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Community of Practice on Preventing Violent Extremism

Building Pathways:

What works on developing
young people's resilience
to violent extremism



In 2017 the All Party Parliamentary Group for the British Council presented the report “Building Young People’s Resilience to Violent Extremism in the Middle East and North Africa”. The report recommended that “witnesses, experts and organisations that informed the enquiry form a community of practice to develop a stronger evidence base, share knowledge about the plethora of small scale programmes in operation from a wide range of organisations and support each other in their programmes and collaborate on their strategies in the region” (Recommendation 187). Recommendation 188 goes on to reflect findings from the UN Action plan,¹ which observes that “primary data is particularly lacking” ... [and] has “limited explanatory power”.

Following the recommendation by the APPG, between 2018 and 2019, the British Council has convened the Community of Practice (COP) on Preventing Violent Extremism. The COP is formed by a range of experts in the sector – including practitioners, academics and officials from the UK government – and it aims to gather information on best practices and lessons learned about the role of cultural, educational and civil society programmes in increasing trust between citizens and the state and building the resilience of young people to violent extremism.

This document represents the collective views of the Community of Practice (COP) on Preventing Violent Extremism. It seeks to reflect this exercise and the richness, range and diversity of views of COP members who have participated in these discussions. This is not a British Council document and does not represent British Council policy. Nor does it reflect the policy, practice or views of individual members of the Community of Practice. Each party submitted its own views and material and the entire work does not represent the views of any one COP member.

¹ UN Action Plan to Prevent Extremism, 2015

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www.britishcouncil.org/community-practice-prevention-violent-extremism

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List of Acronyms

APPG	All Party Parliamentary Group	NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
COP	Community of Practice	PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
CSO	Civil Society Organisation	RUSI	Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies
CT	Counter-terrorism	UN	United Nations
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
DFID	Department for International Development	USAID	United States Agency for International Development
IDP	Internally Displaced Person	VE	Violent Extremism
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria	VEO	Violent Extremist Organisation
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation	VER	Violent Extremist Recruitment
MENA	Middle East and North Africa		

Foreword

Globalisation has brought many benefits, but it also imposes challenges and creates obligations. In this globalised, inter-connected world events happening in any part of the globe can cause major impacts in the lives of British citizens. At the same time, decisions made in the UK can also affect the lives of those who are in different countries, regions and even continents.



Of all examples which come to mind when thinking about the challenges of our time, the rise of violent extremism is perhaps one of the direst.



Radical violence committed across the world is on the rise – from the UK and wider Europe to Africa and the Middle East. It poses a serious obstacle to the stability of our societies and threatens the conditions for lasting peace and sustainable development. When it comes to violent extremism, those threats know no borders. They should therefore be treated as a problem concerning all of us.

Young people are particularly vulnerable to this threat. They are the primary target of violent extremist recruiters, who take advantage of grievances and vulnerabilities to create an appealing discourse that will entice them down harmful pathways.

The drivers, goals and logic behind violent extremist action are complex and multi-faceted. For this reason, the global response to the issue has, over the years,

taken various shapes and focused on a number of different strategies. Often these are uncoordinated and sometimes even contradictory to each other.

After the British Council APPG launched the report “Building Young People’s Resilience to Violent Extremism in the Middle East and North Africa” in 2017, it became clear that it was time for those working in the area to develop a shared understanding and build a common framework for the prevention of violent extremism.

In an effort to achieve those objectives, since 2018 the British Council has been proudly convening a Community of Practice on Preventing Violent Extremism. The COP comprises a group of experts from international organisations, think tanks, academia and the UK government which, between 2018 and 2019, shared their evidence, views and lessons learned – creating a much-needed collaborative space in the area of PVE.

The discussions and conclusions arising from the group’s encounters are shared in this document. We are extremely happy with the result of this work and are pleased to present this publication in the name of all members of the COP. We are thankful to all of them for their engagement throughout this process. I would also like to thank the British Council team involved in this process: Sheelagh Stewart, who is the lead author and led the COP since the beginning; and Manoela Baltar, Mansoor Jalal and Alison Baily, without whom this publication would not have taken shape. Through this report, we hope to be offering to UK and international policymakers a valuable contribution to the evidence base for policy and programme development in the MENA region and across the world.



