



Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

Stories from the EU's
work around the globe

This project is funded by
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Foreword



by Hilde Hardeman,

Director – Head of Service for Foreign Policy Instruments, European Commission

In 2020, the European Commission presented a Counter Terrorism Agenda and a new EU Security Union Strategy. These documents outlined the complex and evolving security landscape facing our Union in these unprecedented times. They also proposed approaches to manage risks ranging from climate change, to demographic trends, to political instability, to terrorism or the impact of the pandemic beyond Europe's borders. Preventing violent extremism is an important part of this bigger picture. This extremism can take many forms. And even though we are confronted with it most viscerally when a terrorist act destroys lives, it also does serious harm when it bubbles under the surface undermining social cohesion in local communities and polarising society.

The challenges posed by violent extremism are faced both by us here in Europe and by people in countries around the world. In our globalised society, we cannot separate risks unfolding within our borders from those emerging in other regions. This is why the EU is committed to working together with partners internationally to tackle the root causes of violent extremism, by way of a range of funding programmes aimed at preventing and countering extremism. We place a premium on collaborating with organisations that are deeply rooted in a particular locality, allowing us to respond to local challenges with local solutions – in tune with a community's culture, mindful of its history, and paying heed to specific conflict dynamics. Moreover, we pursue a 'whole of society' approach, empowering actors from across governments, education, civil society, community organisations and religious groups, to name just a few. This allows us to tap into local knowledge, build on what works and develop a sustainable impact.

Our key response to address the threat of terrorism, whether within the EU or by working with our global partners is prevention. In this context, the EU has been a leader in initiatives to tackle extremist content online, empower those on the front lines in addressing radicalisation, and trace and stem funding for terrorist organisations, to name a few. In addition, preventing and countering violent extremism is a key element of EU development policy, as we see resilient communities as the backbone of peaceful societies. In line with the concept of 'security for development' and the UN Sustainable Development Goal 16 'Peace, justice and strong institutions', there is no sustainable development without security, and *vice versa*. Assisting our partner regions around the world to address this challenge will help deliver the stability needed for prosperity to grow, to the benefit of all. Across all EU activities in this sphere, we rigidly adhere to the principle of 'do no harm' in terms of how we implement programmes and who we work with, with the rule of law and human rights always taking utmost priority.

At its heart, the EU's approach to preventing and countering violent extremism is about people. It is about building relationships with local communities and, among them, reaching out to those individuals who are vulnerable to radicalisation so that we can help them build resilience and gain the tools they need. It is the story of these people, of their communities, and of working together for a more stable and secure future. This brochure shares some of these stories. I hope they will give you an insight into the breadth and depth of our work in this field, and how EU funding is making an impact in tackling these urgent challenges.

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EU P/CVE PROGRAMMES AT A GLANCE

114 projects
since 2013

**Project
duration** **9** **to** **5**
MONTHS YEARS

>75 key partner
institutions
worldwide

- Non-profits and international organisations
- Development agencies
- Government bodies at national and local levels
- Universities and research institutions
- Media
- Police
- Community organisations

EUROPE:

Balkans **5**

AFRICA:

MENA **29**

Western
Africa **16**

Sahel **11**

Central
Africa **4**

North
Africa **10**

Eastern
Africa **7**

This map shows the main regions each of our projects is active in. Projects with important activities in several regions, appear on this map for each of these regions, causing some overlap. Projects in Europe without any specific target regions have not been included.

ASIA:

Central Asia **8**

South Asia **13**

South East Asia **5**

MIDDLE EAST:

Middle East **26**

Number of projects per region

Asia **50**

Africa **32**

Middle East **26**

Global **19**

Europe **18**

GLOBAL EU BUDGET

for projects implemented between 2013 - 2022

€407,923,575

Introduction

Shaken by a surge of terrorist attacks in countries across the EU, Europe has been confronting the consequences of violent extremism (VE) within its own borders in recent years. Yet VE is an urgent challenge facing societies not only in Europe, but all over the globe. Indeed, it is often those regions already struggling with political instability and economic inequality that bear the brunt of extremist ideologies and the violence they can unleash.

By working with international partners with local networks, the EU seeks to tackle the root causes of VE across regions, aiming to prevent extremist views from progressing to violence. On the one hand, this is a matter of protecting European citizens: in a globalised and connected world, it is impossible to stop dynamics unfolding on one continent from spilling over into the next. On the other, tackling VE outside of Europe is an important part of the EU's

commitment to development, as security is understood as an essential precondition for prosperity. This is not only a European but a global objective, as reflected in the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 relating to 'Peace, justice and strong institutions'.

By working with international partners with local networks, the EU seeks to tackle the root causes of violent extremism to prevent extremist views from progressing to violence.

What is violent extremism – and what is P/CVE?

What exactly is violent extremism? Understandings and perspectives on it can vary around the world and neither the European Union nor the United Nations have settled on an official definition. The OSCE provides a comprehensive description though, stating that the

term VE “generally refers to acts of violence that are justified by or associated with an extremist religious, social, or political ideology. The concept of violent extremism is broader and more expansive than terrorism, because it accommodates any kind of violence, as long as its motivation is deemed extremist.”¹

The broad nature of VE requires a more differentiated response than security-based counterterrorism (CT) measures. While CT focuses on intercepting and pursuing those already engaged in terrorist activities, efforts to prevent and counter VE aim to take action before an individual is driven to take part in terrorist activity in the first place. This can involve interventions to prevent the radicalisation

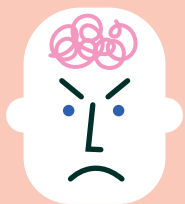
process, action to tackle structural economic or social challenges that can fuel grievances, or assistance to communities seeking to resist extremism and address its underlying drivers. Preventing and countering VE – or P/CVE – can therefore be described as “a broad umbrella term that covers activities implemented by governmental and non-governmental actors seeking to prevent or mitigate violent extremism through non-coercive measures that are united by the objective of addressing the drivers of violent extremism.”²

¹ Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, *A Whole-of-Society Approach to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism* (2020), p. 19.

² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

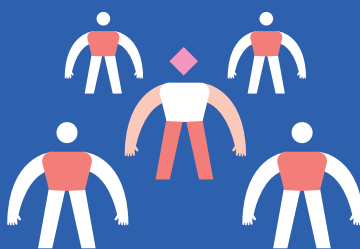
THE ROOT CAUSES OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

There is **no single cause or pathway** into radicalisation and violent extremism. According to research, violent extremism can be best conceptualised as a kaleidoscope of factors, creating a multitude of individual combinations.



Individual socio-psychological factors

Alienation and exclusion, anger and frustration, grievance and a strong sense of injustice.



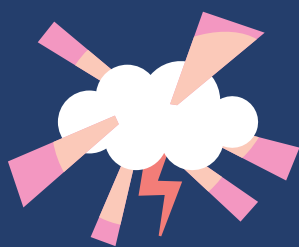
Social factors

Social exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination, limited social mobility, limited education or employment, an element of displacement, criminality, lack of social cohesion and self-exclusion.



Political factors

Grievances around existing conflict and violence. Strong sense of alienation and injustice which is reinforced by Islamophobia, xenophobia and discrimination.



Ideological/religious factors

Sacred historical mission and belief in apocalyptic prophecy; a sense that religion or community is under siege and a desire to protect faith under assault.



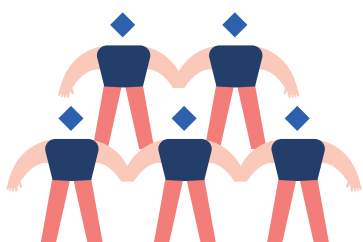
Culture and identity crisis

Cultural marginalisation, which produces alienation and a lack of belonging to either home or the parents' society.



Trauma and other trigger mechanisms

Psychological trauma experienced via parents with post-traumatic stress disorder or other complex psychological problems.



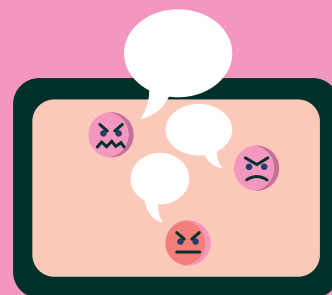
Group dynamics

Charismatic leadership, pre-existing friendship and kinship ties, socialisation, groupthink; self-isolation, polarising behaviour and counter-cultural elements.



