Syria. That city was controlled by the Syrian government, but refugee camps include internally-displaced persons from areas that have been under control of other groups. Following devastating attacks in a nearby bus station, these youth were active in the streets to reduce tensions and discourage attacks on the refugee camps.<sup>169</sup> In another example, the British Council Active Citizens Program also supported research “to discover more about radicalization and the perceptions of young people who see themselves as radicalized, including their perceptions on

violence and violent activity.”<sup>170</sup> If directed to local drivers of violent extremism, this program can be an effective educational tool to promote countering violent extremism efforts.

*How would promoting civic engagement to address local problems build resilience to violent extremism?*

### 7.3.3 Media and Information Literacy

There are rising concerns on how violent extremist narratives are used to promote radicalization (a topic which will be discussed in the next module) and how online, mass media, propaganda, and even “fake news” can be spread in ways that can resonate or amplify them. Therefore, countering violent extremism practitioners often encourage learners to be equipped with the skills to identify the sources of information and understand how information can be used to shape opinions and thinking. These skills would help learners to be critical

of the information they are receiving, check sources and facts, and avoid spreading “fake news” or propaganda. Learners with these skills are thought to be more resilient to radicalization pushed by violent extremist and other divisive messages.

UNESCO’s Media and Information Literacy curriculum is one example of a tool to build these skills to learners. Specifically, the curriculum offers training in:

1. Knowledge and understanding of media and information for democratic discourses and social participation.
2. Evaluation of media texts and information sources.
3. Production and use of media and information.<sup>171</sup>

This curriculum has been suggested as a tool to promote learners’ abilities to identify and critically analyze violent extremist propaganda in order

<sup>168</sup> <https://www.britishcouncil.org/active-citizens>

<sup>169</sup> “Building Resilience to Radicalisation in MENA: Evidence Session” (British Council, July 10, 2017), [https://appg.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/british\\_council\\_evidence\\_session\\_10.07.17.pdf](https://appg.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/british_council_evidence_session_10.07.17.pdf) [English]

<sup>170</sup> “Links and Overviews of Resources on Youth and Extremism in Preparation for the Budapest Symposium,” YouthPolicy, November 19, 2011, <http://www.youthpolicy.org/blog/youth-policy-symposia/resources-on-youth-extremism/>.

<sup>171</sup> Carolyn Wilson et al., “Media and Information Literacy: Curriculum for Teachers” (Paris, France: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2011), 22.

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to make informed decisions and question the legitimacy of violent extremist messages.

## 7.3.4 Peace education

In contexts where divisions and conflict drive violent extremism, learners can be made more resilient to violent extremism and become agents of peace through what is referred to as peace education. Peace education is a broad term for initiatives that aim to build learners' abilities to resolve conflict as well as promote the ideals of peace and non-violence. Many different training modules have been created for this purpose.

Education is much more than the curriculum, though, and changes to the structures or approaches in formal and informal educational spaces can complement a peace education curriculum in fostering positive change. They

may include teachers that resolve conflicts and disputes through dialogue and mediation, open and safe educational environments, and even fully integrating students from different identity groups. For example in Kyrgyzstan, the **Women's Progressive Social Union (WPSU) "Mutakalim"**<sup>172</sup> developed and implemented the Program for Peace Education, which incorporated community action and peace education into the existing curriculum of religious schools.<sup>173</sup> When determining whether a peace education approach might be helpful in countering violent extremism in your context, you may inquire whether educational spaces are segregated by gender, religion, or ethnicity.

For example, when millions of Syrian refugees fled to Lebanon, Syrian children began to outnumber Lebanese children. The strains on Lebanon and the increased competition for jobs led to tensions and even violence. To reduce these tensions, many organizations began to sponsor informal educational activities

across the country for Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian children to introduce them to the concepts of conflict transformation, tolerance, and diversity.<sup>174</sup> One example of these kinds of programs was implemented by Search for Common Ground. An evaluation of the program's peace education curriculum found that it helped the children to deal more effectively with the conflicts they face in their everyday lives and taught them to use positive choices while interacting with others. Incidents of violence and tension in the classrooms also decreased throughout the program. Moreover, Syrian and Lebanese parents participated in parents' committees where they received training and built their own positive relationships, jointly planning and preparing events for their children. Watch the following video for a brief introduction of this program:

<sup>172</sup> <http://www.mutakallim.kg/>

<sup>173</sup> "Women's Progressive Social Union (WPSU) 'Mutakalim,'" Peace Insight, January 2017, <https://www.peaceinsight.org/conflicts/kyrgyzstan/peacebuilding-organisations/womens-progressive-social-union-wpsu-mutakalim/>. [English]

<sup>174</sup> Conflict transformation is where people in conflict are taught how to transform the way they respond to it from competitive and even destructive ways to constructive methods.

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## VIDEO 16

## Rainbow of Hope collaborates with Eco Boys and Girls



By: [Search for Common Ground](#)

Original Link:

[https://youtu.be/As\\_iailNRZ4](https://youtu.be/As_iailNRZ4)<sup>175</sup>

Downloadable Link:

The video can be downloaded [here](#).

Russian Subtitles:

**Advanced**

(recommended for use with downloaded versions)

**Basic**

(recommended for use with YouTube)

Instructions on using these subtitles are available [here](#).

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. By integrating Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian children, how did this project aim to impact the lives of these children?
2. What other elements of the project can you identify that can support its central goal?
3. In what ways could the benefits of this project extend beyond the classroom?
4. Think of your own context. Are there any existing divisions (whether inside schools or in the society in general) that may be addressed through integrated educational programming or peace education? How?

<sup>175</sup> Additional videos about the project can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/L3SmmzRR3iY> and <https://youtu.be/DnMF2ea17-M>. [Arabic, with English subtitles] Examples of peace education camps in Ukraine can be found at [https://youtu.be/M\\_Nb7b5bLdo](https://youtu.be/M_Nb7b5bLdo) [Russian/Ukrainian] and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkWjaVe6Cl4>. [English]

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## 7.3.5 Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism through Education curriculum

Hedayah, together with UNESCO and its International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA), developed a comprehensive curriculum on the prevention of violent extremism through education. The curriculum is meant for teachers and teacher trainers and aims to enhance their understanding of radicalization as well as their understanding of educational approaches that can help address the drivers of radicalization in the classroom, to include digital and critical literacy, socio-emotional learning, and safe spaces for discussion on difficult topics. The curriculum includes a teacher's activity guide with suggested lesson plans to be conducted in classrooms.<sup>176</sup>

## 7.3.6 Other frameworks or curricula for countering violent extremism through education

In response to violent extremist narratives

of intolerance and violent extremist attacks on cultural heritage, UNESCO initiated the Unite4Heritage campaign.<sup>177</sup> The campaign uses the World Heritage in Young Hands training kit to promote “discussion and listening to others, resulting in re-affirmation of identity, whilst promoting mutual respect and respect for diversity.”<sup>178</sup> Like the examples above, this campaign uses an educational training kit in partnership with ongoing initiatives to have the most effect in areas where intolerance is a driver of violent extremism and attacks on cultural and religious heritage sites.

The Beyond Bali Education Package is a training package from the Bali Peace Park Association that uses the 2002 bombings in Bali, Indonesia as a platform to build resilience to violent extremism. It does so by “providing students with the skills and tools to critically analyze and challenge violent extremism, its causes and consequences” as well as encouraging peaceful alternatives to violence.<sup>179</sup>

Produced by the private company Big Bad Boo, the 1001 Nights cartoon program targets younger children with over 50 episodes and lessons that teach principles and values such as rule of law, peace, and honesty in a fun and engaging way.<sup>180</sup> While the cartoons are often broadcast over television channels, Big Bad Boo also partners with international and civil society organizations to distribute the cartoons and teach the accompanying curriculum in places like refugee camps, schools, and elsewhere. For example, Search for Common Ground partnered with Big Bad Boo to promote youth resilience to violent extremist narratives in Tunisia. As part of the program, Search for Common Ground also established extracurricular peace clubs in six communities to promote youth engagement and the positive values promoted in **1001 Nights** in order to build their resilience to violent extremism. The peace clubs built learners' skills in “non-violent communication and conflict transformation as well as their relationships with local civil society and municipal authorities.

<sup>176</sup> <http://www.hedayahcenter.org/what-we-do/91/departments/95/capacity-building-programs/532/prevention-of-violent-extremism-through-education-capacity-building-program>

<sup>177</sup> Read about it here: [Russian] [English] A video explaining the campaign is available at <https://youtu.be/dkMtCR6rv9w>. [English]

<sup>178</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/educationkit/>

<sup>179</sup> <http://www.balipeacepark.com.au/beyond-bali-education-package.html>

<sup>180</sup> <http://www.bigbadboo.com/index.php/propertiesdetail/pid/9/1001nights>

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Nights in order to build their resilience to violent extremism. The peace clubs built learners' skills in "non-violent communication and conflict transformation as well as their relationships with local civil society and municipal authorities. These clubs also provide mentorship and opportunities for dialogue among these young peacebuilders."<sup>181</sup>

For additional examples of relevant educational initiatives, see the following two videos on programs in Pakistan and Somalia:

- **The Sabaoon School** in the Swat Valley of Pakistan, which works to rehabilitate and deradicalize young men and boys who had become involved with the Taliban:
- The United States Agency for International Development's Somali Young Learners Initiative, which worked to help rehabilitate the education system in Somalia, as well as its companion **Somali Young Leaders Initiative**, which provided civic engagement opportunities for youth in and out of schools:



## VIDEO 17

### Terrorist Rehab School



By: [VICE News](#)

Original Link:

<https://youtu.be/yUTIoVM2mxc>

Russian Subtitles:

[Advanced](#)

[Basic](#)

*(recommended for use with YouTube)*

*Instructions on using these subtitles are available [here](#).*

<sup>181</sup> "1001 Nights: Building Children's Resilience to Violence," Search for Common Ground (blog), May 2, 2018, <https://www.sfcg.org/1001-nights-building-childrens-resilience-to-violence/>. [English]

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## VIDEO 18

### Somali Youth Learners Initiative



**By:** [The United States Agency for International Development \(USAID\)](#)

**Original Link:**  
<https://youtu.be/EPmKcfewrl>

**Downloadable Link:**  
The video can be downloaded [here](#).

**Russian Subtitles:**

**Advanced**  
(recommended for use with downloaded versions)

**Basic**  
(recommended for use with YouTube)

Instructions on using these subtitles are available [here](#).

#### REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. *These programs mix educational opportunities with other activities. Why do you think the implementers decided on using these mixed methods? How do the various activities complement each other to build resilience to violent extremism?*
2. *What are the specific educational approaches that are used in these programs? In what ways are they tailored to the specific context?*
3. *How would you measure whether these programs are successful? 🌐*

## 7.4

## How can we manage drivers of violent extremism in school environments and develop appropriate educational initiatives to address them?

Countering violent extremism programs in schools often try to identify learners most vulnerable to radicalization in order to better target their initiatives. Unfortunately, because supposed “warning signs” are highly specific to both context and to each individual, it is beyond the scope of this training manual to suggest them. Here, it is critical that the motivations for creating these indicators is to provide necessary support to vulnerable individuals rather than on “catching” suspected radicalized individuals. Misidentifying students as “vulnerable” or as “radicalized” can have severely marginalizing effects on the student and may even subject them to an unwarranted and violating investigations by security forces. Therefore, a Do No Harm approach is absolutely key here. Instead, the goal of any efforts should be to better target programming in schools and “allow professionals to identify learners at risk in view of primarily providing them with appropriate support at an early stage, which protects them from recruitment by violent extremist groups and helps them reject violence.”<sup>182</sup> 🌐

*Misidentifying students as “vulnerable” or as “radicalized” can have severely marginalizing effects on the student.*

<sup>182</sup> UNESCO, “Preventing Violent Extremism through Education,” 40-41.



## 7.5

## What are some risks of implementing countering violent extremism projects or policies in formal and informal educational spaces?

As introduced in the previous section, implementing countering violent extremism projects or policies in educational spaces may have severe consequences if they are not thoughtfully considered or do not include a Do No Harm approach.

For example, some experts are concerned that specific countering violent extremism programs (such as the Beyond Bali program above) may actually increase risks by exposing youth to violent extremist ideas they would not have otherwise known about, as has been observed with anti-bullying and drug awareness programs.<sup>183</sup>

Teachers (who are often already strained) must also be properly equipped with the support, tools, and training in order to engage in this space. Potential remedies could be to bring in outside trainers for specific programs or to integrate targeted skills into school curricula.<sup>184</sup>

Finally, educational programs must not further marginalize vulnerable students or polarize classrooms by approaching these activities with

a security lens rather than one of identifying problems and providing necessary support. 🌐





<sup>183</sup> Ratna Ghosh et al., “Education and Security: A Global Literature Review on the Role of Education in Countering Violent Religious Extremism” (Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, February 2016), 7.

<sup>184</sup> Naureen Chowdhury Fink et al., “The Role of Education in Countering Violent Extremism” (Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation and Hedayah, December 2013), 4.