We believe that the evidence presented in this report demonstrates that it is possible for international actors and local institutions to develop responses to violent extremism (and other forms of violence) which put young people in the centre. Young people in the Middle East and North Africa – and everywhere else in the world – should stop being seen as a problem to be dealt with and, instead, be empowered and trusted so they can play their true role – as agents for change who can not only contribute positively to their communities, but also help build a more peaceful world.

Ciarán Devane
CEO, British Council

Executive Summary

This report presents the key findings and recommendations of the Community of Practice (COP) on Preventing Violent Extremism, a group of experts formed by a recommendation of the British Council All Party Parliamentary Group (British Council APPG) in the report “Building Young People’s Resilience to Violent Extremism in the Middle East and North Africa”, which drew together the findings of an inquiry that sought to understand how prevention approaches could contribute to building young people’s resilience to the recruitment tactics of violent extremism (VE). The COP worked collaboratively throughout 2018–2019 in order to “[...] develop a stronger evidence base, share knowledge about the plethora of small scale programmes in operation [...] and support each other in their programmes and collaborate on their strategies in the region”.

In the present paper, the COP discusses the current state of the preventing violent extremism (PVE) sector, presents information on best practices and lessons learned through prevention work and provides policy recommendations which aim to inform the strategy and approach towards PVE by the UK government and organisations working in the sector.

The route to violent extremism is not simple and the COP analysis suggested that each person’s pathway is unique and results from a complex interaction between the individual, their context, the opportunity to join a violent extremist group and the coercive tactics used by recruiters. It is, therefore, impossible to produce a profile of vulnerability, and prevention work should always take into account the complexity of those interactions and the particularities of each situation. Prevention programmes demonstrating the greatest impact were based on a granular understanding of both the problem and the context.

However, there are several elements – or push factors – which combine to narrow young people’s social, political and economic opportunities, creating fertile soil for VE recruitment in certain contexts: violence, bad governance, inequalities, repression, amongst several others. In this process, VE movements take advantage of widespread grievances in order to ‘pull’ young people to extremism, making them an offer which presents itself as the only alternative in such a narrow context.

Considering this, the COP concludes that, in general terms, initiatives aiming at preventing violent extremism should seek to increase the number of positive options available for young people. This should be done by combining and co-ordinating immediate short-term responses and long-term structural change, as increasing young people’s ability to recover, keep going and grow in the face of adversity is as important as responding to grievances and addressing local and global factors which create an environment prone to violence and extremism.

The paper goes on by further exploring practical examples and lessons learned by COP members in these two categories of interventions, considering the importance of programmatic elements such as education, gender and communications in contributing to not only diverting young people from the extremist pathways, but also creating positive and meaningful pathways towards increased economic, political and social integration.

Finally, the COP concludes that policy and practice should be more consistently based on a human security approach. This should be reflected, for example, in ensuring greater balance when it comes to using coercive measures associated with countering terrorism. As those can easily fuel feelings explored by violent

extremists in an attempt to promote their cause, PVE interventions can only be truly efficient and sustainable if state actors ensure coherence in their foreign policies. At the same time, the COP recommends that policymakers consider rethinking the need for framing prevention programmes around the violent extremism agenda, and rather put the needs of young people in the centre by looking at the causes of the problem instead of focusing on a single symptom. In the belief that the outcomes of the group's work can contribute to the development of policies and practices that are effective in the prevention of violent extremism, and a range of other negative pathways resulting from young people's vulnerabilities, the Community of Practice has drawn the following conclusions and recommendations:

- **Prevention programming needs to focus on young people – both because they are most often targeted by violent extremist organisations (VEOs) and because their potential plays an important role in any solutions.** Programming needs to work both on increasing young people's ability to recover, keep going and grow in the face of adversity, but also needs to address the global and local factors which have contributed to a significant narrowing of economic, social and political opportunities in the last 25 years.
 - **Policymakers should ensure that programme funding and length takes account of the complexity of violent extremism and political violence.** This would enable the research required to ensure that programmes are based on a granular understanding of both the problem and the intervention context. In particular, because violent extremists exploit existing conflict and tension, this would allow time for detailed and careful conflict analysis. Short-term funding cycles inevitably limit the ability to use
- positive approaches which take time – for example, building trust between citizens and local authorities – which form the basis for the success of longer-term programming.
- **Policymakers and practitioners should resist the temptation to design programmes based on a singular assumption about the cause of violent extremism.** Violent extremism is a complex problem and stems from a complex interaction of context, recruitment strategies and individual choices and motivations. Responses which privilege one explanation – for example, 'religion' or 'ideology', or 'poor governance' – over another focus only on part of this complexity and may miss other important variables.
 - **Prevention programming needs to be based on a far better understanding of the relationship between gender and violent extremism.** There is currently a gap in our understanding and this means that gender is not mainstreamed in the prevention strategy responses. When it is, women are included as 'adjuncts' to men, rather than as actors who can exacerbate the problem or contribute fully to its solution. Both policy research and context analysis need a greater focus on this issue. In addition, programming should actively seek to incorporate women, both as participants and as leaders.
 - **Prevention programming should allow space for engaging the audience.** There are two ways of doing this: either responding to young people's concerns or grievances, or by using platforms – for example such as arts, culture and sports which interest young people. Programmes which specify intervention sectors, or a specific focus – for example, employment – run the risk of missing elements of the problem or critical parts of the audience.

- **Prevention programming needs to provide something immediate, structured and concrete for young people to do, but needs to go beyond diversion and build a pathway towards increased economic, political and social integration.** The initial focus needs to operate as a platform for building the individual and collective skills, contacts and attributes required for young people and the state to increase opportunities. Prevention programmes need to build the constitutive elements of an alternative pathway: i) the ability to work collectively; ii) positive contacts between citizens (collective action groups) and the state, and iii) the experience of having worked successfully together. This combination provides the skills and experience to sustain positive pathways, even in the absence of financial support.
- **Prevention programming needs to manage expectations.** The type of structural change required to address the drivers of violent extremism takes at least a generation. Many of those involved in prevention programming will not get the jobs they want or realise their dreams. This does not mean that they cannot forge positive pathways forward or find meaning. Modest changes in regulation can make a significant difference to perceptions of the state and can create space for meaningful activity. However, if programmes fail to manage expectations, or promise what they cannot deliver, trust will be further eroded and there is potential to increase cynicism and exacerbate grievances.
- **Education can play a role in building the resilience needed to manage challenges and hazards including violent extremism.** This is not related to levels of education. Many violent extremists are well-educated. To build resilience, education needs

two components. The first is a focus on encouraging debate, tolerance, openness and adaptability. And, the second is a focus on enabling students to use their skills positively and in interaction with others, even in contexts where employment is limited.

- **Communications which are focused on ‘opening’ rather than ‘winning’ hearts and minds can play an effective role in preventing violent extremism.** Communications have the potential to: i) create spaces for marginalised voices; ii) reduce social, religious or other tensions in society; iii) support the development of positive and inclusive identities; iv) influence social norms around the acceptance of violence; v) support independent, trusted and inclusive dialogue. However, communication approaches which respond to violent extremist narrative with binary counter-narratives have proved to be unsuccessful and can increase distrust and cynicism.
- **Policymakers and practitioners need to focus on ensuring that measurement of the impact and lessons learnt from prevention programmes is significantly improved.** Monitoring, evaluation and learning from prevention programmes is particularly difficult because of the fluid and rapidly evolving nature of prevention contexts and because evaluation of adaptive programmes is challenging. Nevertheless, this is a critical area, as the ability to improve approaches is hampered by the lack of systematic review and analysis.