Radicalisers/groomers

Hate preachers and those that prey on vulnerabilities, grievances and channel recruits into violent extremism through persuasion, pressure and manipulation.



Social media

The internet "reaches otherwise unreachable individuals", it accelerates the process of radicalisation, and increases opportunities for self radicalisation.

Getting to the root of the issue

In short, P/CVE aims to go beyond the symptoms to address root causes – but what are those root causes? Researchers write about the ‘push factors’ (structural socioeconomic conditions that can ‘push’ people towards radicalisation) and ‘pull factors’ (aspects of extremist groups that can seem attractive) that can lead an individual to engage in VE. Yet whether or not a person is ultimately driven to VE is not a simple case of cause-and-effect.

According to P/CVE research, there is no single cause or pathway into radicalisation and violent extremism – rather the road to VE should be viewed as comprising a kaleidoscope of factors, creating infinite individual combinations.³ These factors can be political, social, ideological or religious, and can include individual factors like trauma, alienation or identity crisis. A person’s environment can also play a decisive role: for example, the group dynamics of their social circle or their proximity to radicalisers that prey on vulnerabilities. All of this can be compounded by information and propaganda spread online and through social media, which can accelerate radicalisation.

³ Magnus Ranstorp and Peder Hyllengren, *Förebyggande av våldsbejakande extremism i tredjeland* (Swedish Defence University 2013).

PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

The European Commission’s P/CVE projects span **eight** themes:



**Development
of education**



**Media
capacity**



**Empowerment
of women**



**Youth
work**



**Socioeconomic
inclusion**



**Governance
capacity building**



**Transitional
justice**



**Inter-communal
activities**
including sport
and inter-faith dialogue

The EU is committed to the principle not only of ‘do no harm’ but of ‘do maximum good’.

Complex challenge – multifaceted solutions

In the face of this complex web of root causes, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. This is why the EU's flagship P/CVE programme STRIVE (strengthening resilience against violent extremism), and other EU programmes, takes a multifaceted approach, funding projects that tackle a broad spectrum of issues across eight key areas:

- **Education:** P/CVE educational programmes can take many forms – from teaching on the warning signs of radicalisation, to promoting values of tolerance and diversity as a bulwark against extremism.
- **Media capacity:** By working with local journalists and media, programmes can enhance understanding of P/CVE and encourage inclusive, impartial reporting.
- **Empowerment of women:** Engaging with women directly to raise their ability to address VE can be particularly beneficial given the central yet often complex role they can play in addressing VE.
- **Youth work:** As young people can be particularly susceptible to VE recruiters, programmes such as mentorship and life skills training can help personal development and give a new sense of direction and self-confidence.
- **Socioeconomic inclusion:** Programmes that seek to open up new economic prospects in disadvantaged areas can help people build the skills to determine their own future, offering new possibilities.

- **Governance capacity building:** By providing support and training to government and other institutions, capacity building programmes can equip them with the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to engage in effective P/CVE.

- **Transitional justice:** Supporting divided communities in remedying injustices and addressing ongoing conflicts can help ameliorate tensions that may otherwise spill over into violence.

- **Intercommunal activities:** Initiatives to bring different communities together, whether through inter-faith dialogue or a simple sports game, can be effective in furthering understanding between groups.

Across all of these activities, the EU is committed to four general principles. First, action must be evidence-based, with interventions taking their lead from the latest research in the P/CVE field. Second, each project must be tailored to the local context: every place is different, and every set of circumstances is different – meaning there can be no simple ‘cut and paste’ solutions from one context and then applied another. Third, EU projects take a ‘whole of society’ approach, working closely across the full spectrum of actors beyond traditional security and law enforcement: from public health and social service providers, to parents and families, education institutions, municipal authorities and the private sector. And finally, the EU is committed to the principle not only of ‘do no harm’ but of ‘do maximum good’ with every action undertaken.

The European Commission's P/CVE programming follows a number of general principles:

Evidence-based

The response is based on the latest objective research. Many actions help develop the knowledge base on the prevention of violent extremism.

Adapted to the local context

There are no one-size-fits-all solutions to violent extremism. All our actions are rooted in a nuanced and in-depth knowledge of the local context and its specificities.

Do No Harm and Maximise Good

Interventions are framed to ensure that they do not cause human rights violations, exacerbate divisions between communities and institutions or worsen existing grievances while still striving for impact.

A whole of society approach

Interventions involve a wide range of actors beyond traditional law enforcement and security actors, from civil society and public institutions to businesses and leading figures within local communities.

A global approach

The stories presented in this brochure provide an introduction to the EU's work in P/CVE. The projects funded cover a wide geographic area, from Africa to the Middle East to Central and Southeast Asia. We work with a range of partners on implementation, facilitating collaboration with a strong network of local grassroots organisations that are active and well-established in the communities where they operate. This is essential to ensure funding is targeted to local people and builds on existing initiatives.

We work with a range of partners on implementation, facilitating collaboration with a strong network of local grassroots organisations.

The ten stories featured in the brochure look at the human impact of EU-funded P/CVE work through three lenses, reflecting the principles outlined above:

- **Developing local solutions:** stories that show the importance of understanding local contexts, and of working with local actors to build P/CVE capacity and create new opportunities.
- **People that make a difference:** stories that look at efforts to bring people together, or to empower specific groups to strengthen resilience to VE.
- **New approaches:** stories that underline the value of cutting-edge, locally rooted research, of sharing knowledge across P/CVE practitioners, and of ensuring the adaptability of projects for long-term impact.

It is important to note that the projects in this brochure were not chosen because they are the 'biggest' in terms of funding or numbers of people. They are simply a handful of examples of the exceptional work being done under the STRIVE programme by our partners around the world to counter and prevent VE. We hope they will bring to life the value of this work for local communities and the individuals who live there.

THE PROGRAMMES



STRIVE GLOBAL
Hedayah



STRIVE
Horn of Africa



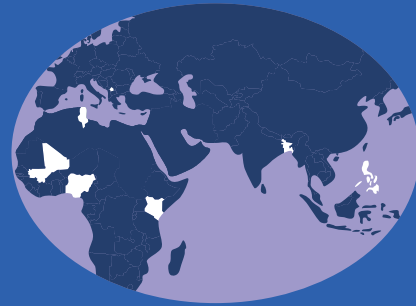
**Countering radicalisation and
violent extremism in the regions
of Sahel and Maghreb**



**Preventing Violent Extremism
through Promoting Tolerance
and Respect for Diversity**



**Restore social cohesion in
the north of Burkina Faso**



STRIVE
Global Community Engagement
and Resilience Fund (GCERF)



STRIVE
Kenya

DEVELOPING LOCAL SOLUTIONS



“If you don’t know the community, it just won’t work.”

Ibrahima Sankaré, Secretary General of Delta Survie



Complex contexts

“Go back to the beginning, and our society was one of complementarity: the livestock farmer provided the animals and the milk; the crop farmer provided the grain... They complemented each other. But with this conflict, they have started to see each other as enemies.” These are the reflections of Ibrahima Sankaré, Secretary General of Delta Survie, a Malian NGO that has worked for years with villages along the border between Mali and Burkina Faso. The region has seen a steep increase in conflict and violence in recent years, escalating to the point that state forces no longer felt it was possible to enter the territory. For the local communities, the consequences cut to the very heart of their livelihoods. “Because of the security situation, nobody dared to go to the fields with their animals anymore,” recalls one of the residents of the village Koro on the Malian side of the border. Violent conflict like this can easily become a breeding ground for extreme thought that plays into existing grievances. To prevent violent extremism, it thus becomes necessary to address its underlying causes.

The origin of the conflict is complex, with myriad local historical, social and economic factors playing a role. For years, traditional tensions over land use had been managed effectively by local actors. But with the arrival of modern farming techniques and a rise in deforestation to create crop fields, the struggle to control the land’s resources grew more acute. As social cohesion began to fray, the community came under additional pressure from violent extremists active in the border region. Seeking to expand their reach and recruitment, these extremist groups stood to gain from stoking existing tensions between generations or community leaders – adding fuel to the flames of mistrust and provoking a rise in violence between local groups.