# 7.6 Key Takeaways


This module explored the role of education in building resilience to violent extremism. It evaluated assumptions on the relationship between education level and radicalization and reviewed potential sources of grievances that can increase vulnerability to the appeal of violent extremism. The module offered a variety of educational tools and approaches that can build learners' resilience to violent extremism. Finally, it offered recommendations on how to set out to identify relevant program goals and good practices when trying to determine vulnerable students. Some of the most important takeaways from this module include:

 **Countering violent extremism through education is not about “catching” violent extremists but about preventing and intervening in the radicalization process.** Educational initiatives can build resilience to radicalization by equipping learners with skills and knowledge in ways that prevent them from finding appeal in violent extremism.

 **Educational spaces may create grievances that can drive violent extremism.** Curriculum design and educational environments may be established in ways that drive violent

extremism by marginalizing students.

 **There are numerous educational resources that can be incorporated into countering violent extremism programs.** These resources provide teachers and learners with a variety of skills, approaches, and knowledge to prevent and address grievances that may drive violent extremism.

 **The selection of education initiatives for countering violent extremism should be guided by whether they work to address specific drivers of violent extremism in a particular context.** For an effective and a Do No Harm approach, educational initiatives (particularly those that seek to identify and support vulnerable learners) must be based on a solid understanding of the local context and the local drivers of violent extremism.

## 7.7

## Further Learning Opportunities

- » *A Teacher's Guide to Preventing Violent Extremism* (UNESCO) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Abu Dhabi Memorandum for Good Practices on Education and Countering Violent Extremism* (Global Counterterrorism Forum - GCTF) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Abu Dhabi Plan of Action for Education and Countering Violent Extremism* (Global Counterterrorism Forum - GCTF) [\[English\]](#)

Review the following educational curricula and their learning objectives. Which elements do you believe are most important for your context? Why?

- » *Global Citizenship Education: Topics and Learning Objectives* by Dina Kiwan and Mark Evans (UNESCO) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Active Citizens: Facilitator's Toolkit* (British Council) [\[English\]](#)

### Media and Information Literacy

- » *Media and Information Literacy: Curriculum for Teachers* by Carolyn Wilson et al. (UNESCO) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Guidelines for Broadcasters on Promoting User-*

*Generated Content and Media and Information Literacy* by Martin Scott (UNESCO) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)

- » *Media Education: A Kit for Teachers, Students, Parents and Professionals* (UNESCO) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Media and Information Literacy: Reinforcing Human Rights, Countering Radicalization and Extremism* (UNESCO) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Dealing with Fake News, Conspiracy Theories, and Propaganda in the Classroom* by Steven Lenos and Jordy Krasenberg (Radicalisation Awareness Network - RAN) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Cyber Civility Curriculum: A Teacher's Manual to Guide Students on Using Social Media and Other Digital Tools in a Safe, Responsible, and Respectful Manner* (World Organization for Resource Development and Education – WORDE) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Digital Citizens: Countering Extremism Online* (DEMOS) [\[English\]](#)

### Sports and Culture

- » *World Heritage in Young Hands: An Educational Resource Kit for Teachers* (UNESCO) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[Uzbek\]](#) [\[English\]](#)

- » *Line Up, Live Up: Life Skills Training Through Sport to Prevent Crime, Violence and Drug Use Trainer Manual* by Peer van der Kreeft (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime - UNODC) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)

### SUGGESTED READINGS:

- » *#YouthWagingPeace: Youth-Led Guide on Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education* (UNESCO) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Teaching Peace, Building Resilience: Assessing the Impact of Peace Education for Young Syrians* by Meg Aubrey et al. (International Alert) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Education and Countering Violent Extremism* by Sara Zeiger (Hedayah) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Thinking Outside the Box: Exploring the Critical Roles of Sports, Arts, and Culture in Preventing Violent Extremism* by Naureen Chowdhury Fink et al. (Hedayah and Global Center on Cooperative Security - GCCS) [\[English\]](#)
- » *More Than a Game: The Impact of Sport-Based Youth Mentoring Schemes on Developing Resilience toward Violent Extremism* by Amelia Johns, Michele Grossman, and Kevin McDonald [\[English\]](#)

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- » *Role of Education in the Prevention of Violent Extremism* by Samantha de Silva (World Bank) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Education, Identity and Rising Extremism: From Preventing Violent Extremism to Promoting Peace, Resilience, Equal Rights and Pluralism* by Sanam Naraghi Anderlini et al. (The Women's Alliance for Security Leadership - WASL) [\[English\]](#)
- » *The Role of Education in Countering Violent Extremism* by Naureen Chowdhury Fink et al. (Global Center on Cooperative Security – GCCS and Hedayah) [\[English\]](#)
- » *The Role of Education in Preventing Radicalisation* by Götz Nordbruch (Radicalisation Awareness Network - RAN) [\[English\]](#)

Additional resources on countering violent extremism through education can be downloaded [here](#).



# MODULE 8.0

## Understanding the Role of Narratives and Media in Violent Extremism

This module enables participants to understand the concept of narratives and how media (traditional and social media) can be harnessed in countering violent extremism efforts, both online and offline. Participants are equipped with reflective tools to understand how credible and constructive narratives can be supported, and how to better understand the channels of influence of more destructive or extremist narratives.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 8.1 What are narratives and how are they relevant to violent extremism?
- 8.2 How can narratives be effectively used to prevent radicalization or recruitment or promote disengagement or deradicalization?
- 8.3 How can traditional and social media be used in countering violent extremism efforts online and offline?
- 8.4 What are the risks of using narratives to prevent and counter violent extremism?



## 8.1

# What are narratives and how are they relevant to violent extremism?

*How has your own worldview been shaped?*

*Why have you embraced the political, religious, ethical views you now hold? Have those views ever changed? Why or why not?*

As explored in Module 2, violent extremist groups drive radicalization and recruitment by offering a convincing framework to view the world, conflicts, and issues and inspire individuals and groups to support or engage in actions that advance that worldview and its goals. There is no single idea or message to this worldview, which are referred to as narratives:

**>> Narratives** are a set of ideas, facts, perspectives, and experiences that inform the way an individual or group perceives their place in the world around them. They often blend elements of historical truth with constructed storylines and can resonate deeply with people's sense of self and how they make sense of events in their own lives [...] Narratives can be positive or negative and function as a natural part of the human experience.<sup>185</sup>

Narratives guide people to understand their place in the world, their past, and their future.

Violent extremist narratives are divisive and undermine social cohesion. They claim victimhood to gain sympathy, reframe the grievances their potential supporters experience by offering a meaning to them and assigning blame for them. They call for recruitment and violent acts by dehumanizing their opponents, justifying brutality against them. Violent extremist narratives also deny their own crimes, intimidate opponents, and offer rewards for participation. Therefore, examining these narratives is an essential component of countering violent extremism efforts, including how they intersect or resonate with (or even hijack) local narratives.

The term narratives is commonly used by the countering violent extremism community to refer to media or messaging products from violent extremist groups, usually online. Violent extremist groups can be skilled at sharing these messages through social media or other online platforms, and a great deal of research has been conducted to study this (for example, recall Video 6 in Module 5). However, it is important to broaden the understanding of narratives to include both online and offline messages,

including those shared between one person to another. Indeed, violent extremist narratives found online are often only packaged versions of the kinds of ideas and perspectives that are shared on the ground among violent extremists and to potential supporters. Violent extremists' use of the internet and social media to spread narratives and recruit men and women will be covered in more detail in the next module. However, this module's focus on narratives and efforts to counter them will apply to both online and offline spaces. 🌐

<sup>185</sup> Slachmuis, "Transforming Violent Extremism," 28. Emphasis added.

## 8.2

## How can narratives be effectively used to prevent radicalization or recruitment or promote disengagement or deradicalization?

In the field of countering violent extremism, researchers and practitioners study the narratives of violent extremists and engage in projects to offer more positive narratives to dissuade individuals or groups from radicalization and recruitment and resorting to violence. They can also be used to promote disengagement or deradicalization. Refer again to the Countering Violent Extremism Cycle in Module 1 and to the different levels of responses, from general prevention to reintegration. Indeed, these efforts can be used in all levels of response! We can sort them into the following three categories, which we will refer to as **positive narratives**.<sup>186</sup>

**Alternative narratives**, which challenge the relevance of violent extremist narratives by offering more effective and non-violent understandings of grievances as well as approaches to addressing them. These can include reinforcing community values about social values, tolerance, openness, freedom, and democracy. They can also include more inclusive perspectives on grievances and conflict (for example, that high unemployment

could be better addressed by fostering local entrepreneurship, removing barriers to the creation of small businesses, and so forth rather than by putting discriminatory restrictions on or violently expelling refugee, migrant, or minority communities). Anyone, including civil society and governments, can be a part of sharing alternative narratives and making them a reality.

**Counter narratives**, which directly challenge, refute, or discredit violent extremist narratives by exposing the error in their ideologies, theology, or framing of a conflict or local issues and exposing lies and hypocrisy. Examples could include religious actors exposing the flaws in violent extremist groups' interpretation of religion, traditional or citizen journalists sharing relevant facts on the ground that expose the propaganda of violent extremists, and even justice officials that prosecute violent extremists in open court to expose their crimes. Anyone can be a part of creating and sharing counter narratives, but governments often face additional problems here, as they may be perceived to be less credible or believable by vulnerable or violent extremist individuals.

**Government strategic communications**, which undermine violent extremist narratives by explaining government actions and policy in ways that refute misinformation and a lack of clarity. Government strategic communications can also raise awareness regarding government programs and the threat of violent extremism and help foster relationships of trust with marginalized communities. However, these communications are more effective when they accompany changes in governance in ways that address local grievances. For example, a government may advertise the opening of new access to justice centers in vulnerable communities and how to access services. These efforts are usually led by governments themselves, but can certainly be supported by others.

*Can you think of examples of these three types of positive narratives from your local context?*

Each of these three categories presents unique strengths and challenges depending on your intended goal and according to the format of the message and the messengers that deliver it. "Alternative narratives promote positive

<sup>186</sup> Adapted from Rachel Briggs and Sebastien Feve, "Review of Programs to Counter Narratives of Violent Extremism: What Works and What Are the Implications for Government" (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2013).

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alternative perspectives, courses of action and role models, and foster critical thinking,” according to the European Radicalization Awareness Network. “Counter-narratives, which aim at debunking extremist propaganda, should only be directed at a well-researched and understood audience which is already engaged with extremist content.”<sup>187</sup>

However, much of the discussion about narratives focuses on counter narratives. Unfortunately, this may sometimes simply reinforce violent extremist narratives as they may become the focus of debate, discussion, and reasoning. “Perhaps the greatest failing that this fixation on counter-narratives highlights,” Dr. Alastair Reed of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) argues,

is the piecemeal approach to communications and the lack of

understanding of the need for a comprehensive, integrated and multi-dimensional communications campaign. Successful campaigns are a complex construction, made up of multiple different types of messaging (offensive and defensive, identity and rational-choice) dispatched through multiple mediums (online, print, TV, radio, oration), all in support of and mutually [reinforcing], a central narrative and synchronized with action on the ground.<sup>188</sup>

Because they provide options for alternative actions, alternative narratives may be more effective at operating in the prevention space. According to a recent evidence review, “the theoretical foundations for these alternative approaches are supported by a stronger and more established research base, drawn from

the multi-disciplinary fields of development, peacebuilding, and social cohesion.”<sup>189</sup> Counter narratives, on the other hand, may be more effective for those already adopting violent extremist narratives or those who have already joined. They may also be used in the disengagement and deradicalization process with great effect.<sup>190</sup> Regardless of the approach, narratives for the purpose of preventing and countering violent extremism share many of the same elements. This module will explore helpful tips and good practices for using them, which are adaptable for your context.

<sup>187</sup> Alexander Ritzmann and Marije Meines, “RAN Guidelines for Effective Alternative and Counter-Narrative Campaigns (GAMMMA+),” RAN Issue Paper (Radicalisation Awareness Network, December 2017), 2.

<sup>188</sup> “IS Propaganda: Should We Counter the Narrative?,” March 17, 2017, <https://icct.nl/publication/is-propaganda-should-we-counter-the-narrative/>. [English] Awareness Network, December 2017), 2.

<sup>189</sup> Kate Ferguson, “Countering Violent Extremism through Media and Communication Strategies: A Review of the Evidence,” Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research, 2016, 2.

<sup>190</sup> For example, see Anne Speckhard and Ardian Shajkovi, “Confronting an ISIS Emir: ICSVE’s Breaking the ISIS Brand Counter-Narrative Videos,” ICSVE Research Reports (International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism, May 29, 2017), <http://www.icsve.org/research-reports/confronting-an-isis-emir-icsves-breaking-the-isis-brand-counter-narrative-videos/>. [English]



## 8.2

### Examples of goals and objectives for narrative campaigns

The goals and objectives [of a campaign] should outline clearly the change in attitude or behavior that is desired in the target audience [...] The below framework describes possible goals and objectives:

**DISENGAGEMENT:** This goal focuses on changing behavior where an individual's involvement in violent extremist activities reduces or ceases. Measurable disengagement can take place in settings where the counter-narratives are delivered face-to-face, rather than online....

**DIVERSION:** This goal focuses on preventing individuals from being interested in violent extremism in the first place, and instead diverts them on other alternative means of expressing opinions or grievances.

**UNDERMINING APPEAL [TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM]:** This goal focuses on diluting the appeal to vulnerable individuals, including discrediting the narrative or message of violent

extremists to make it less attractive.

**LIMITING IMPACT [OF VIOLENT EXTREMIST NARRATIVES]:** This goal focuses on isolating the narrative or propaganda of violent extremists to limit the effects to an individual or small group. This may be particularly relevant when the messages of violent extremists have the potential to appeal to larger audiences.