- **Policymakers need to ensure greater coherence between short-term prevention programming and longer-term structural reform programmes which have the potential to address the drivers of violent extremism.**

Effective responses to violent extremism need both short-term and longer-term structural reform programmes, but they need to work more effectively in tandem.

- **Prevention policy and practice needs to find a better balance between coercive counter-terrorism (CT) responses and the need to protect citizens.** The use of coercion, such as force, surveillance and other measures associated with CT, will always play a part in the range of responses brought to bear on the problem of violent extremism. However, when coercion is not balanced with protection of citizens' rights, it can drive violent extremism. Indeed, in some instances, violent extremists seek to provoke coercive responses because it aids their cause. Prevention policy should focus on strengthening the ability of police and security structures to take a human security approach and to include the communities they police in the development of local and national security policy.

- **Policymakers should consider whether it is appropriate or effective to use violent extremism as the sole framework for prevention programmes.**

Focusing on violent extremism has the potential to erode trust in external intervention. For some partner countries, the focus on this problem amounts to a failure to respect their sovereignty. It may make sense instead to target the source of vulnerability, the narrowing of young people's options, particularly in marginalised and conflicted areas, rather than one of the symptoms of this narrowing – violent extremism. This approach would recognise the range of negative outcomes and pathways resulting from this and other related vulnerabilities. It would see the needs of young people in these areas being put at the centre, mitigating the risk of increased distrust, and would see violent extremism, as one of a number of negative pathways, reduced (alongside, for example, drug addiction, criminality and delinquency). It may, as a consequence, provide an opportunity for PVE outcomes to become mainstream by allowing them to sit alongside other objectives and results. A more human security focused approach will enable better co-ordination and will tackle the negative outcomes that result from the growing demographic divide, which leaves the vast majority of young people with little stake in stable states that cannot offer them security.

1: Introduction

Background

In 2017, the All Party Parliamentary Group for the British Council presented the report “Building Young People’s Resilience to Violent Extremism in the Middle East and North Africa”. The APPG report drew together the findings of an inquiry into building resilience to violent extremism, noting that prevention approaches should seek to build the resilience of individuals, communities and societies, including building trust and responsive relationships between them.

The report recommended that “witnesses, experts and organisations that informed the enquiry of violent extremist recruiters form a community of practice ... to develop a stronger evidence base, share knowledge about the plethora of small scale programmes in operation from a wide range of organisations and support each other in their programmes and collaborate on their strategies in the region” (Recommendation 187).

In line with this recommendation, a COP met from September 2018 to November 2019 and worked collaboratively to develop the evidence base on prevention of violent extremism. This paper is a result of that work and presents evidence based on views of COP members, their prevention work and the wider literature. Its purpose is to provide information and evidence which can be used to inform UK government strategy and approach towards PVE. The process of the COP has enabled members to share (and debate) their knowledge and has generated opportunities for collaboration.

Why do we care about violent extremism?

After the 9/11 attacks cycles of violent extremism (VE) received new attention. Their contribution to existing complex problems, for example, mass migration, erosion of human rights and developmental gains,² humanitarian disasters, the retardation of global trade and the global economy, which are a major and costly³ threat to global security,⁴ was highlighted. Violent extremism also poses significant risks to individuals and their communities, violating human rights and threatening human security. In addition, the responses to violent extremism often depend on security structures which violate rights.

The UK National Security Strategy also identifies terrorism as a key risk to the UK’s ability to: i) ensure a secure and resilient UK by protecting its people, economy, infrastructure, territory and ways of life from all major risks that can affect it directly; and ii) shape a stable world, by acting to reduce the likelihood of risks affecting the UK or British interests overseas, and applying instruments of power and influence to shape the global environment. The paper identifies terrorism as one of four key risks to these objectives. Countering and preventing violent extremism are, therefore, important national security objectives⁵.

² World Bank 2011, p. 5.

³ Global Terrorism Index 2017, p. 80–2.

⁴ Global Risks Report 2018, pp. 10–11; 39.

⁵ HMG 2010; 2015; 2018.

What is violent extremism?