This was the challenging situation that confronted Delta Survie. Thanks to a long track record of work with these border communities, they understood that the only path towards an impactful solution lay with the local people themselves. “Our aim was to provide mediation training, so that they could manage the situation independently,” explains Mr Sankaré. “The goal is to not only reduce the conflicts but to help them reorganise the social structures so they are sustainable for the future.” Supported by EU funding through a UNICRI-managed project, Delta Survie set the wheels in motion by selecting four people from the local community to receive initial training. These four then went on to train a further 32 local actors – two per commune, with an equal balance of women and men. Adapted to each locality, the programme covered conflict mediation, warning systems that can spot conflict early, and established conflict management committees.

Right from the start, local knowledge and support were seen as the key to success: “It was absolutely imperative that these actors were from the local area and that they were known and recognised as leaders within their society,” underlines Mr Sankaré. “If you don’t know the community, if you’re not listened to in the community, if you’re not at that level where you can be a bridge between the local groups, it just won’t work.” Equipped with new skills gained through the training, the mediators were able to reach out to prominent figures in their villages – arranging meetings between the mayor, traditional communicators, representatives of civil society and members of armed militia. From there, they worked to establish more permanent channels of communication between the groups.

The process has not been without its challenges, as explained by a resident from Koro, who himself trained as a mediator: “At the start, one difficulty we had was that a militia was reluctant to participate in our sessions.” But the combination of new skills from the training and deep local knowledge opened new doors: “We had the idea to approach an elder of Koro to ex-

plain our mission and the problem. He was interested in the project and he called us back that evening to visit the militia’s camp, where we met with their representative who ultimately did agree to join the process. The training gave us an important lesson: not to give up and to reflect on a strategy to make sure that every party can participate.”

Using their newly acquired expertise, the 32 mediators trained by the programme have since gone on to engage with a further 2 648 people in 57 villages, advocating for non-violent methods to resolve conflicts. While there still may be a long road ahead, things are certainly heading in the right direction: “There was division and people were no longer talking to each other; but through us, they created a new connection,” concludes the Koro resident. And the signs are promising that these efforts can lead to lasting impact: “We proposed to the groups to continue the process after the project had ended – today, they are driving their own process of mediation, discussing how to maintain calm and social cohesion.”

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Supporting institutions

Hop on the bus in downtown Jakarta at rush hour and you will be greeted with a familiar sight: passengers intently scrolling on their smartphones, passing their commute reading the news or messaging with friends. Social media is part and parcel of everyday life in Indonesia, with around 200 million active users amongst a population of over 260 million. Yet the country has also experienced the darker side of online communication in recent years, as social platforms have been used to spread hate speech, extremist messages and even as recruitment platforms for intolerant or violent groups.

This challenge is acutely felt by the national government. “We had some cases of conflict in Indonesia where hate speech shared on social media even led

to violence,” explains Alamsyah M. Dja’far, Programme Manager at the Wahid Foundation, a local NGO. “So today, every ministry is aware that social media has a very important role, including the potential to increase tensions in society.” With follower counts in the millions, some government ministries’ social accounts have serious reach among the Indonesian population too. However, the potential to use this platform to communicate with citizens on issues like tolerance and diversity had largely been left untapped. This was where the EU and UNDP saw an opportunity, proposing an initiative to provide training for ministry web managers and social media administrators on promoting counter-narratives to extremism, as part of a National Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism.

Whether in their role as policymakers or as an interface between citizens and the state, institutions like these government ministries have a central role to play in addressing the challenge of VE. This is why EU programmes often work in partnership with various institutions to help strengthen capacities in P/CVE based on the latest evidence from international research and best practices. EU-funded projects collab-

orate with policymakers, providing research to support a National Action Plan in Thailand (UNDP), for example; with law enforcement, working to build P/CVE capacity of security and law enforcement agency personnel in Kenya (STRIVE); and with educators, training trainers to build resilience and promote peaceful engagement in the Philippines (UNDP). As every institution is rooted in a specific historical, social and political context, it is essential that each action is carefully adapted to the local situation to ensure maximum impact.

In the case of the government social media training in Indonesia, a local approach meant zooming in on issues most relevant to Indonesian society – leading in turn to a focus on communicating diversity and tolerance. While home to the world’s largest Muslim population, Indonesia is also a richly diverse nation with over 1 000 ethnic groups spread across its 17 000 islands. “In Indonesia, we are struggling to decrease intolerance at the same time as we are struggling to prevent narratives around extremism,” explains Mr Dja’far of the Wahid Foundation. The foundation was one of a number of local organisations that contributed to the training sessions – all of which were selected for their commitment to promoting tolerance, religious moderation and respect for diversity.

Bringing together social media administrators and website managers from 10 government ministries, the workshops focused first and foremost on developing narratives of tolerance as a means to counter extremism. Indra A. Priyanto, a social media manager at the Peace Media Centre of the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) who participated in the training, describes how the trainers shared in detail with participants a range of techniques such as storytelling to ensure impactful messages: “We exchanged ideas on how to make counter-narratives to radicalisation on websites and social media: how to tell a story and use infographics to show that Indonesia is home to many different cultures, religions and social conversations.” Emphasis was placed on open and inclusive communication, with trainers foregrounding the importance of ensuring all messages were based on accurate information and data.

An added value of the training was that it strengthened collaboration between the ministries and encourage the sharing of content across their channels. “One important benefit was enhanced networking across government institutions,” Mr Priyanto explains. “The training raised our awareness that preventing extremism is not something we can do alone. We have to work

together to reach our goal.” Social media administrators and website managers from across the ministries agreed to upload a meme they had created about religious moderation and peace at the same time on the same day, helping to make the topic trend and expand their reach. Since the training, they have been putting these learnings into practice in their daily work. Connected via a WhatsApp group named Kolaborasi Pemerintah (Government Collaboration), the participants now actively share content with each other to publish on their ministries’ channels. Using the #JumatToleransi (Tolerance on Friday) hashtag, they can reach millions of Indonesians across the country – with a message of tolerance, respect for diversity and a rejection of extremist narratives both on- and offline.

“The training raised our awareness that preventing extremism is not something we can do alone.”

Indra A. Priyanto, social media manager at the Peace Media Centre of the National Counterterrorism Agency



Reaching out through education

A story from the Torun Alo project in Bangladesh – supported by EU funding and implemented by CODEC through GCERF and the Kofi Anan Foundation – demonstrates how support for educational institutions can make a valuable impact on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism efforts. After attending a Torun Alo skill session at her school on the signs of extremism, an 18-year-old student realised she had seen many of the same signs in her neighbour: frustrated by poor job prospects, he had

become withdrawn and had been sharing extremist views. Using the tools she had learned at school, she reached out to her neighbour and started a conversation about the negative consequences of extremism. Over time she managed to convince him to pursue a different path, using suggestions based on the Torun Alo messages. Today, he is a social worker and shopkeeper, working to counter VE in his community – and contributing to Torun Alo's skill sessions himself.

Changing outlooks

The room is buzzing as 25 eager students put their new skills to the test. At the heart of the action, a young woman carefully connects the wires on a circuit-board as her classmate checks progress against a diagram on the smartphone display. The instructor lends a hand here and there. Projected on the big screen behind him you can see, a range of agricultural robots – from machines that automatically pull weeds, to drones that monitor what's happening in the fields. It's a new angle on farm life for the young people who have travelled from across eastern Burkina Faso to attend this workshop in Fada N'Gourma, hosted by EU-funded organisation Jeunes Ambassadeurs (JA). With as much as 80% of employment in the region concentrated in agriculture, tending livestock is part-and-parcel of their day-to-day – programming microchips, not so much. But the workshop has shown how these two worlds can come together to create new possibilities. "I didn't know much about robots except for what I saw in sci-fi films or on TV," reflects participant Parfait Thiombiano. "Now I'm thinking I would like to build robots for agriculture and support our farmers".