**RAISING AWARENESS:** This goal looks at providing information related to certain aspects of violent extremism. This includes information on drivers and processes of radicalization. This goal may be most applicable when the target audiences are "key influencers."

Excerpt from Sara Zeiger, "Undermining Violent Extremist Narratives in East Africa: A How-To Guide" (Hedayah, August 2016), 15.

An analysis of these three categories of narratives reveals a number of essential elements to consider when promoting positive narratives, regardless of whether they are counter narratives, alternative narratives, or government strategic communications:

The messenger can be more important than the message: Different actors (such as community or religious leaders, former violent extremists, civil society organizations, and government officials) may have different strengths and challenges to creating and sharing positive narratives because of their relationship to the problems driving radicalization, the communities at risk, and proposed solutions.

**Collaboration in building and sharing narratives:** While some actors may lead certain aspects of getting messages out, collaboration across society will mean that the narratives will be more widely shared, accepted by communities, and less likely to be perceived as a propaganda effort (see Video 19 below for a good example of this kind of collaboration).

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**Connecting message to action:** Narratives left to inspiring or informative messages alone are less able to shape a person's understanding of the world around them and their role within it. Instead, positive narratives that connect people with actions and a purpose to contribute to will offer experiences that can transform perspectives and approaches far more powerfully than words alone.

**Efforts with a purpose:** Related to the previous point, positive narratives should have goals to offer new understandings or invitations to act (like the violent extremist narratives they compete with). Having this goal will help to shape the content, form, and delivery of messages to achieve the planned goals.

**Narratives include multiple formats:** Narratives are not just about words and messages, but include a number of formats, including face-to-face dialogues or larger discussions. "Messaging can also take the form of op-eds, speeches, fact-sheets, and other unglamorous modes of discourse. A recent study suggests that counter-narratives have a measurable persuasive effect regardless of the format in which they are disseminated."<sup>191</sup> Narratives are also built

through lived experiences and interactions, meaning that actions in a society can help to reinforce or build narratives in either helpful or damaging ways.

Let us take a look at an example that explores many of these points. Colombia has faced decades of violence from groups like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (referred to as FARC), which recently negotiated a peace agreement with the government to end the violence. However, at the end of 2013, the Colombian Ministry of Defense worked with the mothers of fighters in a campaign to encourage their sons and daughters (women also fought with the group) to disengage and come home. Watch a video about this campaign on the next page:



*Narratives are not just about words and messages, but include a number of formats, including face-to-face dialogues or larger discussions.*



<sup>191</sup> Berger, "Making CVE Work," 7-8.

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## VIDEO 19

### You Are My Son



By: [MullenLowe Group for The Colombian Ministry of Defense](#)

Original Link:  
<https://youtu.be/qYrofD8l1-k><sup>192</sup>

Russian Subtitles:

**Advanced**

**Basic**

(recommended for use with YouTube)

Instructions on using these subtitles are available [here](#).

#### REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Would you consider this campaign an example of a counter narrative, alternative narrative, or government strategic communications? Or does it include multiple elements? If so, which elements are examples of which category and why?
2. What was the goal of the campaign?
3. Who were the central messengers of the campaign's message? How was the campaign an example of cooperation?
4. What were the different formats for the campaign?
5. Colombia has had a long-running disengagement and reintegration program for militants and violent extremists from various groups. Did this campaign highlight this program? Why or why not?
6. The video claims that the campaign was successful in encouraging 196 fighters to disengage. The Colombian government has

<sup>192</sup> This campaign was part of a yearly Christmas program. Other campaigns included lighting Christmas trees in remote jungle areas (<https://youtu.be/gODTTz3ayCk>) and floating Christmas messages that were released in Colombia's remote rivers (<https://youtu.be/RpTDPTaOdVk>). Each of these campaigns were designed to encourage disengagement.

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*debriefed over 15,000 people over 10 years as part of its program. From those, only about 5% claimed that they left because they missed their families (about 750).<sup>193</sup> Does it seem like the campaign had a significant effect? Why or why not?*

7. *Do you think that this campaign might have convinced some young men and women not to join? If so, would this be measurable?*

Like the campaign above, the process of creating and sharing positive narratives should be thoughtful and tied to a goal. However, they do not need to be thoroughly researched or be incredibly well produced to be effective. Indeed, focusing too closely on these things adds to a myth that there can be a “perfect cure” to violent extremist narratives and that we need to simply find the right antidote. It can also over-emphasize media products (particularly those online) rather than other formats that may also be effective.

## 8.2.1 Guidelines for implementing effective narrative campaigns

So how do you set out to create and share positive narratives (whether counter narratives, alternative narratives, or government strategic communications)? Hedayah has developed the following steps which are helpful in guiding these efforts, which have been adapted for this handbook:

1. Understand and assess the relevant drivers of violent extremism
2. Identify the target audience
3. Identify the explicit or implicit violent extremist narratives that resonate with the target audience
4. Set clear goals and objectives of the campaign
5. Determine effective messengers
6. Develop the content and logic to the messages
7. Identify the formats where the messages will be shared

8. Develop a strategy to disseminate the messages and how to connect them to actions or programs
9. Evaluate and assess the impact of the campaign
10. Adjust the campaign as necessary and continue if needed<sup>194</sup>

The order of some of these steps may be adjusted as necessary. While most of these steps are self-explanatory or are covered elsewhere in this handbook, it is important to focus specifically on a few key aspects: identifying a target audience (for example, those in the general community in order to raise awareness or those vulnerable to radicalization), determining effective messengers, developing the content and logic to the messages, and identifying the formats where the messages will be shared.

**Determining effective messengers:** How the target audience will be receptive to messages is tied to a number of factors, but perhaps the most important factor is who they are receiving the messages from, or the “messenger” as

<sup>193</sup> Berger, “Making CVE Work,” 21-22.

<sup>194</sup> Adapted from Lilah Elsayed, Talal Faris, and Sara Zeiger, “Undermining Violent Extremist Narratives in the Middle East and North Africa: A How-To Guide” (Hedayah, December 2017), 4.

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they may be called. This is because this factor affects whether the audience will even listen to the messenger or whether they will be seen as credible. For example, marginalized communities that have serious disagreements with other communities or the central government may not trust statements from them. Or a religious leader from a mainstream religious community may be less credible than a religious leader from a more conservative religious community when addressing certain groups or individuals that believe that the mainstream is somehow “impure” or “incorrect” in its teachings. These factors must be considered when designing a messaging campaign.

## Questions to determine the right messenger

Hedayah also offers guidance on determining the right messengers in its 2017 publication, “Undermining Violent Extremist Narratives in the Middle East and North Africa - A How-To Guide,” with the following questions to consider:

- What is the relationship between the messenger and the target audience?
- What is the credibility of that messenger with the target audience?
- What is the potential for that messenger to change attitudes?
- What is the potential for that messenger to change behaviors?
- What are the potential negative effects or risks associated with choosing that particular messenger?

**Developing the content and logic to the messages:** Having set the goal of your campaign based on the needs you have determined, you must thoughtfully consider how you will achieve it. Remember that narratives shape the way we see issues, conflicts, and the world around us and are unlikely to change with a simple message. Does your campaign need to address multiple points? Does it need to connect groups of people, or highlight a new program? Does it need to call people to action to address their grievances in effective and non-violent ways? Does it need to highlight exit paths for violent extremists when they begin to doubt or consider leaving the group, like the campaign in Colombia?

Indeed, messages are not simply the words behind them. Messages include a number of other factors relevant to the message itself as well as the messenger:

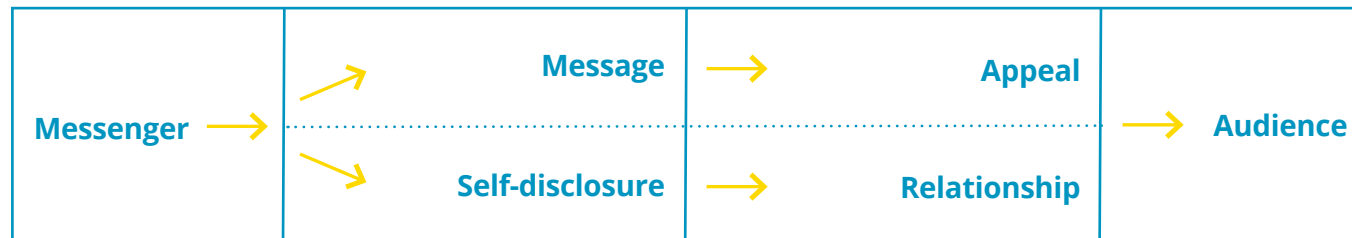
- **Factual information:** information, data, stories
- **Self-disclosure:** what the messenger shares about themselves (such as their values, feelings, motives) either intentionally or

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unintentionally

- **Relationship:** the relationship between the messenger and the audience, including what the messenger thinks about the audience
- **Appeal:** what the audience wants<sup>195</sup>

The following chart demonstrates how these factors may interact:



As portrayed in the chart, a messenger's message will not reach the intended audience if it is not appealing to the audience. This does not refer to whether the medium or the manner in which the message is delivered (although these are important factors that certainly do affect whether the audience is receptive of the message), but whether it is in line with their own interests and needs.

Similarly, what the messenger shares about themselves can improve or damage the relationship between the messenger and the audience, affecting whether the audience will be receptive of the message or find the messenger to be credible.

Messages as part of a positive narrative campaign should be considered based on these

factors, which will shape the logic and content of each message. This will also inform how narratives can connect to actions or personal experiences.

*Remember that narratives shape the way we see issues, conflicts, and the world around us and are unlikely to change with a simple message.*

<sup>195</sup> Adapted from "Active Citizens Facilitator's Toolkit" (London: British Council, 2017), 102.

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**Identifying the formats where the messages will be shared:** The above considerations will shape the formats that will be best to share these messages. For example, if the relationships between messengers and the target audience is very strong, perhaps personal interactions would be best. If the goal is to raise awareness of a specific program, it could be advertised on a number of platforms where the target beneficiaries will be most likely to see them. Like the example from Colombia, a campaign may use multiple formats to share the messages (the following section will specifically explore how traditional and social media can be used for these efforts). For more examples of alternative and counter narratives by private corporations, civil society organizations, and governments, explore the following videos and links.



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Answer these questions for each video:

1. At what stage of intervention is each narrative campaign targeted to (for example, general prevention, early intervention and diversion, or deradicalization)?
2. Why might this campaign have been influential? Why not?
3. How would you measure this campaign's success?



## VIDEO 20

### Zain Ramadan Commercial



By: [Zain](#)

Original Link:

<https://youtu.be/U49nOBFv508><sup>196</sup>

Russian Subtitles:

[Advanced](#)

[Basic](#)

(recommended for use with YouTube)

Instructions on using these subtitles are available [here](#).

<sup>196</sup> For a case study on this example see Elsayed, Faris, and Zeiger, "Undermining Violent Extremist Narratives in the Middle East and North Africa," 37-38.



## 8.2



## VIDEO 21

### Empowering Terrorism Victims in Indonesia

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By: The Victims' Voices Initiative

Original Link:

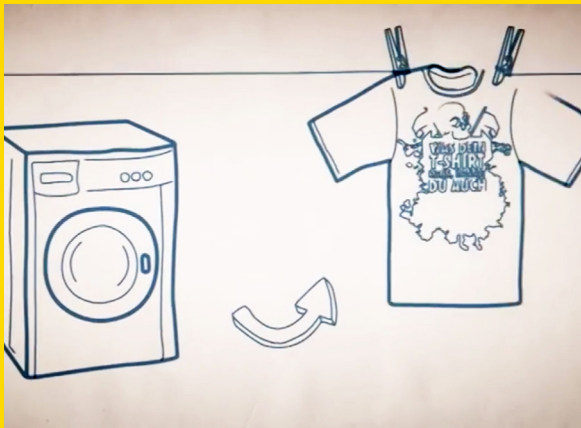
<https://vimeo.com/310277294/037b2437cd>

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## VIDEO 22

### Trojan T-Shirt



By: [EXIT-Germany](#)

Original Link:  
<https://youtu.be/CSlbsHKEP-8>

Russian Subtitles:

**Advanced**

**Basic**

*(recommended for use with YouTube)*

*Instructions on using these subtitles are available [here](#).*

- The International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism (ICSVE)'s "Breaking the ISIS Brand" series, featuring interviews with ISIL defectors, captured members, and victims of ISIL in multiple languages, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCumpEsozixbl-PyKw12hmnw/playlists>
- For more examples, sign up to access Hedayah's Counter Narratives Library, with examples from all over the world, at: <http://www.cn-library.com/registration/>

# 8.2

## 8.2.2 Good practices for developing and implementing narrative campaigns

In addition to the above, it is helpful to keep the following good practices in mind when developing and implementing narrative campaigns:

- Go local with local ownership for narrative campaigns since, like the drivers of violent extremism, narratives are very localized.
- Do not dismiss the grievances of your audience or of violent extremists themselves, but transform the way they are characterized and the proper (and more effective, non-violent) responses to them.
- Reinforce community and religious norms rather than trying to discredit their interpretations, even to including credible religious leaders as messengers.
- Do not assume that alternative or counter narratives are not already on the ground and working effectively. Instead ask: What

is already being discussed locally that builds resilience to the appeal of violent extremism? This is important because the communities may know what is best and most effective already, so narrative campaigns can benefit from amplifying their narratives. As the former head of an American counter narrative program admitted, “it is a cherished myth” that “credible voices” are not already mobilized against ISIL, since the “overwhelming weight of Islamic religious authority has been openly against [ISIL].”<sup>197</sup> Effective counter narratives are even being produced by former members! Indeed, as one former ISIL member told journalists in Central Asia, “Governments do not understand that we have stopped more people from joining [ISIL] than they have.”<sup>198</sup> Therefore, it may be helpful to find out what is already working before trying something new.