One of the first issues we face in designing effective responses to the problem of violent extremism (VE) is that there is no agreed definition of the phenomenon. For the purposes of this response to Parliament, however, we have defined VE as “the use of violence and intimidation, by non-state actors – particularly against civilians – to achieve political objectives”. Violent extremism is committed by a wide range of actors – from right wing extremism to achieve nativist and/or white supremacist objectives to jihadism committed, in the case of ISIS, to create a caliphate which reflects their interpretation of sharia law. In essence, violent extremism is similar to political violence committed for a range of causes. The original APPG paper⁶ focused on violent extremism in the Middle East and North Africa. This paper, too, will focus on the region, drawing in relevant examples from other parts of the world. However, this should not be taken as a sign that other forms of VE are neither important nor worthy of concern.

Routes, not roots; pathways, not profilesⁱ

Violence committed to achieve political objectives is shocking and the decision to join a violent extremist organisation can seem incomprehensible.⁷ Policymakers have therefore tended to focus on ‘why’ people become violent extremists, or what ‘drives’⁸ them to violent extremism. Whilst these answers tell us about ‘grievances and discontent’,⁹ which may ‘drive’¹⁰ people to a place where they choose political violence as a tactic, they do not tell us enough about how young people become violent extremists.

It is largely accepted in the literature that a ‘terrorist profile’ does not exist and that it is impossible to identify individuals who are more likely to become violent extremists based on individual vulnerabilities.¹¹ Current evidence suggests that becoming a violent extremist is a process,¹² which varies from individual to individual. So, whilst it is impossible to produce a profile of individual vulnerability, there are individual pathways.¹³ Every pathway is different, but involves a complex interaction between the individual, their context, the opportunity to join a violent extremist group or to carry out an act of violence, and the coercive tactics that recruiters use in order to attract them. There is, therefore, no way of making simple cause-effect connections – for example, “unemployment causes violent extremism”.ⁱⁱ

6 British Council APPG 2017.

7 Horgan, J. 2008, p. 53.

8 Glazzard, A. et al. 2017.

9 Wiktorowicz, Q. 2003, p. 3.

10 Glazzard, A. et al. 2017.

11 See Reich 1990; Silke (ed) 2003; Horgan, J. 2008; Monahan 2017.

12 Silke, A. 2008; Wiktorowicz, Q. 2005; Della Porta, D. 1992; Horgan, J. 2008.

13 Horgan, J. 2008; Hwang, J. 2018; Hwang, J. and Schulze, K. 2018.

Evidence from Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps noted that members of groups they had spoken to came from diverse backgrounds. Some had jobs, and others did not. Some attended secular school; others Islamic school. Many were engineers and doctors. Similarly, the reasons given for joining differ from conventional wisdom. For example, ideology and religion are overlaid as drivers of violent

extremism. **Many former fighters have told us they were not especially religious.** Rather, it is often the way in which armed groups package and offer the revolutionary nature of radical Islam and violence that appeals to disillusioned youth seeking recognition, a sense of meaning or the opportunity to right an injustice.

Horgan describes joining or supporting a VEO as a process of “marginalisation ... toward a much narrower society where extremism becomes all-encompassing”.¹⁴ Across the literature, different elements of this narrowing are observed. They include narrowing or polarisation of views, hardening of attitudes to others and other communities, a change in social groups and increasing alienation from friends and family.

Narrowing of opportunities – particularly for young people

At the same time, social, political and economic opportunities for young people are narrowing. This is true globally and even truer for communities where there is conflict.ⁱⁱⁱ Narrowing economic opportunities are a function of: i) changing employment; ii) the ‘youth bulge’ – the poorer the country, the greater the percentage of its population is under 30; iii) poor economic governance structures.

This, in turn, has an impact on social opportunities and creates what has been called ‘waithood’¹⁵ – young people who cannot secure an economic future also cannot complete adult ‘rites of passage’; for example, marrying and having families. Gendered expectations of men’s role within society also narrows possibilities, as there is pressure on men to be breadwinners, and protectors of the home at all costs. Civic space – the space within which it is possible to negotiate collectively for different arrangements between citizens and the state – is also narrowing globally, which reduces the opportunities for political engagement.¹⁶ The global narrowing of opportunities has also created relative deprivation – that is, a lack of opportunities relative to expectations.^{iv}

¹⁴ Horgan, 2008, p. 59.