Farming is the epicentre of economic life in this part of Burkina Faso. Yet it has become increasingly difficult for local farmers to carve out a living, as tensions over limited resources are compounded by security challenges posed by extremist groups gaining ground in the north and east of the country. And research has shown that extremist recruiters can take advantage of this lack of economic opportunities, targeting unemployed young people who may be frustrated with their situation and have time on their hands. While by no means a simple matter of cause-and-effect, economic disadvantage can therefore be one factor that may push a vulnerable individual along the path of radicalisation. This is why a major aim of EU Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism work is to give people the tools they need to build a better future for themselves and their communities.

The robotics workshop in Fada N'Gourma was de-

signed to do just that. Supported by EU funding, it is one of JA's many initiatives to strengthen social cohesion by opening new horizons for young people. A top priority is tailoring projects to the local context. And in eastern Burkina Faso, that puts agriculture centre stage. By inspiring participants to think about modernising farming techniques and providing hands-on training in basic robot assembly, the workshop showed how participants can use technology to increase yields. "It sparked enthusiasm and a desire to learn, to go further and create robots of their own," relays JA coordinator Whali Jean Silvanu. "If young people do not have new opportunities, if they think they have nothing else to learn or that there is nothing they can do to improve their lives, they will be more vulnerable to violent extremism. We want to break that chain by showing them that it is within their own power to improve their daily lives." Always on the lookout for a fresh opportunity, Silvanu and the JA team are now investigating a training on solar energy technology – another area with huge potential for a community where electricity outages are a common nuisance.

EU-funded DJAM likewise seeks to address the economic challenges that can add fuel to societal tensions in Burkina Faso. A recent success story shifted focus from the individual to the structural level, with a drive to support local milk producers who have been facing fierce competition from imported dairy products. Facilitated by Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium (VSF-B), the programme brought together representatives from across the milk production chain with to create a strategy to promote local produce in regional and national markets. After engaging with producers to identify strengths and weaknesses of the current system, a two-day workshop in the Burkinabe capital of Ouagadougou channelled these ideas into a concrete plan of action. Collaboration was placed front and centre, recalls VSF-B's local project manager: "The goal was for each participant to contribute actions for the strategy, as the workshop's outcomes were to set the foundations for a new national policy to promote local milk."

For the local producers, the programme provided a welcome space to come together and tackle a real economic challenge. And beyond this concrete short-term outcome, the experience of elaborating a business plan has given them valuable skills to advocate for their local economies in the future. For JA's Whali Jean Silvanu, fostering this sense of purpose and direction is where the real value of the network's activities in the region lies: "The young people we work with are the authors of their own development – we just have to give them the means to do it, so that they can be proud of what they can achieve."



“If young people do not have new opportunities, they will be more vulnerable to violent extremism.”

**Whali Jean Silvanu,
Jeunes Ambassadeurs coordinator**

Mentorship

Mentorship schemes can be an effective way to reach vulnerable young people and guide them to make positive life choices through peer-to-peer counselling and support. Mentors trained by EU-funded initiatives such as STRIVE in Kenya go a step further by acting as a link to networks offering skills and economic opportunities – from training on financial management to entrepreneurship. Since 2016 the STRIVE mentorship programme has worked with women and men aged 17 to 30 who are at risk of radicalisation and recruitment by violent extremist organisations. Mentees are paired with a mentor close in age and from a similar background. “Mentors who have faced the same challenges as the mentees, have overcome them and chosen a positive path in life – they can relate to what the mentees are going through,” explains programme manager Hadija Suleiman Buke. Mentors are chosen based on their community work and potential to be positive role models, and receive training on the subjects they will work on with their mentees, such as life skills, VE-related issues, critical thinking and communication.

The programme combines individual and group meetings, and blended psychosocial support with peer-to-peer dialogue around current issues. “In one-on-one

meetings, I have the opportunity to really get to know my mentee, where they’re coming from and the issues that make them look at life a certain way,” explains mentor Zainab Mohammed. “And at bi-weekly get-togethers with all mentors and mentees, people share their experiences, which helps mentees change their perspective – they may have thought their problems were much bigger, yet they find solutions through talking with others. So they learn a lot, and we support one another.”

A central aspect of the mentorship is support in identifying training or employment opportunities. Mentors look for potential opportunities that they can share with their mentees; mentees who start businesses are given support and advice to help them grow; and those who have not yet decided what path they want to take are encouraged to reflect on their strengths and consider new options. For mentor Ms Mohammed, these efforts are closely interlinked with the work of building emotional resilience: “Both are equally important: when you give someone emotional support, they pick themselves up afterwards and will want to take action. Mentorship helps young people look at life from a different perspective – we advise them to venture into areas where they feel they have strengths, enabling their skills. When they can do that and earn a decent living, they are doing something positive to sustain themselves and to grow.”

PEOPLE THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE



“I had never seen content creators in Malaysia talking about violent extremism.”

Young YouTuber Vikar

Listening to young people

For 100,000+ subscribers in his native Malaysia and beyond, twentysomething YouTuber Vikar is a master of comedy: sketches, straight-to-camera vlogs, music video parodies... his channel is packed with the sort of fun, irreverent content beloved by Generation Z. So, when his 2018 video ‘I Was a Terrorist’ appears on the queue, it comes as something of a shock. Set in a sparse prison cell, it shows a young female victim of violent extremism confronting the man who attacked her family – a prisoner in an orange jumpsuit, played by Vikar himself. The conversation plays out as each tells the story from their perspective, speaking with the same voice as they set out motivations and consequences, and lay bare their pain, anger and remorse.

The video was produced as part of the YouTube Creators for Change Asia-Pacific programme, implemented in collaboration with UNDP and supported in part by EU funding. The aim was to give young influencers in the region a platform to express themselves on social issues they care about, share their messages and start a conversation with their online audience. In addition to addressing VE directly, creators were invited to explore

many themes that impact young people and can play a role in stoking extremism or radicalisation: from hate speech, racism and misogyny, to bullying, social isolation and political grievances. Over the last two years, over 100 young influencers have participated from Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and Australia. Many had not previously been involved in addressing Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism topics, with their YouTube channels dedicated instead to comedy, rap, or makeup tutorials. “It was definitely not on my radar at all; I’ve never seen content creators in Malaysia talking about violent extremism,” explains Vikar. “It’s one of the reasons I chose to get involved – why not take on this challenge, learn more and see how far I could push this content creatively while shedding light on the topic for others.”

Young people can be some of the most passionate promoters of peace and tolerance in their communities.

Across many EU P/CVE activities, young people as a group play an important role. On the one hand, they can be more vulnerable to extremist narratives, on the other, they are some of the most passionate promoters of peace and tolerance in their communities. Initiatives such as Creators for Change provide a platform for young voices to contribute to the public debate on the issues that affect their lives, while other projects aim

to build emotional resilience among young people who may be under pressure. The STRIVE Global GCERF programme, for example, has worked with Serbian youth through engagement, leadership skills training and cognitive and social-emotional skills development. And a

STRIVE Global Hedayah theatre training initiative in Jordan has helped young people tap into their creativity while raising awareness of VE to a broader audience – as participants developed an interactive play on the impact of VE and toured it in various locations across the country.

As for the Creators for Change, the programme began by reaching out to young influencers and inviting them to attend a boot camp. Here, they met with local NGOs with expertise in P/CVE as well as more renowned YouTubers, film directors, and journalists. They offered guidance and support on the themes the creators wanted to explore, acting as mentors as they developed the concepts and produced their final videos. “I worked with a Malaysian anti-terrorism organisation who helped me understand more about VE in the country,” relays Vikar. “I was given full freedom to come up with the concept and content, while the experts gave input to ensure the facts were correct and that the storytelling was realistic

– something that was especially important, as I had to be in the characters’ shoes in the video.”

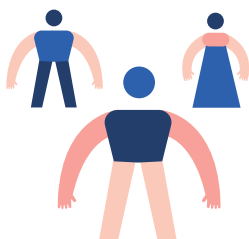
Worldwide, the Creators for Change series has racked up views in the tens of millions. By working with online influencers with huge follower counts, the programme has been able to tap into a vast network to spread the creators’ messages for peace and tolerance across the region. While it may not have been what they expected from Vikar’s channel, the response from his followers shows the video has clearly made an impact. “When I saw people begin sharing it and starting conversations in the comments about the topic of VE, I felt the video had achieved its goal,” he concludes. And while the real-life events that inspired the video may not have ended in understanding or forgiveness, the creative process allowed for a different takeaway. “The message I wanted to get across is that if people talked to each other, had conversations and actually got to know each other, maybe things would be different.”