- On the other hand, recognize that narratives that promote violent extremism are often

promoted by groups and individuals that are not violent extremist themselves, but which play into violent extremist narratives, promote them, or amplify them. Examples may include conspiracy theories, hate speech, or problematic narratives from their opponents—including the government. These narratives must also be addressed.

- “Amplify narratives that reinforce the power of emotion and human connection.”<sup>199</sup> This is because emotions are often more important than evidence and information.
- “Focus on how narratives are constructed and shared rather than their content.”<sup>200</sup> This will emphasize the relationship with the messenger, the emotional connection to the messages and ideas, and the forms the campaign should take.
- Narratives are a set of ideas, facts, perspectives, and experiences, so campaigns should be sustained with multiple elements and messages. 🌐

<sup>197</sup> Berger, “Making CVE Work,” 10.

<sup>198</sup> Vera Mironova, Ekaterina Sergatskova, and Karam Alhamad, “The Bloody Split Within ISIS,” *Foreign Affairs*, December 8, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2017-12-08/bloody-split-within-isis>. [English]

<sup>199</sup> Slachmuisjlder, “Transforming Violent Extremism,” 29.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

## 8.3

## How can traditional and social media be used in countering violent extremism efforts online and offline?

Discussions about alternative and counter narratives often focus on messaging campaigns in two specific formats: 1) traditional media and journalism and 2) social media and online platforms. This section will briefly explore unique considerations for these formats.

### 8.3.1 Traditional media and journalism

These formats include a variety of mediums, such as television, radio, and print journalism and entertainment programs. These mediums have a wide reach and can have a significant impact in promoting positive narratives. Already, the media is central to creating popular narratives through reports, photographs, video, and headlines, which can shape what people believe, what ideas they buy into, and whom or what they support.<sup>201</sup> The United States Institute of Peace argues that the maximum impact on conflict prevention and peacebuilding can be achieved through the following five strategies:

1. Conflict-sensitive and peace journalism
2. Peace-promoting citizen media
3. Peace-promoting entertainment media
4. Advertising or social marketing for conflict prevention and peacebuilding
5. Media regulation to prevent incitement of violence<sup>202</sup>

These strategies can also be used to counter violent extremism. For example, the concept of “peace journalism” advocates for constructive discourse that avoids making people or specific groups of people the problem, choosing instead to focus on the problem of people using violence to address their grievances or conflicts.<sup>203</sup> To illustrate, Search for Common Ground’s work on journalism is founded on two principles:

First, [when covering] incendiary topics like extremist attacks, the details of the event are not the only important news

and their portrayal of the event can either generate or alleviate animosity toward the communities involved. Second, journalists have an obligation when covering conflict and extremism to widen their framework for understanding the problem in order to highlight where people are productively working together across dividing lines, rather than simply those who do so violently. This avoids exclusively covering grievances that legitimize the means that extremists use for recruiting.<sup>204</sup>

Focusing on violence and other problems rather than efforts to resolve them can help entrench grievances. When reporting on violent extremism, journalists should be careful in their use of statements and messages from violent extremists in reports, which can serve to spread or amplify their narratives. “The media should not restrict themselves to serving as a communication channel however

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>202</sup> Eran Fraenkel, Emrys Schoemaker, and Sheldon Himelfarb, “Afghanistan Media Assessment: Opportunities and Challenges for Peacebuilding,” Peaceworks No. 68 (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2010).

<sup>203</sup> Vladimir Bratic and Lisa Schirch, “Why and When to Use the Media for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding,” Issue Paper 6 (The Hague, The Netherlands: European Centre for Conflict Prevention, December 2007), 17.

<sup>204</sup> Slachmijlder, “Transforming Violent Extremism,” 32-33.

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and whenever a terrorist group wants,” one UNESCO handbook advises. “They must select the genuinely newsworthy clips, cut out propaganda, explain the context, and ask the opinions of the authorities.”<sup>205</sup>

This can also extend beyond journalism, of course, to include entertainment, awareness raising campaigns, and storytelling. In fact, a growing amount of evidence suggest that “radio and television drama addressing issues of identity, reconciliation and tolerance have a positive impact on public attitudes and behavior,” including the potential for rapid reaction media and communication strategies when the threat of violence is immediate.<sup>206</sup> For example, countering violent extremism radio programming in Mali, Chad and Niger used peace and tolerance messaging effectively to shape attitudes toward moderation. The radio programs were not only popular and accessible to the target audience, but provided youth with marketable skills.<sup>207</sup> Search for Common

Ground’s HEROES program in Burundi helped to transform the narratives from inter-ethnic violence and victimization through sharing weekly radio stories of someone whose life was heroically saved by someone from the other ethnic group. After the first year of the five-year-long program, Search for Common Ground was able to organize a large event to celebrate these heroes.<sup>208</sup>

## 8.3.2 Social media and online platforms

Similar to traditional media, social media has great reach in many communities, particularly with youth. Online platforms and social media also provide better tools for getting messages and narratives to specific individuals or groups of people. Violent extremists know this all too well, and have used these platforms effectively to reach potential recruits and communicate secretly. Positive narratives, of course, can also be shared through social media and online

platforms. Using technology for the prevention and countering of violent extremism will be explored more in the next module. 🌐

<sup>205</sup> Jean-Paul Marthoz, “Terrorism and the Media: A Handbook for Journalism” (Paris, France: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2017), 84.

<sup>206</sup> Ferguson, “Countering Violent Extremism through Media and Communication Strategies,” 2.

<sup>207</sup> Jeffrey Swedberg and Lainie Reisman, “Mid-Term Evaluation of Three Countering Violent Extremism Projects” (United States Agency for International Development, 2013), 62.

<sup>208</sup> Slachmuis, “Transforming Violent Extremism,” 33.

## 8.4

# What are the risks of using narratives to prevent and counter violent extremism?

Finally, like all countering violent extremism activities, using narratives presents a number of unique risks that ought to be considered:

- When coming to understand violent extremism narratives, governments may sometimes criminalize these messages or prosecute those who share similar messages rather than positively engaging with these ideas and offering alternative narratives and solutions. This can lead to a breakdown in relationships.
- The possession of violent extremist content may be illegal in some countries, which may make studying them difficult or risky. Care must be taken when conducting this research in general, especially when exploring known violent extremism forums.
- Be careful in the use of violent extremism content when building counter narratives, which can end up spreading violent extremist narratives.
- Targeting the deeply held beliefs and values of vulnerable communities for messaging campaigns can further marginalize them by causing them to feel that their values or

perspectives are being attacked, rather than listened to.


- Using the wrong messenger can undermine narratives and result in campaigns losing credibility or being seen as propaganda. 🌐




## 8.5

## Key Takeaways


This module explored the concept of narratives, including how they may drive radicalization as well as how they can build resilience to the appeal of violent extremism. This module offered a number of guidelines and guiding questions to help with the design and implementation of narrative campaigns. Some of the most important takeaways from this module include:

 **Positive narratives to prevent and counter violent extremism come in many forms.**


Practitioners may use counter narratives, alternative narratives, or government strategic communications to address narratives that drive violent extremism, depending on needs and the intended goal.

 **Narratives are not just media products, but both words and actions.**


Narratives are sets of ideas, facts, perspectives, and experiences that inform the way an individual or group perceives their place in the world. This means that simple messaging campaigns are less likely to change the narratives a person or community holds. Therefore, narrative campaigns should call the audience to action or to engage in meaningful ways.

 **Effective positive narratives that help individuals and communities be resilient to violent extremism are already present in local communities.**

Since most members of a community reject violent extremism, even though they face similar issues or hold similar views on specific grievances, it is helpful to inquire as to what narratives help them see things differently than violent extremists in their community. Amplifying these narratives may be more effective than creating new narratives for campaigns.

 **Narratives that drive violent extremism are often promoted by groups and individuals other than violent extremist themselves.**

Local narratives may resonate with violent extremist narratives in ways that can drive radicalization. These narratives may also need to be transformed or taken into consideration.

 **The messengers can be more important than the messages.**

Because the relationship that a particular messenger holds to a community or audience shapes how messages are listened to or accepted, the individuals or institutions that

deliver particular messages greatly influence the effectiveness of a narrative campaign. Broad collaboration and multiple messengers often helps to increase impact.

## 8.6

## Further Learning Opportunities

- » *Undermining Violent Extremist Narratives in the Middle East and North Africa: A How-To Guide* by Lilah Elsayed, Talal Faris, and Sara Zeiger (Hedayah) [\[English\]](#)

Explore the following publications on violent extremist groups' use of online and offline narratives to drive radicalization and responses to violent extremist messaging. What do you believe are the most effective narratives in your area? What do you believe have been the most effective responses to them?

- » *The Secret of Attraction: ISIS Propaganda and Recruitment* by Abu Rumman and Mohammad Suliman et al. (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Messages, Images and Media Channels Promoting Youth Radicalization in Kyrgyzstan* by Inga Sikorskaya (Search for Common Ground) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Public and State Responses to ISIS Messaging: Kazakhstan* by Noah Tucker (Central Asia Program) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Public and State Responses to ISIS Messaging: Kyrgyzstan* by Noah Tucker (Central Asia Program) [\[English\]](#)

- » *Public and State Responses to ISIS Messaging - Uzbekistan* by Noah Tucker (Central Asia Program) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Public and State Responses to ISIS Messaging - Tajikistan* by Noah Tucker (Central Asia Program) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Public and State Responses to ISIS Messaging - Turkmenistan* by Noah Tucker and Rano Turaeva (Central Asia Program) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Islamic State Messaging to Central Asian Migrants in Russia* by Noah Tucker (Central Asia Program) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Making (Social Media) Deradicalization Work: Case Study - Kyrgyzstan* by Mirgul Karimova and Sheradil Baktygulov (Search for Common Ground) [\[English\]](#)

The following resources are helpful in encouraging journalistic practices that build resilience to violent extremism, further discouraging government oversight on the media that may lead to censorship:

- » *Journalists' Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon* (United Nations Development Programme) [\[English\]](#)

- » *Conflict-Sensitive Reporting - State of the Art - A Course for Journalists and Journalism Educators (Training Manual)* by Ross Howard (United Nations Educational Scientific, and Cultural Organization) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Guidelines for Broadcasters on Promoting User-Generated Content and Media and Information Literacy* by Martin Scott (United Nations Educational Scientific, and Cultural Organization) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)

For an **interactive online toolkit** on building a campaign, visit: Counter Narrative Toolkit <http://www.counternarratives.org/> (Jigsaw, formerly Google Ideas) [\[English\]](#)

For a **training presentation** on building a messaging campaign by the Radicalization Awareness Network in multiple European languages (including English and French), go to: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/civil-society-empowerment-programme/training\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/civil-society-empowerment-programme/training_en)



## 8.6

**SUGGESTED READINGS**

- » *Narratives and Counter-Narratives: Countering Violent Extremism Research Brief 3* by Sara Zeiger (Hedayah) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Countering Violent Extremism Through Media and Communication Strategies: A Review of the Evidence* by Kate Ferguson (Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research, University of East Anglia) [\[English\]](#)
- » *The Counter-Narrative Handbook* by Henry Tuck and Tanya Silverman (Institute for Strategic Dialogue) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Developing Effective Counter Narrative Frameworks for Countering Violent Extremism* (Hedayah and International Centre for Counter-Terrorism) [\[English\]](#)
- » *The Counter Narrative Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook* by Louis Reynolds and Henry Tuck (Institute for Strategic Dialogue) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Handbook: Voices of Victims of Terrorism* by Guillaume Denoix de Saint Marc and Luca Guglielminetti et al. (Radicalisation Awareness Network) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Guidelines for Effective Alternative and Counter Narrative Campaigns* by Alexander Ritzmann and Marije Meines (Radicalisation Awareness

Network) [\[English\]](#)

- » *Media Development Indicators: A Framework for Assessing Media Development* (United Nations Educational Scientific, and Cultural Organization) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)

Additional readings on narratives that drive violent extremism and on using counter and alternative narratives (in English) can be downloaded [here](#).

# MODULE 9.0

## Utilizing an Innovative Toolbox: Leveraging New Media and Technology

In a cross-cutting discussion, this module explores the opportunities of engaging people through online and other tech-based platforms as well as through other forms of new media. It briefly explores how violent extremists use these same tools to great effect to spread propaganda, sow hatred amongst groups, terrorize their target communities, and draw support and recruits. This module also explores how these tools can provide new and engaging opportunities to connect people, engage in dialogues that transform relationships and how issues are viewed or addressed, and disseminate information in ways that can expand the reach of programming and effectively build community resilience to the pull of violent extremism. Finally, it evaluates a number of factors to consider when using new media and technology as well as potential risks.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 9.1 How do violent extremists use online spaces, tech-based platforms, and new and social media to promote or facilitate violent extremism?
- 9.2 How can new media and technology be used to counter violent extremism?
- 9.3 What are the risks or challenges to using new media and technology?