¹⁵ Kovacheva, S., Kabainov, S. and Roberst, K. 2018.

¹⁶ Carothers, T. and Brechenmacher, S. 2019.

Evidence from the British Council APPG inquiry on Building Resilience to Radicalisation

In the MENA region, although levels of investment in education are higher than the global average, this does not translate into quality teaching, skills development and personal empowerment to face obstacles in the outside world. However, attending school and completing education increases young people's expectations about employment, social welfare and politics.

When these expectations are not met, they feel frustrated and left behind.

"Once you get out of school and you have a diploma and you do not find a job, because the unemployment rate in the MENA region is one of the highest in the world, of course you do not feel included. You are excluded from society and from the economy and that causes a lot of frustration."¹⁷

Government action and inaction can – and does – exacerbate this effect

Governments – either local or foreign – often respond to security threats by: i) enacting legislation which limits press freedom, the role that civil society can play and space for debate and ii) increasing their coercive security capacity (often with international assistance). This can ratchet up tension, particularly if coercion and repression – in the form of surveillance and pre-emptive arrests – are indiscriminate and reduce further the space for positive political engagement. Coercive responses to violent extremism often appear as trigger factors which push individuals decisively from the 'at-risk' category to joining a VEO.

Saferworld evidence¹⁸

Research by Saferworld in a number of countries found that abusive, corrupt and exclusive states play a key role in creating the enabling environment for the rise of violent movements.

One example is Yemen, where international actors gave full priority to the fight against terror, failing to prioritise governance reform and reinforcing a dysfunctional, repressive and unresponsive state which was in the centre of the crisis. As the populations' grievances based on state behaviour worsened, armed opposition to the government has grown on several fronts, allowing VEMs to prosper amidst the conflict. Analysis shows that targeted killings of VEO leaders carried out by Western actors have generated feelings of resentment against local and

international governments, which has in turn increased levels of support for and recruitment into al-Qaeda and its domestic wing Ansar al Sharia (AAS).

In this and other contexts, the use of the terrorist threat to justify authoritarian and hard-power policies by governments has been feeding VE in many ways: "First, when constructive channels to push for political change are shut down, this can push dissenters towards violent tactics. Second, dissidents can feel impelled to join violent groups in order to protect themselves from torture, arbitrary arrest and extra-judicial killings. And third, the deep anger generated by repressive responses tend to feed support for armed rebellion where options for pursuing it exist".

Ju-jitsu politics – using coercive strength against itself

It is also clear that violent extremists not only take advantage of this phenomenon, but also, in some instances, seek to provoke a security over-reaction as this can build support for their cause – a strategy referred to as "ju-jitsu politics".¹⁹ McCauley and Moskalenko note that "with ju-jitsu politics terrorists aim to elicit an overreaction that mobilizes new sympathy and support for themselves. A response to terrorism that creates collateral damage, that harms individuals previously unsympathetic to the terrorists, can bring new status and new volunteers for the terrorists".²⁰

The failure to deliver core services, particularly when this affects some communities and identity groups more than others, is correlated with the presence of VEOs. British Council evidence suggests that many communities have a conflicting experience of governance.

These communities lack access to core services, whilst at the same time experience the state as an 'unpleasantly omnipresent' form of surveillance and repression. This type of contradictory unaccountable governance often results in feelings of injustice and victimisation, which are fertile soil for calls to violence.

It's not just context – it's also about opportunity

These contextual or 'push' factors act as fertiliser for the soil in which extremist rhetoric is sown. However, there are many contexts in which these factors exist, but there is little or no extremist violence. Hence, they are not predictive.²¹ What is predictive is the presence of active recruitment by VEOs. And, what is clear is that recruitment strategies are interactive and tailored to the context.^v

¹⁸ Atree, L. 2016; Saferworld 2017.