SUPPORT NETWORKS

Support networks are important to young people in preventing violent extremism and radicalisation



Family



Mentors



Religious institutions



Role models



Employment



Formal education



Politicians



Getting everyone around the table

After simmering for months, the situation had reached boiling point. Tensions had been growing for some time between the elder religious leaders and the young people challenging their authority. Educated but with few employment prospects, the youth were frustrated with lacking a voice in the decisions that affected their lives: in politics, in society, in religious institutions. And they were losing faith in their religious leaders, too, as many young people travelled abroad for religious instruction and felt detached from traditional teachings. They started to ask for positions of leadership in their places of worship, so that their voices too could be heard. When the elders said no, communication quickly broke down. One day, it came to a head: buoyed by strength and numbers, the young

people began to take leadership of the worship centre by force – removing the religious leaders and declaring the site a youth-led institution.

This conflict unfolded in 2014 against a background of instability in Kenya's coast region. Economic and social tensions have over time taken on a religious angle – something violent extremist groups have been eager to stoke and exploit to their own ends. Growing intolerance not only between different religions but also within religious communities has destabilised social cohesion. "The coast region is known to be very welcoming and many people have found a place for themselves there," explains Gloria Likhoyi, programs manager at local NGO Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics (CICC). "But the growth of VE is disrupting that culture, as people living here do not know when conflict and violence will strike."

When CICC was called in to address the stand-off at the worship centre, they knew there was only one solution: they had to get people talking again. Active in the areas of peacebuilding, security and development, the Council is dedicated to interfaith and intrafaith dialogues, with membership across Christian, Muslim, Hindu and indigenous religious communities. Supported by funding from the EU's STRIVE Horn of Africa programme, it worked both within and across religious institutions to foster understanding and build bridges where community conflicts and challenges put

“The more you talk without fear, and as long as you stay objective, at the end of the day the groups will talk to each other.”

**Reverend Stephen Anyenda,
Chairperson of the Board at CICC**

peace and security at risk. “One of our aims is to ensure intergenerational linkages so that we are speaking to each other and understanding each other,” explains Reverend Stephen Anyenda, Chairperson of the Board at CICC. “So when we came in, we saw that there needs to be a dialogue between the youth and the elders: the youth needed to be included in an organised way.”

The road to dialogue was far from easy, however, as Rev. Anyenda points out: “The first time we went, we could not talk – the youth chased us away and would not even hear us out. We had to lobby behind the scenes to arrange a second meeting. This time it was tense, but at least we listened to each other.” It took a further six meetings before the talking really started. Through exercises like scenario building and problem trees, the CICC mediators were able to identify the main issues and give direction to the discussions. “What we’ve learned is the more you talk without fear, and as long as you stay objective, at the end of the day the groups will talk to each other.” Building respect between the elders and the youth was crucial to keeping everyone around the table. “We talked for so long and sometimes we were about to despair – but at that point of despair we had a breakthrough, people talked to each other and we could map ways forward.”

From conflict resolution systems to peacebuilding initiatives, facilitating a dialogue between different parties is a vital element of addressing tensions that

can fuel VE. This is why many EU-funded projects focus on getting everyone around the table to talk through differences and find common solutions. For example, STRIVE Global GCERF has established community dialogue platforms to address intercommunal conflict that had been exploited by VE groups in North Central Nigeria. By engaging with local leaders and raising community awareness of VE, it was possible to start a constructive dialogue to address and resolve conflicts.

Similarly, a recent STRIVE Horn of Africa initiative has worked to build the capacity of Kenyan law enforcement to engage with civil society in combatting VE. By helping to review relations between the two groups through workshops and dialogue, the project was able to grow trust on both sides and ultimately strengthen cooperation on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism related issues.

Thanks to CICC’s work, the two sides at previously at odds of control over the worship centre experienced the transformative impact of starting a conversation. “When I look at where we

are today, they have even gone beyond what we expected,” relays Rev. Anyenda. “The youth are involved, the older people are involved; in fact, the youth will sometimes call on the elders to come and explain traditions, and the older ones will invite the youth to the traditional places where previously they would not have been permitted. We have started seeing change whereby each group appreciates the other – and it is all because of this dialogue and active communication.”

From conflict resolution systems to peacebuilding initiatives, facilitating a dialogue between different parties is a vital element of addressing tensions that can fuel violent extremism.

Often cast as passive bystanders, women's place at the heart of the family and community means that they too can be targets for recruitment, can amplify radical messages and provide support to extremists.



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Women leading the way

Stop by a cookout organised by the Council of Women Clergy (COWC) in Mombasa, Kenya, and the first thing to hit you are the scents: the fragrant rice of the pilau on the stove, the sharp tang of the mbirimb cucumber pickle. Then, the voices and laughter of the groups huddled around each pot, as the women chat and chuckle, they slice and stir. Ranging in age from 18 to 80, these women hail from different areas and different religious backgrounds. Yet here at the cookout, they are all on the same page – gathering to talk, cook and eat together in a safe space. Conversations often build on what the women have been discussing in the adjacent hall beforehand. During COWC sessions designed to raise awareness of violent extremism, they explore the pull and push factors that enable recruitment and

listen to women share stories of how extremism has impacted their lives. “We take a proactive approach to countering VE, to warn that it could happen to any of us and make people aware of the signs,” relays Reverend Jane Jilani, Executive Director at COWC. “When they go back home, they can cascade this information to the other women in their villages.”

In the coast region of Kenya where COWC operates, VE is a shadow looming over the lives of many. For almost 20 years, the region has been wrestling with instability – with women and their children often bearing the brunt of recurring conflict. “Where youths were being used as combatants, the women were suffering because they were losing their sons and husbands to the fighting,” explains Gloria Likhoyi, Deputy Chairperson of the Board at local NGO Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics (CICC), which has partnered with COWC on the project ‘Shrinking the space against violent extremism thriving’ (SAVET). “But at the same time, they were also supporting these violent activities – providing food to family members who were fighting, and giving them encouraging words.” This chimes with understandings of the complex role women can play in addressing VE: while often cast as passive bystanders, women's place within the family and community means that they too

can be targets for recruitment, can amplify radical messages, provide support to extremists or engage in violent acts. At the same time, this central role makes them ideal multipliers for promoting non-violence and civic engagement.

This is why EU-funded Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism programmes engage directly with women to strengthen their awareness and involvement in prevention work. In addition to the activities of COWC in Kenya, which are supported by the EU through the STRIVE Global GCERF programme, initiatives include UNDP's work to develop a women's mediator platform in the Philippines that aims to strengthen the capacities of women working to prevent extremism in their communities. Similarly, the STRIVE Horn of Africa programme helped establish 11 women's peace committees in Somaliland to raise awareness of VE, providing guidance for women working with law enforcement, and training policewomen on participation in P/CVE work. And at an institutional level, UNDP PROTECT has engaged with the Indonesian government to ensure a substantive gender dimension in the implementation of the country's National Action Plan on P/CVE – going beyond simple numerical representation and seeking to unlock the potential of women to act as agents of change in their communities.

Returning to Kenya, COWC engages with local women on a number of fronts. As a women-led interfaith group of female clerics, the Council promotes under-

standing and tolerance in coastal communities through joint actions for sustainable peace and socio-economic development. In the SAVET programme, COWC has been working more closely with vulnerable groups at risk of radicalisation. Whether in group meetings or one-on-one counselling, COWC aims to provide a safe space for these women – many of whom have experienced trauma – to talk about their experiences and develop tools to address the challenges they face. The Council also trains women to be champions in promoting P/CVE strategies for their families and broader communities.

Another key focus is building women's capacity to support themselves economically; for example, facilitating savings and internal lending communities so that they can borrow and build investments to assure a sustainable livelihood. Even the cookout sessions have an economic slant: as the mbirimbi pickle the women learn to cook can be made from readily available ingredients, they can produce it themselves in the future to sell and generate an income. And these steps towards economic empowerment are complemented by efforts to build capacity of women on the civic stage. COWC promotes women in leadership positions and organises consultative forums with security agents and civil society to give women the ability to advocate for their own needs. "We work in the background to lend a voice to women so they can come into leadership positions," explains Rev. Jilani. "We can have representation but that's not enough. We need to have women at the table where decisions are made."