## 9.1

# How do violent extremists use online spaces, tech-based platforms, and new and social media to promote or facilitate violent extremism?

Violent extremist groups have proven to be very skilled at learning how to use online spaces, tech-based platforms, and new and social media to promote or facilitate violent extremism.

One of the most visible examples of violent extremists' use of these tools is through their spread of online narratives. They use websites and social media to spread propaganda, sow hatred amongst groups, terrorize their target communities, and draw support and recruits. However, it is important to note that, despite some assumptions, online messages are rarely a sole factor in driving radicalization and recruitment. As explained in a recent UNESCO study, "While Internet may play a facilitating role, it is not established that there is a causative link between it and radicalization towards extremism, violent radicalization, or the commission of actual acts of extremist violence."<sup>209</sup> That is, online narratives may have a radicalizing effect, but are more likely to facilitate the radicalization and recruitment process by connecting

vulnerable people who consume or interact with online messages to recruiters and those already in the violent extremist groups. As the former United Nations Secretary-General wrote,

ISIL also has a large team of dedicated "online groomers" whose job it is to identify individuals who express an interest in the group on online forums. The grooming of would-be sympathizers for terrorist activity locally or for travel to ISIL-held territory is based on information about the individual's particular social and personal context.<sup>210</sup>

These recruiters use internet forums, chat rooms, social media, messaging apps, and even video gaming platforms to find sympathizers and recruit them.<sup>211</sup> They even use these tools (like WhatsApp and Telegram, for example) to coordinate attacks and train their members on how to commit attacks.

This has caused concerns among the public,

including important discussions and debates, about how to prevent violent extremists from using these tools. However, these fears may also create a "policy panic" that results in responses that severely restrict or criminalize certain tools. For example, after a young Kyrgyz-born man launched a suicide bombing attack on a busy St. Petersburg metro train, the Russian government threatened to block the Telegram app because it had been used by the attacker.<sup>212</sup> While there is a need to remove violent extremist content from online spaces and prevent violent extremists from using these tools, this module will focus on how practitioners can use these tools to counter violent extremism. 🌐

<sup>209</sup> Séraphin Alava, Divina Frau-Meigs, and Ghayda Hassan, "Youth and Violent Extremism on Social Media: Mapping the Research" (Paris, France: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2017), 5.

<sup>210</sup> United Nations Secretary-General, "Report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat," United Nations Security Council, S/2016/92 (January 2016), 8.

<sup>211</sup> For a video about the online methods of recruitment of citizens of Kyrgyzstan, see "Not My War" at <https://youtu.be/iLAOaneXegg>. [Russian]

<sup>212</sup> "Russia Targets Telegram App after Bombing," June 26, 2017, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40404842>. [English]

## 9.2

# How can new media and technology be used to counter violent extremism?

New and social media and other tech-based tools provide new and engaging opportunities to connect people, engage in transformative dialogues, and disseminate information. If used correctly, these tools can expand the reach of programming and effectively build community resilience to the pull of violent extremism. However, choosing to use these platforms may also present a unique set of risks: these tools require engaging and user-friendly development, specialized moderators, and maybe even longer-term commitments. If not handled correctly, tech-based platforms may also create suspicions that these tools are used for monitoring by security forces. Hashtag campaigns (about popular musicians or earthquakes) have even been hijacked by violent extremism individuals or organizations, who use the online discussions to introduce their own narratives to new audiences.

While this handbook cannot train you in how to use new and social media or develop new tools for countering violent extremism, it will offer good practices to make such efforts most effective, provide examples of projects and initiatives, and (via the 9.5 Further Learning Opportunities section) connect you to resources to explore this issue further in greater depth.

## 9.2.1 Good practices on using new media and technology to prevent and counter violent extremism

### *Planning and designing a countering violent extremism program that uses new media and technology*

When planning and designing a program, practitioners should begin by clearly stating their goals. Even if these goals are not overtly stated publicly, they will help to shape whether technology can assist in reaching these goals and, if so, how these tools can be incorporated. Common goals of countering violent extremism programs that use technology are:

- Connecting vulnerable people to services and opportunities that can increase their resilience to violent extremism.
- Connecting people across dividing lines (whether ethnic, political, religious, or any other dividing issue) to engage in dialogue and build mutual respect and understanding.
- Building the skills of vulnerable people to enable them to find employment or become entrepreneurs.
- Raising awareness about the threat of radicalization and violent extremism.

*If not handled correctly, tech-based platforms may also create suspicions that these tools are used for monitoring by security forces.*

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- Creating and sharing positive narratives to counter or undermine the appeal of violent extremism.
- Empowering organizations or individuals to better engage in countering violent extremism through building knowledge and skills about violent extremism and efforts to address it.

This list of goals is not exclusive, and programs may include more than one goal. But defining goals according to local needs and vulnerabilities and then searching for methods of achieving them (whether those methods include technology or not) may be more effective than starting from a technology and deciding how it can be used to prevent or counter violent extremism, as it may limit a program's focus too closely on that technology.

### **What other goals would you add to this list?**

Once the goals are set and you begin to explore the approaches you can use to achieve them, you may ask whether current technology or new media platforms are sufficient (for example, whether it is possible to create spaces on platforms that youth are already using, such as Facebook or WhatsApp groups) or whether it would be best to create new platforms or tools.

These decisions should be guided by research on the drivers of violent extremism as well as “market research” on what tools your target audience uses and has access to. For example, do the vulnerable youth you wish to engage even have access to the internet or phones that can run mobile apps? Are SMS messages or data packages too expensive for your target audience?

### **Good practices on using social media in narrative campaigns**

Social media has great reach in many communities, particularly with youth. Online platforms and social media may also provide better tools for getting messages and narratives to specific individuals or groups of people. When incorporating social media and other online platforms into your programming, there are a number of special factors to consider because of their unique nature. For example, the kinds of platforms people use can be highly context specific. Therefore, it might be helpful to ask the following questions:

*What are the most popular social networking websites and apps in your area? Does the vulnerable community you want to reach out to and connect with on the same platforms, or do they prefer others? If so, why?*

### **Social media in Central Asia**

Central Asians use many of the same popular social media sites and messaging applications, but Russian social media influence and local software developers means that Central Asians also use many unique tools to interact and communicate. For example, VK (originally VKontakte) is the largest European social media network, second only to Facebook, and is based in St. Petersburg, Russia. *Odnoklassniki* (“Classmates” in Russian) is another popular site as well as *Moi Mir* (“My World”) and Mail.ru. Local social networking websites include Uzbekistan’s Muloqot.uz, Davra.uz, and dozens of other government-sponsored networking sites. In Kazakhstan, a government-backed group of developers launched the iTys messaging app in 2014.

Therefore, local and international practitioners should take special care when developing programs in the online space to best reach their target audiences. This would include research as to what platforms the target audience uses most.

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## Additional considerations include the following:

**Targeting your audience:** Because social media platforms allow you to reach specific users with targeted ads or through others sharing your messages, it is helpful to consider how you can finely tune your outreach. Simply sharing posts on social media or uploading a video are unlikely to reach those outside of your own circle. You may decide to use a different platform or target your messages differently, such as using a social media platform's targeted advertising tool to have it reach specific audiences.

**Use photographs or videos to grab interest:** Social media is a very visual platform, so users are less likely to stop and pay attention to a post that is only filled with text. Including an interesting photograph or video can be enough to get a user to stop and spend the time reading or interacting with your message.

**Limit yourself to only one short message per post:** Social media users are less likely to read long posts or watch long videos, so keep online posts and videos short (ideally from one to three minutes) and limited to making one clear point. You can always share another idea later or direct

users to more information.

**Use hashtags to build a broader campaign:** Many social media platforms use “hashtags” (#) to organize and group posts by different people. If used correctly, hashtags can invite other social media users to create their own messages that are in line with your core message. For example, #NotInMyName was a campaign by British Muslims to individually stand against ISIL's violence and ideas. In Australia, #IllRideWithYou allowed people to announce that they were allies to Muslims in their community and offer their support when they feared anti-Muslim violence on public transit. The English #DaeshLiesExposed and Arabic #أكاذيب\_داعش\_تفضح campaign offered facts and stories that exposed the falsehoods in ISIL propaganda.

**Call your audience to action and link technology with programming and interactions:** Like most good messaging or awareness-raising campaigns, regardless whether they are online or offline, social media and online campaigns should include an inspiring call to action. This can be something as simple as how you want them to engage or interact in your campaign, whether it is something offline like visiting a new local resource center

or online like subscribing to your social media accounts or sharing the post.<sup>213</sup>

**Engage with those that interact with your posts:** In some cases, it may be important to engage with social media users who interact or share your posts. For example, you may get questions asking for more information or receive an idea. Engaging with these people can help to increase their interest or interaction, even if it is just a kind thank you to someone who shares your content. Sometimes, it may be best to ignore interactions, such as harsh criticism or someone who wants to engage in a debate. It is also important that you develop a strategy on what to do when you are contacted or threatened. A common failing in online campaigns is this lack of engagement. Violent extremist groups like ISIL have demonstrated skill in this and have reached out and even recruited social media users who share or interact with their content.

### ***Overall good practices and lessons learned on using technology***

In summary, Hedayah has compiled the following list of international good practices and lessons learned on using technology in countering violent

<sup>213</sup> Henry Tuck and Tanya Silverman, “The Counter-Narrative Handbook” (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, June 2016), 37.

# 9.2

extremism programming, which have been adapted for this handbook:

**Nothing beats reality:** Recognize that counter-narratives alone are not the solution to preventing radicalization and recruitment. Address multiple layers of push and pull factors (such as economic, political, religious, and ideological).

**Communication is only one part of the solution:** Integrate countering violent extremism communications approaches (such as positive narratives) into the broader counter-terrorism strategies and policies. Engage in government strategic communications about policies such as the national strategies or national action plans for counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism.

**Engage in a multi-faceted approach:** This would include a variety of approaches such as removing violent extremist content, countering misinformation, communicating your own message, and making youth more resilient through activities and education. These positive narratives, even in everyday indirect messaging such as policies, actions, and political statements by governments, can be influential in shaping

narratives.

**Engage in a whole of society approach:**

This would include encouraging government institutions, civil society, and the private sector as well as local actors. Many innovative solutions and approaches have been developed at the grassroots level, especially by youth.

**Ensure consistency and coordination:**

Coordinate efforts to ensure that messages are not contradicting each other and build on existing efforts. This would also mean aligning messages with actions to build consistent narratives.<sup>214</sup>

## 9.2.2 Examples of projects and initiatives that leverage technology

This section offers a number of examples of projects or tech tools in the field of countering violent extremism. They can generally be sorted into two main categories based on their target audience and goals: 1) tools and projects to assist practitioners and software developers engage in countering violent extremism more effectively and 2) tools to build individual and community resilience to violent extremism. These examples

are meant to provide inspiration and serve as case studies that allow for an exploration of the good practices and lessons learned above.

### *Technology tools and platforms for countering violent extremism*

#### **Tech Against Terrorism**

Since technology can be used both to enable and counter violent extremism, it is important to make platforms more resilient to their use by violent extremists. **Tech Against Terrorism** is a United Nations-mandated initiative with the mission of “supporting the tech industry tackle terrorist exploitation of the internet, whilst respecting human rights.”<sup>215</sup> It supports knowledge sharing and supports tech startups and small tech companies in preventing their platforms from being exploited by violent extremists. It is also designing new tools to assist large and small companies in these efforts.

<sup>214</sup> Adapted from Wedad al Hassen, [https://twitter.com/Hedayah\\_CVE/status/993412884641218560](https://twitter.com/Hedayah_CVE/status/993412884641218560). [English]

<sup>215</sup> <https://www.techagainstterrorism.org/>

# 9.2

## United Nations Development Programme's Africa Toolkit

Following their *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment* research report, the United Nations Development Programme partnered with Albany Associates to create a mobile app to help practitioners launch their own positive narrative campaigns to prevent and counter violent extremism. The app includes “a practical, step-by-step, guide on strategic and communications elements – from basic concepts of narrative to campaign planning; and incorporates a number of case studies, tips, templates and online resources.”<sup>216</sup>

### Monitoring and evaluation

A number of online platforms and tech tools have also been produced that help practitioners in the design, monitoring, and evaluation of countering violent extremism programming. A number of examples are provided in the following module.

### **Tools and initiatives to build individual and community resilience to violent extremism**

## Virtual Exchange

Virtual Exchange is a concrete example of the use of technology and online tools to bridge divides and prevent violent extremism. For over a decade, **Soliya** has been utilizing the Exchange Portal, a technology platform specifically designed to connect people in facilitated small-group dialogue. Soliya's Connect Program has aimed to build intercultural and interreligious understandings specifically between predominantly Muslim societies and “Western” societies by bringing together young people from these regions to engage in sustained conversations, collaborations, and exchange. Soliya also provides a United Nations-certified facilitation training to support and train young leaders to facilitate these virtual exchanges themselves and use these skills in their own communities.

Search for Common Ground, in partnership with Soliya and other organisations, is leading a consortium implementing the **Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange** project launched by the European Commission in 2018 as part of its Erasmus+ program. This initiative offers an accessible, ground-breaking way for young people to

engage in intercultural learning as part of their formal or non-formal education, through facilitated online people-to-people interactions. Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities teach young people how to constructively engage with difference and build critical modern skills such as self- and global-awareness, empathy, critical thinking, as well as media and digital literacy. This, in turn, aims at helping them succeed in a globalising world and enhancing their resilience to discrimination and indoctrination. One of the project's policy objectives is directly linked to the Paris Declaration, agreed at the informal meeting of European Union education ministers in March 2015, to promote citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance, and non-discrimination through education. Watch Video 23 on the next page for a brief overview of the new virtual exchange program:

<sup>216</sup> “UNDP Launches Mobile Application to Help Design Campaigns to Prevent Violent Extremism,” United Nations Development Programme, April 19, 2018, <http://www.africa.undp.org/content/rba/en/home/presscenter/articles/2018/undp-launches-mobile-application-to-help-design-campaigns-to-pre.html>. [English]

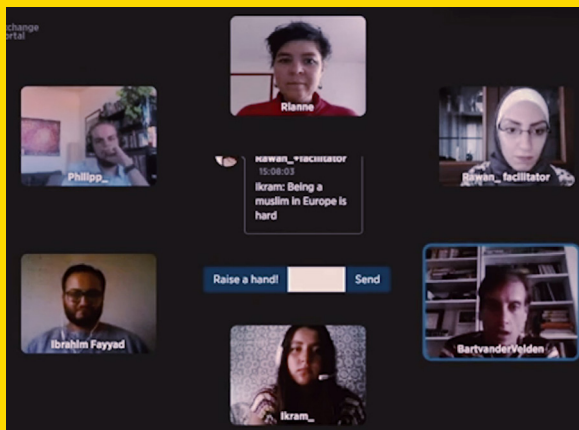


## 9.2



## VIDEO 23

## Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Trailer



By: [Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange](#)<sup>217</sup>

Original Link:

<https://youtu.be/DSW7kleimF0>

Downloadable Link:

The video can be downloaded [here](#).

Russian Subtitles:

**Advanced**

(recommended for use with downloaded versions)

**Basic**

(recommended for use with YouTube)

Instructions on using these subtitles are available [here](#).

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. How might building understandings between people in Western and Muslim-majority countries increase resilience to violent extremism in both areas? (Think about the forms of violent extremism that are prevalent in Europe, for example, and what they oppose.)
2. What are the other specific benefits that this program can offer participants?

<sup>217</sup> View other videos about the program by going to their YouTube channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGSdhrHIzQN2Y4t7yla2pYg> [English]

# 9.2

## Youth Innovation Labs

A common countering violent extremism initiative is to gather and train youth to design tech-based tools or projects to prevent and counter violent extremism. The Institute for Strategic Dialogue's Youth Innovation Labs are an example of this "hackathon" style event, which specifically engages youth to develop initiatives to create counter narratives against violent extremism. In these workshops, youth come together and combine skills to create messaging campaigns that use social media platforms (their guide can be found in the 9.5 Further Learning Opportunities section below).<sup>218</sup>

Another example of this kind of approach would be UNESCO's **Youth Mobile** program that trained "young people with the high-level skills and confidence to develop, promote, and sell locally relevant mobile apps that solve local issues of sustainable development and provide employment" as well as conflict and peacebuilding.<sup>219</sup>

Youth organizations have even sponsored these events themselves. For example, one youth-led organization in Pakistan reported the first "peace hackathon" in the country, where they "gathered civil society organizations and young people and did dialogue on countering violent extremism and peace. [They] gave [a] chance to the youth to build their ideas and to present their ideas to judges."<sup>220</sup>

In another example, EdVenture Partners and the United States Department of State co-hosted the Facebook-supported Peer-to-Peer: Challenging Extremism competition in 2015, which provided a platform for 23 universities from around the world to showcase their initiatives and innovative tech tools for countering violent extremism. Watch the following video for a brief overview of the competition and the top three projects:



<sup>218</sup> For a video on one of these events, see <https://youtu.be/HEMEn3En54c> [English].

<sup>219</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/youthmobile>

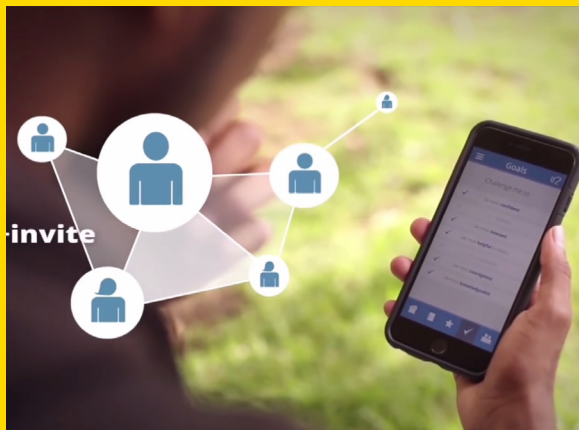
<sup>220</sup> Rashmi Thapa, "Mapping a Sector: Bridging the Evidence Gap on Youth-Driven Peacebuilding" (The Hague, The Netherlands: UNOY Peacebuilders and Search for Common Ground, 2017), 25.

## 9.2



## VIDEO 24

## Peer-to-Peer: Challenging Extremism 2015



By: [United States of America's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs \(Department of State\)](#)

**Original Link:**  
<https://youtu.be/cCrDOSsDbt8>

**Downloadable Link:**  
The video can be downloaded [here](#).

**Russian Subtitles:**

**Advanced**  
(recommended for use with downloaded versions)

**Basic**  
(recommended for use with YouTube)

Instructions on using these subtitles are available [here](#).

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Engagement with the teams occurred over an entire semester and ended with the competition. How can it be beneficial to sponsor a "hackathon" style event and to bring people together like this?
2. The projects and initiatives featured in the video involve technology. In what ways are they adaptable to different contexts, and in what ways might they need to be adapted for each context?
3. Further funding was made available for projects deemed to be the best. Is this a good incentive for projects? Why or why not? 🌐

## 9.3

# What are the risks or challenges to using new media and technology?

The decision to create a new tool or platform can be a risky and expensive decision for a variety of factors. Tech tools and platforms can be expensive and difficult to develop. They may (depending on need) require specific aspects to be most successful including an engaging and user-friendly development, specialized moderators to manage the platforms, and/or longer-term commitments to keep the platforms active. Therefore, deciding to launch a new tool or platform should be considered carefully:


- Are there enough resources to see the development through to completion?
- Will there be enough resources after the development phase to ensure that it is marketed and that the tool or platform is managed and sustained?

Technology and social media tools can also run the risk of not reaching the right audience if their design was not informed by adequate research. Many vulnerable communities may have different levels of access than others in their context. 🌐




# 9.4 Key Takeaways


This module reviewed how violent extremists have used technology and social media to further their goals as well as how these same tools can be used to counter violent extremism. It explored a number of good practices on using technology and social media as well as a number of examples from around the world. Some of the most important takeaways from this module include:


 **New media and technology are more likely to facilitate radicalization and violent extremism than to drive it.**

While it is unlikely that new media and technology are the sole factors in a person's radicalization process, it is important to counter violent extremist content and safeguard technology and online tools from being exploited by violent extremists.

 **Using new media and technology in countering violent extremism programming can expand reach and inspire change.**

When connected to clear goals, whether to facilitate activities, share or gather information and learning, and so forth, new media and technology can be important and effective tools.

 **New media and technology cannot replace reality when countering violent extremism.**  
Although these tools provide additional options and approaches to countering violent extremism, they may not be effective alone and should be partnered with other activities to strengthen their impact.

 **Creating new platforms (versus using or creating spaces on established platforms) can be difficult and costly but can also be effective.**  
Indeed, new platforms can meet needs that have not been addressed or enable new approaches to address key problems. Training and enabling youth to develop them has also been helpful in engaging youth in countering violent extremism while offering them opportunities to develop marketable skills.

## 9.5

## Further Learning Opportunities

- » *Youth and Violent Extremism on Social Media: Mapping the Research (Summary)* by Séraphin Alava, Divina Frau-Meigs, and Ghayda Hassan with the collaboration of Hasna Hussein and Yuanyuan Wei (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) [\[English\]](#)  
Full version here: [\[English\]](#)
  - » *International Conference on Youth and Information and Communication Technologies - Preventing Violent Extremism in Cyberspace* (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) [\[English\]](#)
  - » *Digitally-Enabled Peace and Security: Reflections for the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda* by Raouf Farrah, John de Boer and Robert Muggah (SecDev Group) [\[English\]](#)
  - » *Role of Youth in Peace Building via New Media: A Study on Use of New Media by Youth for Peace Building Tasks* by Sumit Narula (Journal of Mass Communication & Journalism) [\[English\]](#)
  - » *Youth Innovation Labs: A Model for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism* by Dr. Erin Marie Saltman, Moli Dow and Kelsey Bjornsgaard (Institute for Strategic Development) [\[English\]](#)
  - » *The Use of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes* (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)
  - » *Promoting Online Voices to Counter Violent Extremism* by Todd C. Helmus, Erin York, and Peter Chalk (RAND Corporation) [\[English\]](#)
  - » *Using Social Media to Communicate against Violent Extremism* (Australian Government) [\[English\]](#)
- Download additional resources (in English) that explore violent extremist groups' use of the internet and technology [here](#).

# MODULE 10.0

## Monitoring and Evaluation of Efforts in Response to Violent Extremism

This module introduces the basics of monitoring and evaluation, including definitions of important terms, and guidelines for developing a theory of change and a monitoring and evaluation strategy. It offers examples of how ongoing monitoring can strengthen initiatives while ensuring continuous learning and adapting to the shifts in context. This module briefly reviews a number of practical frameworks, tools, methodologies, and indicators that might be adaptable for their context.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 10.1 What are the components of monitoring and evaluation and why are they important for programming?
- 10.2 How is the monitoring and evaluation of countering violent extremism programming challenging?
- 10.3 What insights can be gained from other fields to help overcome these challenges?
- 10.4 What are the good practices in monitoring and evaluating countering violent extremism programs?

## 10.1

# What are the components of monitoring and evaluation and why are they important for programming?

This handbook has presented a number of guidelines and good practices to developing countering violent extremism policies and programs. However, how would practitioners, researchers, donors, and the public know that a specific initiative is working well? How would they know that the initiative is reaching the right target group? Can they know if both men and women are being reached similarly and whether they experience the same effectiveness? How could they monitor for unintended consequences that may cause risks that can harm beneficiaries, communities, and the public? The effective design, monitoring, and evaluation of these programs and policies will provide the insights to help answer these questions. Monitoring and evaluation are defined below:

- >> **Monitoring** is a process of “data collection throughout the duration of the program to assess indicators along the way and make appropriate changes if necessary.”<sup>221</sup>
- >> **Evaluation** is “a systematic assessment of a program to determine its impact and effectiveness based on benchmarks, standards, and goals.”<sup>222</sup>

Monitoring and evaluation allows practitioners to make adjustments to improve the implementation of programming, understand whether the initiatives were successful, and demonstrate to others that different approaches are necessary.

In the most basic terms, these two efforts begin with the **design** of a program or policy, which should plan for the time and manner in which the monitoring and evaluation should happen and set aside the resources needed. The design should also set up a framework on how the implementers will **measure** the work and accomplishments of the program or policy. The design of a monitoring and evaluation framework includes:

- articulating the **theory of change** or logical framework that the project, program, or policy will follow (see section 10.1.1 below for an explanation of the theory of change),
- setting good goals, objectives, and activities,
- identifying how implementers will measure the degree of achievement of objectives and accomplishment of the activities,

- planning for the time and manner in which the monitoring and evaluation should happen,
- and setting aside the resources needed for monitoring and evaluation.

Of course, planning must change depending on the level being analyzed, which can make this process complicated. For example, evaluating a specific training on dialogue facilitation is different than monitoring the number of successful dialogues (and how many men and women participated). These efforts would also be different than evaluating the effect the program’s numerous dialogues in a specific community had on the relationship between the citizens and the police. Therefore, it is important to separate these different levels in a program into separate terms, which we will refer to as **outputs, outcomes, and impact**. In the section below, we will define these terms as well as other important components of a countering violent extremism monitoring and evaluation framework.

- >> **Outputs** are measurable products (usually recorded as a number) of a program’s activities or services and are often recorded measures

<sup>221</sup> Cristina Mattei and Sara Zeiger, “Evaluate Your Countering Violent Extremism Results: Projecting Your Impact” (Hedayah, July 2018), 7.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.



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*in terms of units completed.*<sup>223</sup>

Outputs are the most immediate results of programs and are the results of specific activities or services. Examples would include:

- Counselling and mentoring provided to vulnerable youth
- Grassroots projects are funded and supported technically
- An awareness campaign for community leaders to prevent radicalization is designed

From this list of examples, you may already begin to see how you might plan how to measure these outputs, such as logs provided by counsellors and mentors, contracts and reports from grassroots projects, and a strategy document for the awareness campaign.

But why would a specific project choose to include these activities or services? Countering violent extremism programs include particular activities or services because they are thought to lead to particular improvements in people, communities, or systems that are needed in that particular context for those particular people.