"We can have representation but that's not enough; we need to have women at the table where decisions are made."

**Reverend Jane Jilani,
Executive Director at the Council
of Women Clergy**

RESEARCHING WOMEN'S ROLES

Historically, views on women's role in violent extremism have been reductive.



**Innocent
bystanders**



**Victims
to be rescued**



**Deviant
monsters**



Therefore, it is necessary to use a **gendered perspective** when researching violent extremism, which looks at women and men and the impact of gender role expectations on participation in violence.

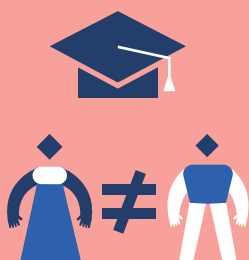
Research offers more nuanced, **evidence-based perspectives**. For example:



Like men, women can **make active choices**

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Women have too often been seen as victim to or being swept up by violent extremism. However, like men, women also have agency and can act as willing participants in violence and/or supporters of the terrorist cause.



Like men, women can turn to violent extremism for **varied reasons**. Often, their reasons are the same as men's.

Root drivers of violent extremism are broadly the same for women and men, but they can present themselves in different ways to different parts of the population, such as through:

- the level of education
- the role gender inequality can play



Like men, women can take up different roles in different groups

- Sometimes act as trustworthy recruiters
- Sometimes fill reproduction and education roles for next generation of recruits
- Sometimes act as influencers, enforcers and guards
- Sometimes actively engage in violence



A gender lens is necessary to gather evidence for the roles that women and gender equality can play in **preventing and countering violent extremism**

*“Before joining the station,
I had no idea how radio works.”*

Dhouha Dhibi

Amplifying alternative voices

It's early January 2020. 6 p.m. on the dot, the 'On Air' sign lights up and it's time for the evening news. Yet for the residents of Kasserine in western Tunisia, this is a new kind of radio experience: the headlines are read by a young woman, and the current affairs show that follows is full of young voices discussing issues that might normally be off-limits – from gender equality, to child labour, to countering violent extremism. This is Hola Kasserine, an online radio station run by around 60 local young people aged between 16 and 25. You wouldn't know it by listening, but until a year ago none of them had set foot in a studio. “Before joining the station, I had no idea how radio works,” remarks Dhouha Dhibi, the newscaster who can be heard reading the headlines at the top of the hour. “So I was excited to get involved – it was the first step towards achieving my childhood dream of becoming a journalist.”

While held up as a democratic trailblazer following the Arab Spring, Tunisia has experienced its share of challenges in recent years, with disillusionment setting in among certain groups. The country is also facing the creeping threat of violent extremism, as VE cells seek to exploit local frustrations – often using online channels as recruitment tools. Hola Kasserine was established to counter these narratives head-on in the digital space, by giving a voice to the overwhelming majority of moderate youth who want to promote democracy and tolerance in their home region. Backed by EU funding, Coopera ONGD

and UNICRI provided the training on radio production, practical support and equipment – while Kasserine's young people brought the talent that has made the station a runaway success in the community.

Hola Kasserine's diverse content has attracted listeners of all ages and backgrounds. Far from being put off by discussions on more controversial issues, the audience has been keen to get engaged – sharing show links on Facebook, posting comments on debates or proposing new subjects for future shows. “It was a big responsibility for the team because we discussed topics like terrorism, democracy and gender equality,” explains Ms Dhibi. “But that's what got people interested, they heard us and encouraged us.” For Ms Dhibi and the team, Hola Kasserine has provided not only media skills but the opportunity to speak to a broad audience on the issues that matter most to them and their peers. “We learned how to defend our ideas and positions,” she concludes, “and it gave me the confidence to raise my voice louder.”

In the coast region of Kenya, the EU-funded STRIVE II programme has also been supporting alternative voices

*“We wanted to help
reporters think
outside the box and
seek alternatives to
the voices they had
always used.”*

David Okwemba

on the airwaves by working with professional radio journalists to build capacity on P/CVE reporting. While the region has many local radio stations, budget constraints mean journalists often lack the resources to pursue in-depth reporting. This can lead to a lack of diversity in the voices heard in news features, as reporters tend to source comments from easily accessible authority figures such as law enforcement. “We wanted to help reporters think outside the box and

seek alternatives to the voices they had always used,” explains David Okwembah, the journalist who ran the STRIVE media training. “If you are reporting on VE affecting young people, just talking to a police officer might not give you the full picture – but by reaching out to the youth, they can tell their story themselves.” Training



sessions covered key Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism topics and guidance on interview techniques and feature production, and were followed by a period of mentoring where participants were supported by a trainer as they put together their reports.

Among the participants was Asha Bekidusa, a radio reporter working on health, environment, gender and security issues. “The training was an eye-opener for me,” she recalls, “as I learned new ways to approach young people, build trust and get their views on sensitive topics.” Equipped with these new skills, she headed out to the field to uncover new stories. One feature presented the journey of a group of young people in Mombasa who had been active in a machete-wielding gang but had since reformed – starting a new life with a small business selling food and washing cars. “I sat down with these youth as they told me their experiences, what they had learned and how they are willing to change themselves and their community,” Ms Bekidusa shares. For young people impacted by VE who may feel disconnected from their communities, the chance to hear stories like theirs presented from a youth perspective and with a positive outcome was something new. The response from the community says it all, she concludes. “The impact was huge – the station received so many phone calls, with listeners saying if we could hear more positive stories like this, it could make a big difference.”

#ExtremeLives

Can a story change your point of view? Supported by EU-funding, the #ExtremeLives project answers in the affirmative: using vivid and gripping video storytelling, this UNDP regional initiative seeks to spark conversations around issues such as radicalisation and reintegration, violent extremism, discrimination and hate speech. Episodes give a platform to the voices of individuals who have been impacted by VE or who have insights to offer on confronting extremist narratives. For example, the story of a family who fled Syria for Malaysia after receiving threats and harassment from ISIS, or of the peacemakers bridging religious and cultural divides in Southern Thailand. So far, the videos have reached over 31 million people online around the world.

NEW APPROACHES



Sharing knowledge

The conference hall on the outskirts of Geneva has been transformed into a melting pot, bubbling with the ideas of Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism practitioners who have travelled from as far as Bangladesh, Kenya, Kosovo, Mali and Nigeria to share their insights and experience. This is the GCERF Forum, an annual learning event organised by the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), an international organisation dedicated to preventing violent extremism. The forum's agenda changes each year, but the mission remains the same: to share lessons on P/CVE from the real-world experience of those working in the field. "We were given the opportunity to discuss with an amazing group of people who are doing amazing work all over the world," explains a participant from Kosovo. "This enables us to learn what works and what doesn't – but also to find out, for example, that Kosovo and Mali share cultural similarities that I would have never expected."

Sharing knowledge and learning from the experience of others is an essential pillar of EU-funded programmes like STRIVE Global GCERF. Other initiatives also aim to grow the knowledge base on P/CVE through cross-regional knowledge sharing sessions, such as those organised between the UNDP Thailand Country Office and the Bangladesh Peace Observatory, or UNDP Thailand's regional knowledge exchange on sustaining peace and building social cohesion. In the same spirit, both STRIVE Horn of Africa and STRIVE Kenya have published 'lessons learned' reports, looking at what

went well in the programmes and where improvements could be made. They can serve as an inspiration for other practitioners and ensure future interventions are built on success.

GCERF's commitment to knowledge exchange extends right across the countries where it is active: at a national level, twice-yearly Communities of Practice (CoPs) bring together local grantees with representatives of government, donors, civil society organisations and the private sector to discuss current issues and activities. Topics on the agenda can range from methods to measure programme results, gender mainstreaming, or communication of alternative narratives. "It's an opportunity for shared learning and to build stronger connections between the actors involved in this work," remarks Kevin Osborne, Country Manager at GCERF. And these connections last far beyond the day of the physical meeting: in Kenya, for example, CoP participants have formed a WhatsApp group, regularly pinging their peers with updates and relevant content.