These “improvements” can otherwise be thought of as the results of outputs and are described as outcomes:

**>> Outcomes** *are any results of program activities or services (usually recorded qualitatively) and are often expressed in terms of changes in behavior or attitudes.*<sup>224</sup>

Outcomes can be intended or unintended or result directly or indirectly from your activities. They can also be positive or negative as well, meaning that not all outcomes are “improvements.” Instead, there may be unfortunate deteriorations in local conditions. For example, you may find that your training of a police division in community-oriented policing tactics and public relations results in that division being used to control protests in the city. Looking out for both intended and unintended outcomes (for better or worse) is a good example of a Do No Harm approach, which can help you to adjust programming as necessary or to seize on new opportunities. Examples of intended outcomes would include:

- Disengaged members have not re-joined violent extremist groups after 6 months of

receiving support

- Communities increasingly trust the local government and believe that it represents their interests
- Family members that are concerned about the potential radicalization of a relative request support

Looking again at this list of examples, would you think that they are exclusive, or could they even be part of the same project? Are they the central aim of the program? Certainly, a program may have multiple outcomes that complement and build on each other. However, they all work towards a longer-term goal that would be central to the program. For example, the outcome of improved perceptions of the local government could be intended to improve relationships between citizens and local leaders, increase collaboration on specific topics, and (if poor relationships were determined to be a driver of violent extremism) counter the narratives and dynamics that drive radicalization. The long-term result of a program’s outcomes is called its impact.

<sup>223</sup> Adapted from Mattei and Zeiger, “Evaluate Your Countering Violent Extremism Results,” 8.

<sup>224</sup> Adapted from Mattei and Zeiger, “Evaluate Your Countering Violent Extremism Results,” 7.

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>> **Impact** is “the measurable effect or change a program has on the target population [and] can be intended or unintended, direct or indirect.”<sup>225</sup>

Often, a program’s stated central goal is its intended impact. However, programs and policies can also end up having an impact that is not intended. The impact may be assisted or shifted by other factors, such as changing circumstances or the influence of other programs or a new government policy, for example, when the outcomes intersect. The most common intended impact in countering violent extremism programs and policies is “greater individual or community resilience to violent extremism” or “a reduction of violent extremist support or attacks.” Often, a program’s intended impact is set by donors when they offer opportunities for funding or by governments when they establish an action plan or strategy. Therefore, it may be helpful in those cases to set your own shorter-term impact.

As shown in each definition, every level of a monitoring and evaluation—whether outputs, outcomes, or impact—requires measurement

of some kind to demonstrate results. These measurements must be specifically designed for each intended result at every level. These measurements are known as indicators.

>> **Indicators** are measurements of types and processes of change, such as attitudes, behaviors, and relationships.<sup>226</sup>

A project’s outputs, outcomes, and impact can all be measured by indicators (see section 10.4.2 below for guidance on developing good indicators).

## 10.1.1 The theory of change

These different levels of monitoring and evaluation may be confusing, and it may be difficult to keep track of what actions or changes are likely to lead to which result. Therefore, practitioners use a framework called a theory of change to map out these changes:

>> **A theory of change** is an explanation of the causal links from activities to the intended outputs, to subsequent outcomes, and finally to the intended impact.

Theories of change are often depicted in logical

models or as a clear statement.

There are many ways to create a theory of change, but one of the simplest is to write a sentence or short paragraph that begin with “if.” An example of a theory of change structure would be:

1. **If** something changes or occurs (*outcomes*)
2. **then** the intended impact will happen (*impact*)
3. **because** they are linked in this way. (*causal link*)

Written differently for countering violent extremism programming: **If** (outcomes) are achieved, **then** (the impact) will happen **because** (they reduce or eliminate these drivers of violent extremism/these outcomes build resilience to violent extremism).

Let us look at a few examples. The first two are theories of change about countering violent extremism programming that Alliance for Peacebuilding evaluated. They can be adapted in a number of contexts and programs:

**If** at-risk [vulnerable] youth feel empowered and capable of making a

<sup>225</sup> Mattei and Zeiger, “Evaluate Your Countering Violent Extremism Results,” 7.

<sup>226</sup> This definition was adopted from Hedayah.

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difference in their communities through peaceful mechanisms, **then** they will be less inclined to support and/or engage in violent extremism.<sup>227</sup>

**If** members of distinct groups have opportunities to discuss their perspectives and strategies for forging relationships with one another, [**then**] they will be more tolerant of one another and be less likely to support violent extremism based on gaining power over other identity groups.<sup>228</sup>

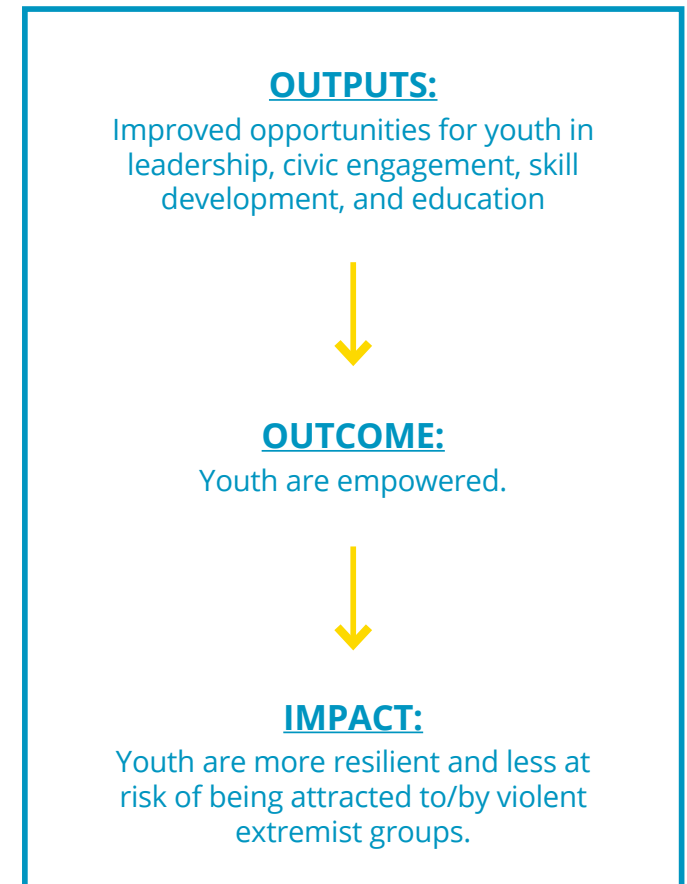
*These two theories of change do not have a “because” section at the end that explains why the outcomes are likely to lead to the intended impact. Can you write what they could be?*

Finally, this last example is a theory of change from a large countering violent extremism project that was implemented in Kenya. It is in a different format but covers the same three categories while including some of the program’s outputs:

The [youth] program is intended to empower youth by improving opportunities for leadership, civic engagement, skill development and education (including English language training for [students in religious schools] to allow them to better integrate into Kenyan society). Empowered youth are more resilient and less at risk of being attracted to/by violent extremist groups.<sup>229</sup>

*Can you rewrite this theory of change into a sentence with an if, then, and because?*

The process described in a theory of change can also be visually laid out in what is called a logical framework (or a logical model). The simple logical model below illustrates the theory of change above:



<sup>227</sup> Emily Myers and Elizabeth Hume, “Peacebuilding Approaches to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: Assessing the Evidence for Key Theories of Change” (Washington, DC: Alliance for Peacebuilding, 2018), 7. Emphasis added.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 9. Emphasis added.

<sup>229</sup> Lynn Carter and Phyllis Dininio, “An Inventory and Review of Countering Violent Extremism and Insurgency Monitoring Systems” (United States Agency for International Development, December 10, 2012), 5.

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A more elaborate logical framework would include the indicators as well.

Now that this section has introduced you to the basics of a monitoring and evaluation framework, the following sections will review what makes these efforts challenging in the countering violent extremism field, how other fields have addressed many of these same challenges, and finally some good practices on monitoring and evaluation. 🌐



## 10.2

## How is the monitoring and evaluation of countering violent extremism programming challenging?

*Do you believe that the monitoring and evaluation of countering violent extremism efforts have been sufficient to build an evidence base of what works well in your context? Why or why not? How can you find out?*

The monitoring and evaluation of countering violent extremism programs and policies is frequently criticized for being lacking. Sometimes their conclusions are also criticized for not being based on enough evidence to determine whether projects are successful and not doing harm in the target communities. These are not intentional but are the results of a number of factors that make monitoring and evaluating these kinds of efforts very challenging:

- Monitoring and evaluation can be costly, meaning that smaller organizations may not be able to do it.
- Monitoring and evaluation are also technical and require training and skill (often by staff or outside agencies devoted to it).
- Programs are not always labeled as “countering violent extremism” in order to bring in beneficiaries, making it more difficult to explore the links between outcomes and the intended impact.
- Programs often have many outputs, which makes it difficult to connect specific outputs to specific outcomes and impact. This is in consideration of the fact that factors external to the programs may also influence the outcomes and impact, especially since there are often blurred boundaries between countering violent extremism and other fields of practice.
- In a related manner, change is a dynamic and rarely linear process, especially in context affected by conflict and violent extremism. These dynamic changes may clash with monitoring tools and logical models that are less flexible.
- Change may also take a long time over many projects to be seen, while many countering violent extremism programs are more short-term.
- Further on this point, the design of programs may not be flexible enough to respond to a changing context or to seize on new opportunities. If programs do change, the monitoring and evaluation of it must also be flexible and adaptable as well.
- Countering violent extremism is concerned with behavioral and attitudinal changes, which are not easy to measure (whether by observing from outside or by asking beneficiaries themselves).
- Violent extremism is a sensitive topic, making it difficult to make inquiries about. Beneficiaries and community members may perceive questions about these kinds of topics to be part of an intelligence gathering process.
- Violent extremism is relatively rare, so it is difficult to observe changes of already small samples of individuals or events.

*What other challenges would you add to this list?* 🌐

## 10.3

## What insights can be gained from other fields to help overcome these challenges?

The list of factors above that make monitoring and evaluating countering violent extremism efforts challenging is not exclusive to this field. Indeed, the belief that countering violent extremism is something so unique that it should not build on the learning from other fields is a pitfall that can lead to practitioners and researchers to miss the opportunities of building on the lessons learned from other fields. For example, the long-running crime prevention field has a number of lessons have been learned that can be applied to the countering violent extremism field, such as the benefits of collaborative, non-securitized approaches to resolve local issues and how to evaluate them. Indeed, monitoring and evaluation processes have been heavily influenced by the development field, such as the need to embed these processes into a program from the early design.<sup>230</sup>

Other fields have also struggled with the so-called “prevention challenge” that states that

it is impossible to prove that certain actions (like radicalization and recruitment) have been prevented.<sup>231</sup> However, the fields of peacebuilding and conflict resolution have also been helpful in providing a number of practical remedies to some of these challenges. For example, the evaluation of those programs often requires a more flexible framework to understand how external factors influence the broader context (or conflict system). This could even be through the inclusion of special indicators called **context indicators** that monitor the “key changes in the context in which a project is operating relating to [countering violent extremism] dynamics identified which could impact the project’s performance or represent new opportunities.”<sup>232</sup> This can be particularly helpful when there is a need to think more broadly about the problem of violent extremism to focus on more than violent extremist groups themselves, including evaluating changes in other armed groups,

*The belief that countering violent extremism is something so unique that it should not build on the learning from other fields is a pitfall that can lead to practitioners and researchers to miss the opportunities of building on the lessons learned from other fields.*

<sup>230</sup> Laura Dawson, Charlie Edwards, and Calum Jeffray, “Learning and Adapting: The Use of Monitoring and Evaluation in Countering Violent Extremism” (London: Royal United Services Institute, 2014), 87.

<sup>231</sup> Lillie Ris and Anita Ernstorfer, “Borrowing a Wheel: Applying Existing Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation Strategies to Emerging Programming Approaches to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism,” Briefing Paper (Peacebuilding Evaluation Consortium, 2017), 4.

<sup>232</sup> Lucy Holdaway and Ruth Simpson, “Improving the Impact of Preventing Violent Extremism Programming: A Toolkit for Design, Monitoring and Evaluation” (International Alert and United Nations Development Programme, March 2018), 67.

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community dynamics, and even the “violent political agendas that certain governments might themselves be promoting” that can drive or influence the radicalization process.<sup>233</sup>

Another useful tool from peacebuilding and other fields of practice is the **proxy indicator**, which is a special kind of indicator that better allows for the evaluation of difficult-to-measure changes, such as when they are complex or based on beliefs and attitudes. A proxy indicator would observe related signs (although indirect) that complex or difficult-to-measure changes have taken place. For example, potential proxy indicators that might be helpful in providing evidence of a positive change in a complex issue like marginalization can include:

- An increase in the number of members in the target (marginalized) community that say that the local government listens to and represents their interests.
- An increase in voter turnout in elections, especially compared to neighboring (“not marginalized”) communities.

- An increase in the number of formal and informal youth-led civil society organizations based in the target community.

*What other potential indicators of a change in marginalization would you recommend that would be applicable to your context?*

*How could you gather the information needed to measure this change? 🌐*



<sup>233</sup> Ris and Ernstorfer, “Borrowing a Wheel,” 4.

## 10.4

## What are the good practices in monitoring and evaluating countering violent extremism programs?

While this module has explored some of the major issues and unique considerations surrounding the monitoring and evaluation of countering violent extremism, it is beyond the scope of this handbook to cover all of the complexities of these efforts. However, please see a selection of resources (many of which are available in Russian!) that will help in the 10.6 Further Learning Opportunities section below.

#### Technology platforms to aid the monitoring and evaluation process

There are also a number of online and tech tools that have been developed to assist in efforts to monitor and evaluate these kinds of programs and policies:

**MASAR:** MASAR is a smartphone, tablet, and desktop application to assist practitioners in creating a plan for the monitoring and evaluation of countering violent extremism programs and projects. The application walks a user through a thorough thought process that helps to facilitate program design. It collects information about your program and makes recommendations for resources that may support the development of goals and objectives, indicators, data collection methods, and a final evaluation. MASAR also

provides smart guidance on terminology related to monitoring and evaluation, with options to link to resources that explain those terms in more detail. Additionally, the application allows users to view available case studies and even to share their own program as a case study. Through using MASAR, users can generate a logical framework that easily displays all of the relevant outputs, outcomes, and impact of their countering violent extremism program.

MASAR was created by [Hedayah](#) and the [Royal United Services Institute](#) (RUSI) and developed by [21 Unicorns](#). MASAR was kindly supported by contributions from the Government of Canada.<sup>234</sup>

MASAR can be used online at <https://secure.masar.tech/> or the mobile application can be downloaded here:

**iOS:** <https://itunes.apple.com/ae/app/masar-app/id1347936215?mt=8>

**Android:** <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.hedayah.masar>

**DM&E for Peace:** Search for Common Ground manages the [DM&E for Peace](#) platform, in partnership with a variety of other organizations, which serves as a clearinghouse for researchers and practitioners to share their research and

evaluations on a variety of topics related to development, peace, and security—including violent extremism. The platform hosts regular webinars on new and innovative monitoring and evaluation practices as well as a number of other programs to encourage collaboration and innovation, including a mentoring program.

**DM&E for Peace is accessible here:** <http://www.dmeforpeace.org/> [English]

**IMPACT Europe Evaluation Toolkit:** IMPACT Europe developed an [online toolkit](#) for practitioners working in countering violent extremism. It includes a print manual and guides users through the platform's three main components: 1) an **Evaluation Guide** to assist in designing and conducting countering violent extremism evaluations; 2) an **Interventions Database** with many examples of projects and current practices in the field; and 3) a **Lessons Learned** section that provides evaluations from implemented countering violent extremism projects and reviews the lessons learned from them.

**IMPACT Europe's toolkit is accessible here:** <http://www.impact.itti.com.pl/index#/home> [English and French]

<sup>234</sup> Read more at <http://www.hedayahcenter.org/what-we-do/91/departments/98/research-and-analysis/914/masar>



# 10.4

While a full exploration of monitoring and evaluation cannot be covered here, this module will share some guidelines and good practices in monitoring and evaluating countering violent extremism efforts. These have been developed by Hedayah and are based on existing good practices in the field. They are also based on the principles that the monitoring, measurement, and evaluation of countering violent extremism programs should be:

1. **Objectives-Led:** As with any good evaluation, the assessment should be *related to/derived from* the goals and objectives of the project or program.
2. **Useable:** The assessment is not an end in itself—the results should *enable decision-making* for the project or program.
3. **Achievable:** The assessment itself should not be designed in a way that the *results can be delivered*, despite the challenges of the operational environment. This is particularly important when developing key indicators and ways to measure those indicators.
4. **Valid:** Assessment design and evaluation

should be based on **high-quality data and analysis**.<sup>235</sup>

## 10.4.1 Steps to developing a logical model for programs

Previously, this module defined the concept of a theory of change and explained its role in the design, monitoring, and evaluation of countering violent extremism efforts. The following steps are helpful in developing a theory of change or the more elaborate logical model and using that framework to monitor and evaluate a program:

1. Identify the problem or need that you want to address with your program and the target group or groups that you would need to reach with your program.
2. Develop a theory of change on how the problem or need may be addressed effectively.
3. Define the activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact.
4. Determine the key indicators and measures of success based on the goals and objectives.

5. Determine the tools and collection methods that will be used to obtain the desired information and what human, financial, and technical resources you will need to accomplish it.
6. Determine whether staff have all of the appropriate capacity to use those collection methods and tools to measure the key indicators.
7. As the program begins and when it ends, assess the results on the basis of the data collected, distinguishing in terms of outputs, outcomes, and impact.<sup>236</sup>

## 10.4.2 Developing appropriate indicators

This module defined what indicators are and how they can be used to monitor and evaluate programs, as well as many of the different kinds of indicators and what they observe:

- Performance indicators that are used to measure a program's performance against the intended results and goals at the output, outcome, and impact levels.

<sup>235</sup> Mattei and Zeiger, "Evaluate Your Countering Violent Extremism Results," 5. Emphasis in original.

<sup>236</sup> Adapted from Mattei and Zeiger, "Evaluate Your Countering Violent Extremism Results," 9.

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- Process indicators that measure the quality of processes rather than results of an action and are useful in interrogating the quality of a change, not only that it occurred.
- Context indicators that monitor the key changes in the context in which a project is operating relating to countering violent extremism dynamics identified which could impact the project's performance or represent new opportunities.
- Proxy indicators that observe related (although indirect) signs that complex or difficult-to-measure changes have taken place.

*Can you list some ideas of each kind of indicator that you would like to see accomplished in your context? Why do you think these changes are important?*

Regardless of what kinds of indicators are chosen to monitor and evaluate a project, the most relevant indicators (often called key indicators) should be:

1. Mapped to the goals and objectives of the program or project.
2. Meaningful (i.e. capture the goal and

objective) to the program or project.

3. Measureable based on available data and what is important to the program or project.
4. Culturally and locally relevant to the program or project.
5. Sensitive to change.
6. Time and geographically bound.
7. Comprehensive to the goals and objectives, if possible.
8. Cost and time efficient to measure based on resources available.<sup>237</sup>

However, indicators are not the only way to monitor and evaluate a project. As mentioned above, a variety of tools can be used including: reports, in-person visits, a review of media and community responses to activities, interviews, focus group discussions, and so much more. While the numbers and figures from indicators (acknowledging that not all indicators are measured by numbers) are helpful in monitoring and evaluating a project, these processes are more effective when they are connected and validated to more qualitative efforts. For example, having in-depth discussion with,

for example, a number of police officers on a community dialogue program can help uncover things like why police officers did not attend the meetings frequently or how the program affected their work in other areas. Focus groups with participants from the community, both before and after the activities begin, can uncover how public perceptions may have changed or what helped participants felt safe to speak openly to members of the police forces. This kind of qualitative information can be crucial to the successful monitoring and evaluation of countering violent extremism projects.

Finally, this module will conclude with a number of good practices to the design, monitoring, and evaluation of countering violent extremism efforts:

- Begin the design process with the identification of the community's needs and the context.
- Be conflict sensitive and include a Do No Harm approach in all levels.
- Incorporate gender in every part of the monitoring and evaluation process (which includes disaggregating the indicators by

<sup>237</sup> Mattei and Zeiger, "Evaluate Your Countering Violent Extremism Results," 24.

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gender). This allows for the observation of whether activities or services are reaching both men and women and how men and women are impacted by them differently.

- Allow for flexibility in design, monitoring, and evaluation to pursue new opportunities that arise or to adapt in ways that avoid risks.
  - Clearly outline your theory of change and revisit it frequently to maintain a focus on the program's goals.
  - Make evaluations go beyond the measuring of outputs, outcomes, and impact to assess if the theory of change is valid based on the results.
  - Use local researchers or organizations in the monitoring and evaluation process that understand the context fully, speak the local language, have better access to participants and partners, and understand the countering violent extremism field.
  - Frame the questions broadly to allow for the gathering of insights (perhaps even some that you were not intentionally looking for) that give you the fullest picture of the outcomes and impact of your program.
- Since violent extremism is a sensitive topic, safeguard the data from your monitoring and evaluation activities.
  - Engage multiple stakeholders such as governments, donors, local researchers, and program partners in the design of the monitoring and evaluation process.
  - Share the results of your learning to help others learn about what works or does not work in a given context. 🌐




# 10.5 Key Takeaways

This module introduced the basics of monitoring and evaluating, especially in regards to countering violent extremism programming. It explored a number of factors that make monitoring and evaluating these kinds of programs challenging. This module drew insights from other fields on ways these challenges can be overcome before reviewing a number of good practices and guidelines for successful monitoring and evaluation. Some of the most important takeaways include:


 **Monitoring and evaluation works to determine what approaches are effective in preventing and countering violent extremism.**

While there are many different goals of monitoring and evaluation, the most important goal is to determine what works most effectively. Theories of change and other monitoring and evaluation tools need to incorporate this to be most beneficial.


 **The complex and sensitive nature of countering violent extremism efforts make the monitoring and evaluation of them challenging, but not impossible.**

This includes the danger of violent extremism and

the reluctance people may have in talking about it, but also includes the difficulty in measuring changes in attitudes and beliefs as well as the difficulty in proving that an event did not occur (such as radicalization or recruitment) because of specific actions.

 **Other fields provide insights and lessons learned on how to overcome challenges to the monitoring and evaluation of countering violent extremism efforts.**

While unique, countering violent extremism is not so novel that it cannot build off of the lessons learned in other fields. Indeed, crime prevention, development, and peacebuilding provide a number of insights that have already strengthened the monitoring and evaluation of countering violent extremism efforts.

 **There is a variety of quantitative and qualitative ways to evaluate the effectiveness of countering violent extremism efforts.**

Many types of indicators can be used to monitor the implementation of programs and policies as well as to observe resulting changes or those from external factors. However, these indicators (often recorded as numbers) can be greatly supported by the gathering of qualitative information, such as from interviews or focus group discussions. Indeed, both types are needed.

## 10.6

## Further Learning Opportunities

- » *Evaluate Your Countering Violent Extremism Results: Projecting Your Impact* by Cristina Mattei and Sara Zeiger (Hedayah) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Program Evaluation Toolkit for Countering Violent Extremism* by Todd C. Helmus et al. (RAND Corporation) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Development and Pilot Test of the RAND Program Evaluation Toolkit for Countering Violent Extremism* by Sina Beaghley et al. (RAND Corporation) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Improving the Impact of Preventing Violent Extremism Programming: A Toolkit for Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation* by Lucy Holdaway and Ruth Simpson (International Alert) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Learning and Adapting: The Use of Monitoring and Evaluation in Countering Violent Extremism* by Laura Dawson, Charlie Edwards and Calum Jeffray (Royal United Services Institute) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Surveys and Countering Violent Extremism: A Practitioner's Guide* by Matthew Nanes and Bryony Lau (Asia Foundation) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Borrowing a Wheel: Applying Existing Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation Strategies to Emerging Programming Approaches to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism* by Lillie Ris and Anita Ernstorfer (CDA Collaborative Learning Projects) [\[English\]](#)

- » *Evaluating Countering Violent Extremism Programming: Practice and Progress* by Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Peter Romaniuk, and Rafia Barakat (Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Does Countering Violent Extremism Work? Lessons Learned from the Global Effort to Counter Violent Extremism* by Peter Romaniuk (Global Center on Cooperative Security) [\[English\]](#)
- » *The Counter Narrative Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook* by Louis Reynolds and Henry Tuck (Institute for Strategic Dialogue) [\[English\]](#)
- » *How to Measure the Impact of Your Online Counter or Alternative Narrative Campaign* (Radicalisation Awareness Network) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Countering Violent Extremism: Developing an Evidence-Base for Policy and Practice* by Sara Zeiger and Anne Aly (Hedayah) [\[English\]](#)

**SUGGESTED READINGS**

- » *Monitoring and Evaluation: Some Tools, Methods, and Approaches* (World Bank) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Norms and Standards for Evaluation* (United Nations Evaluation Group) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Framework for Evaluation* (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent

Societies) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)

- » *Project-Programme Planning Guidance Manual* (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Project-Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Guide* (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results* (United Nations Development Programme) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Rethinking Monitoring and Evaluation* (International NGO Research and Training Centre) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Non-Governmental Organizations, Communication and Information Flows* (International NGO Research and Training Centre, No. 25) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)
- » *Building Organisational Capacity through Analytical Skills Training in Central Asia* compiled by Mia Sorgenfrei with Charlie Buxton (International NGO Research and Training Centre) [\[Russian\]](#) [\[English\]](#)

Download additional resources (in English) on the monitoring and evaluation of countering violent extremism projects, including a number of examples, [here](#).

# Conclusion

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This handbook has strived to explore the field of countering violent extremism and to share a number of the latest good practices in designing, implementing, and evaluating these programs and policies. It has drawn from the worldwide experiences in this field as well as regional examples to present a contextually relevant training program. In addition, the modules of this handbook asked complex questions to further contextualize the materials as well as promote introspection and critical inquiry.

The field of countering violent extremism is constantly learning and growing. It adapts to rapid changes in violent extremism and new challenges. You must continue to learn, grow, and adapt as well. We encourage you to review the wealth of materials found in the Further Learning Opportunities sections of this handbook. They have been collected and curated for you and your context, with many being specific to your region and/or available in Russian.

As you continue to work in this space, we encourage you to continue to:

- ask critical questions;
- collaborate effectively with other institutions or organizations to multiply impact;
- set out to better learn the drivers of radicalization and good practices to address it;
- empower others;
- share your growing knowledge and understanding; and
- advocate for change.

As you finish this resource, we would invite you to share your thoughts with us. Give us your review [here](#).

Finally, once you set out after reading this handbook or participating in a training and have successes or challenges from using things you learned here that you would like to share, please tell us about them [here](#). We would love to hear from you!

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