For those working with projects on the ground, these exchanges can be invaluable. By sharing lessons learned, others can identify mistakes to avoid and can course-correct. Opportunities for collaboration can emerge when gaps are identified in knowledge or resources that others can fill. In recent months, far from being stopped in their tracks by the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, local GCERF CoPs have

been transformed into virtual global meetings – with the new format allowing for more frequent exchanges with more participants from all over the world, providing a sense of community for P/CVE practitioners at a challenging time.

EU-funded STRIVE Global partner Hedayah has forged a different path to share the knowledge of its community: by publishing a training curriculum on countering violent extremism, made freely available as a resource for practitioners. "As P/CVE is a relatively new topic in many countries, there can be a lack of

Sharing knowledge and learning from the experience of others is an essential pillar of EU-funded P/CVE programmes.

knowledge among government bodies and local NGOs of what it really means and what approaches could be used for prevention,” explains Irene Belmonte, STRIVE Global Programme Manager. “The curriculum was designed to introduce these actors to the main concepts and best practices.” Comprising ten modules, the publication spans the spectrum of P/CVE work: from understanding the drivers of VE; to working with groups such as women and youth; to the role of education and media. Accompanied by a facilitator’s guide, it advocates a participatory learning approach, encouraging practitioners to bring forward solutions tailored to their own contexts. While designed to be used in any region, the publication was initially tailored to the Central Asia and MENA regions, pilots have been rolled out in Jordan and Kirghizstan, and the curriculum has also been implemented with government officials in Turkmenistan. The text is now available in English, Russian and Arabic.

The curriculum has the potential to make a real impact on the ground by enhancing the capacity of grassroots organisations to get involved in P/CVE work. “When we started the STRIVE Global programme, most of the organisations we funded hadn’t previously worked on P/CVE – yet they had extensive experience working with young people, women and vulnerable groups,” explains Ms Belmonte. “They had access to communities and were trusted by them; the only thing they lacked was the specific P/CVE knowledge. By introducing them to the topic, the curriculum helps us see how their expertise can be used to prevent radicalization and violent extremism.” A fitting example of how sharing knowledge can create more knowledge; by bringing local insights into the fold and bolstering P/CVE activities in the field.

“As P/CVE is a relatively new topic in many countries, there can be a lack of knowledge among government bodies and local NGOs.”

**Irene Belmonte,
STRIVE Global
Programme Manager**



HEDAYAH'S CVE TRAINING CURRICULUM PACKAGE

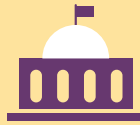
GOAL

Raise awareness
on collaborative
P/CVE approaches

LANGUAGES:

English
Russian
Arabic

TARGET AUDIENCES:



Government
representatives



Civil society
organisations

WHERE:

**Jordan, Kyrgyzstan
and Turkmenistan**



Conceptual grounding in CVE

- Clarifies key concepts
- Presents key background documents and resolutions (e.g. the United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, and selected National Action Plans)
- Common opportunities and pitfalls



In-depth understanding

- Understanding drivers of violent extremism in a contextualised manner
- Understanding gender dynamics of radicalisation
- Education's role in preventing and countering violent extremism
- Understanding the role of narratives and media in violent extremism



Engaging with others

- Engaging community leaders and families
- Opportunities for collaboration between government and civil society
- Understanding and engaging with youth



Utilizing an Innovative Toolbox

- How violent extremism uses these tools
- How these tools can be used to connect and engage in dialogue



Monitoring and evaluation of efforts in response to violent extremism

- Developing a theory of change
- Monitoring and evaluating approaches to strengthen initiatives over time

Leading research

Foreign terrorist fighters' (FTFs): a term used to describe the thousands who travelled from European countries and beyond to conflict zones such as Syria and Iraq in the last decade to engage in terrorism. As the conflicts have worn on, a number of them have now returned home. This puts local authorities in a bind, as FTFs may be further radicalised from their time in combat, traumatised by their experiences, and may still have links to extremist groups. For many, their first stop back on home turf is a prison term. But ultimately, they will need to return to normal life, making rehabilitation and reintegration an urgent priority. North Macedonia is one of many countries seeking answers to this challenge. In 2019, local NGO Nexus – Civil Concept approached the North Macedonian authorities with an unconventional suggestion: why not talk directly with FTF returnees in the prison system, to hear their perspective on how their rehabilitation could work?

This was the idea behind an ambitious research project undertaken with the support of EU funding, through the STRIVE Global programme run by Hedayah. The plan was to conduct a series of interviews with returnees in the prison system, their families, and local institutions that can support reintegration – municipal authorities, policymakers and the private sector. The plans were met with a degree of scepticism in government quarters at first, but Nexus convinced them of the value of the research. “By helping these individuals, we’re helping ourselves and our society,” explains Afrodita Musliu, Executive Director of Nexus-Civil Concept. “If we want to rehabilitate and reintegrate prisoners like these, we have to speak with them to understand their needs, and then see what possibilities exist within the state institutions.”

Following an intensive period of research and analysis, Nexus published its findings including valuable new

insights on the importance of vocational training for prisoners, the role played by tradition and language, and the relationship of returnees to the local Muslim community. Crucially, the report put forward concrete recommendations for the relevant institutions on establishing effective rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. Already, the government department responsible for the prisoners has put many of these in place.

Support for innovative research like this is a major priority of EU Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism funding. As Hedayah’s STRIVE Programme Manager Irene Belmonte explains: “New research is essential to generate evidence-based findings that can support further interventions on the ground. Our aim is to reduce the gap that can exist between theory and practice.” In doing this, a key objective is to work with local partners who are best placed to know where gaps exist and where research can contribute to practical objectives. Hedayah, for instance, places a high value on supporting local entities to build capacity – working closely with grantees to advise on research design, methodology and sampling. Results are disseminated widely throughout Hedayah’s global network, via the online STRIVE Global Counter-Extremism Hub, and at an annual international P/CVE research conference. And research is also shared with practitioners at the local level, to ensure findings can inform projects on the ground.

“New research is essential to generate evidence-based findings that can support further interventions on the ground.”

Irene Belmonte, STRIVE Global Programme Manager

Another recent EU-funded STRIVE Global research project focused on how media narratives

may contribute to radicalisation in Georgia. Tbilisi-based NGO the Media Development Foundation (MDF) proposed the initiative to investigate this phenomenon further, as Tamar Kintsurashvili, MDF Executive Director explains: “Georgia has a large and diverse Muslim community, but it has also been targeted by outside influences from other countries. Media can be used to recruit people based on their beliefs and we wanted to study the role this plays.” The wide-ranging project included a survey of sources of information, media monitoring to analyse narratives of relevance to the community, and focus groups to gauge perceptions. Published in a series of reports, the findings pointed to the role played by non-Georgian media for minority groups; issues around anti-Muslim sentiment, hate



speech and non-inclusive reporting in mainstream and fringe media outlets; and the challenge of weak media self-regulation in this sphere.

MDF used the findings to develop recommendations on terminology, media coverage and inclusive reporting. “When there is interference from outside sources, you should have strong and inclusive local media reflecting the needs of the local communities who are often excluded from mainstream media,” explains Ms Kintsurashvili. The research has received a positive reception from NGOs working with minorities, but also with journalists and media organisations. Work has begun with government actors like the National Communication Commission on media self-regulation and institutional cooperation. And the impact on the ground is already being felt, as MDF is now working directly with the media to address these issues. In addition to a VE curriculum for media schools and a diversity reporting textbook in the pipeline, local journalists will be offered training on how they can put the research recommendations into practice. This will lay the groundwork for a more diverse and inclusive media landscape that serves all Georgian communities.

“When there is interference from outside sources, you should have strong and inclusive local media reflecting the needs of the local communities who are often excluded from mainstream media.”

Shifting gears

All over the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has hit society like a bolt from the blue. Beyond the serious health risks, people have struggled with lockdowns, curfews and other restrictions to everyday life. For some communities, however, the impact is amplified by existing economic hardship or social tensions: regular handwashing is easier said than done in areas where water supply is limited and communicating public health messages is an uphill battle where trust in government is low. For Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism work, the pandemic poses a particular set of challenges, as both the disease and the measures to stop its spread can exacerbate drivers of violent extremism – reducing social cohesion, restricting access to economic opportunities, and impacting mental wellbeing.

While the COVID crisis may be unparalleled in many ways, it is just one example of how unforeseen events can throw the best laid plans off course. And in those parts of the world combatting the threat of VE, preparing to expect the unexpected is par for the course given the dynamic, ever-evolving nature of the challenge at hand. This is why EU-funded P/CVE projects are designed with built-in flexibility and the agility to respond to changing circumstances.

To see this agility at work during the unprecedented upheaval of the COVID pandemic, look no further than the Jeunes Ambassadeurs (JA) in Burkina Faso. One successful JA initiative has been the ‘Mobile

Journalisme’ (MOJO) project to train local youth in video production, with the aim of giving a voice to people from all backgrounds while sharing messages of peace and social cohesion. Previously, the young filmmakers had produced documentaries on VE in their region, screened for other young people to raise awareness and promote discussions. Once COVID-19 hit the area, however, they wasted no time in finding ways to contribute their skills to help local efforts to combat the virus.

The pandemic has had a major impact on daily life in Burkina Faso, and local NGOs have had to adapt as lockdowns put a halt to training programmes and school activities. Yet their links with local communities also puts them in an ideal position to raise awareness. Working with regional health authorities, the JA identified key messages

about COVID and how people can protect themselves from infection. Then the MOJO filmmakers got to work. Collaborating with community figures, they created videos to spread the word and show good practices – such as how a village beer seller learned to apply protective measures to her business.

In addition to providing valuable information, the videos also gave a voice to local people on this key issue, helping them become part of the solution. As MOJO filmmaker Yoanli Yemeoido

“When we see that it comes from our community and when people feel a part of it, the videos have more of an impact.”

MOJO filmmaker Yoanli Yemeoido

Yemeoido explains: “People reach out to us because their voices don’t go very far. They don’t have the opportunity to express themselves and they feel this is important at this time.” The videos were shared widely in the community via Facebook and WhatsApp. “People say ‘that’s where we’re from, that’s our daily life’,” points out Whali Jean Silvanu, JA programme coordinator. “When we see that it comes from our community and when people feel a part of it, the videos have more of an impact.”

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EU-funded STRIVE Global GCERF was also quick off the blocks to reassess and realign once the impact of the pandemic became clear, as Katya Palazzolo, Head of External Affairs, explains: “Working with our board, we quickly acted to facilitate a repurposing of funds where needed. As grantees were respecting national rules, they had to halt their activities in many cases. So we arranged for flexibility for a small proportion of current grants to help them deal with the current situation.”

Zooming in on GCERF grantees in Kosovo, for instance, one local woman had received funding for her textile business from a small business training programme. Once COVID hit, she shifted her business model to start making face masks – creating an online

tutorial on how to sew a mask and selling or donating to healthcare workers the masks she produced herself. Another project promoting social cohesion in Kosovan schools had been supporting reintegration of returned foreign terrorist fighters and their families, developing educational curricula for children returning from Syria and Iraq. The arrival of COVID meant the children could no longer go to school, disrupting the stability and continuity so vital for young people affected by trauma. By repurposing the funding, however, the NGO was able to adapt the curriculum and provide the students with tablets so they could continue their schooling at home. A small step achieved thanks to funding flexibility – one that makes a big difference in supporting a vulnerable child through an uncertain time.

What next?

Preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) is a crucial aspect of the European Union's approach to counterterrorism. Through its P/CVE initiatives the EU aims to foster peace, stability and security – around the globe, but ultimately also for European citizens. As violent extremism in one part of our interconnected world can easily have spill-over effects elsewhere, European security requires concerted efforts by a broad coalition of organisations at different levels.

The EU's strategic approach to P/CVE will continue to be centred around cooperation and multilateralism. The EU will continue to cooperate with both large international organisations such as the UN, the Global Counter Terrorism Forum and Interpol, as well as with a multitude of smaller civil society actors. It will complement policy initiatives such as the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and the Youth, Peace and Security Agendas as well as national and regional policy agendas in EU Member States, Third Countries, the European Neighbourhood and partner countries. With growing urban populations around the world, the EU also looks to empower cities to play a more prominent role in P/CVE. It also hopes to enhance cooperation with strategic and like-minded partners in the private sector.

In the coming years, the EU aims to expand its position as a global peace and security actor, leading the way in setting global standards. In its efforts to tackle the structural economic, political and social grievances that can fuel extreme thought, the EU will continue to place a strong em-

phasis on democratic principles, the rule of law and good governance. Human rights and international humanitarian law will also continue to be a common thread in EU actions, with a particular focus on gender equality and youth.

The EU also looks to consolidate its role as a leader in building academic research on violent extremism and radicalisation. It will be a continued priority of EU-funded projects to add to the publicly-available knowledge base, exploring theory to support practitioners on the ground in reacting quickly to evolving situations and developing innovative approaches – all in a well-founded and well-reasoned way. At the same time, increased attention should be given to concrete effects on the ground, to further understand what works, foster knowledge exchange and showcase the small and large positive impacts created by the EU's actions.

Perhaps the most important cornerstone of P/CVE actions will continue to prioritise supporting the local – local actors, local capacity and relations, and listening to the local context to inform overarching approaches. The European Union wants to keep supporting grassroots initiatives by providing the tools and resources that are needed for communities that want to become more resilient to violent extremist discourses. The stories in this publication feature people from different backgrounds and ages and in many different parts of the world. If there is one thing that unites them, it is that they are writing and rewriting their own stories: strengthening their voices to make a positive change to their lives and their communities.

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Further reading

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Other Sources

Radicalisation Awareness Network: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network_en

CTED factsheet on COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORIST NARRATIVES: https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ctc_cted_fact_sheet_designed_cve_counter_narratives_december_2018.pdf

UN plan of action to prevent violent extremism: https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism.ctitf/files/UNOCT_PVEReferenceGuide_FINAL.pdf

Programmes in this brochure

Under the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, the European Commission funds various global P/CVE actions as part of its flagship Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism (STRIVE) programme. STRIVE actions support communities around the world in acquiring the tools they need to become more resilient in facing violent extremism. All initiatives in this project are part of programmes funded under STRIVE. More information: <https://ct-morse.eu/projects/>

STRIVE GCERF



GCERF in Kenya: <https://www.gcerf.org/kenya/>

A Youth Perspective on Preventing Violent Extremism: https://storage.googleapis.com/kofiannanfoundation.org/2018/10/821c0b85-unga-booklet_final.pdf

GCERF's COVID 19 work: <https://www.gcerf.org/covid19/>

GCERF's Youtube page: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCafkFX4imB_JoZ8bGAR3WA

STRIVE Horn of Africa

More information: <https://rusi.org/strive>



STRIVE Kenya

More information: <https://rusi.org/strive>



Countering radicalisation and violent extremism in the regions of Sahel and Maghreb



Many hands on an elephant. What Enhances Community Resilience to Radicalization into Violent Extremism? (Final report, 2020): <http://unicri.it/sites/default/files/2020-11/Hands.pdf>

Preliminary Findings - Evaluation of a pilot project on countering violent extremism in the regions of Maghreb and Sahel (2019): http://www.unicri.it/sites/default/files/2019-10/Preliminary_findings.pdf

Pilot webpage: http://www.unicri.it/topics/counter_terrorism/countering_violent_extremism_sahel_maghreb



Preventing Violent Extremism through Promoting Tolerance and Respect for Diversity

Projects by the European Union and UNDP: <https://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/tolerance-and-diversity/en/home.html>

Extreme Lives: <https://www.extremelives.org/>

YouTube Creators for Change: [https://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/rbap/en/home/programmes-and-initiatives/creators-for-change.html#:~:text=YouTube%20Creators%20for%20Change%20is,positive%20im-pact%20on%20the%20world](https://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/rbap/en/home/programmes-and-initiatives/creators-for-change.html#:~:text=YouTube%20Creators%20for%20Change%20is,positive%20impact%20on%20the%20world)

Restore social cohesion in the north of Burkina Faso

Jeunes Ambassadeurs: <https://www.facebook.com/JeunesAmbassadeursbf>

STRIVE Global Hedayah

More information: <https://www.hedayahcenter.org/programs/eu-strive-global/>



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