¹⁹ McCauley, C. and Moskalenko, S. 2016.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Bouhana, N. 2011, p. 34.

In the recruitment process, VEOs take advantage of widespread grievances, using them to argue that violence is the only route to change. Contentious politics²² is used to drive radicalisation with governance co-opted and reframed as part of a broader struggle. This reframing is often accompanied by an 'offer' of purpose, belonging and a mission which attracts both tacit and active support.

VEO messaging is specifically targeted

The evidence suggests that strategies are specifically designed to appeal to the audience in mind. This can involve: i) invoking conflict, issues or problems experienced in a particular context; ii) constructing a heroic purpose – for example, the need to respond to the attacks against the Muslim community [Ummah] or build the caliphate or iii) appealing to individual duty and identity.²³

Differential strategies for recruiting men and women²⁴

ISIL's strategies to recruit men and women have worked where other efforts have failed. Young men and women's experiences of political, economic and social marginalisation in their own countries and their desire to do something 'more' with their lives provides a context against which joining ISIL looks attractive. In joining ISIL, they are led to believe that they can become the man or woman they hope to be, and to be a valued member in the building of the caliphate and a new society, which they envision will be a

better place for them and, in some cases, their children. For older girls and women, this idealised role is one of a valued and respected wife and mother, who can raise her children in a 'holier' place where neither she nor her family are discriminated against or abused. For men, this idealised role is one of a real man, a powerful and capable man who protects his community and family, whose wife and children respect him, a place where he is no longer emasculated and discriminated against by his society.

These highly focused strategies often create degrees of affinity, acceptance or agreement with some, or all, of the ideological positions of a violent extremist organisation or movement. This ideological dimension is not the only concern but does suggest a need to move beyond a dichotomy of structural versus ideological factors to a more nuanced understanding of how individuals come to engage in violent extremist activity.^{vi} Ideology is often a lens through which structural grievances are filtered.

22 Search for Common Ground 2019

23 Van Leuven, D., Mazurana, D. and Gordon, R. 2016.

24 Ibid p. 103.

The role of ideology as a contributing factor

The UNDP's "Journey to Extremism in Africa" report²⁵ recognises the role of religious ideologies. Among the key programming entry points identified by the research, alongside economic factors, state and citizenship, education and family circumstances, is an acknowledgement of the role of religious ideologies. The report states, "Where there is injustice, deprivation and desperation, violent extremist ideologies present themselves as a challenge to the status quo and a form of escape."

The United Nations' "Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism" notes that violent extremist groups "distort and exploit religious beliefs, ethnic differences and political ideologies to legitimize their actions... and recruit followers."²⁶ Different beliefs and ideologies can also play a positive role. Religion, for example, can be a source of collective identity and a way to imbue a higher or eternal purpose.

Identity can also be exploited

Identity can be exploited in a similar way. The 2017 APPG report notes that identity can also be exploited by extremist groups, but that it is the "instrumentalisation of identity" to justify violence, rather than the identity itself which is the problem. Confusing the two can lead to harmful responses which "are perceived – for example – as Islamophobic".²⁷ In both instances, structural discrimination against particular communities or identities makes it easier for violent extremists to perpetuate violent ideology and instrumentalise identity.

A perfect storm?

The narrowing of social, political and economic opportunities, alongside feelings of injustice and distrust generated by bad governance and repressive, securitised responses to the population's demands, narrows young people's options and creates fertile soil for VE movements which argue that change can only be achieved by violent means. In essence, they make the task of the violent extremist recruiters easier. Contexts where: i) violence is already endemic and normalised and ii) the few occupations that are available are already violent/illegal, or both, may provide a backdrop against which violent extremism does not seem particularly extreme.

This process can be illustrated as a funnel (illustrated below), in which recruiters build on narrowing social, economic and political opportunities to create^{vii} and promote narrower views and a narrower society that justifies a reliance on violence as the only route to change, and drawing to a point "where extremism becomes all-encompassing".²⁸

²⁵ UNDP (2017)

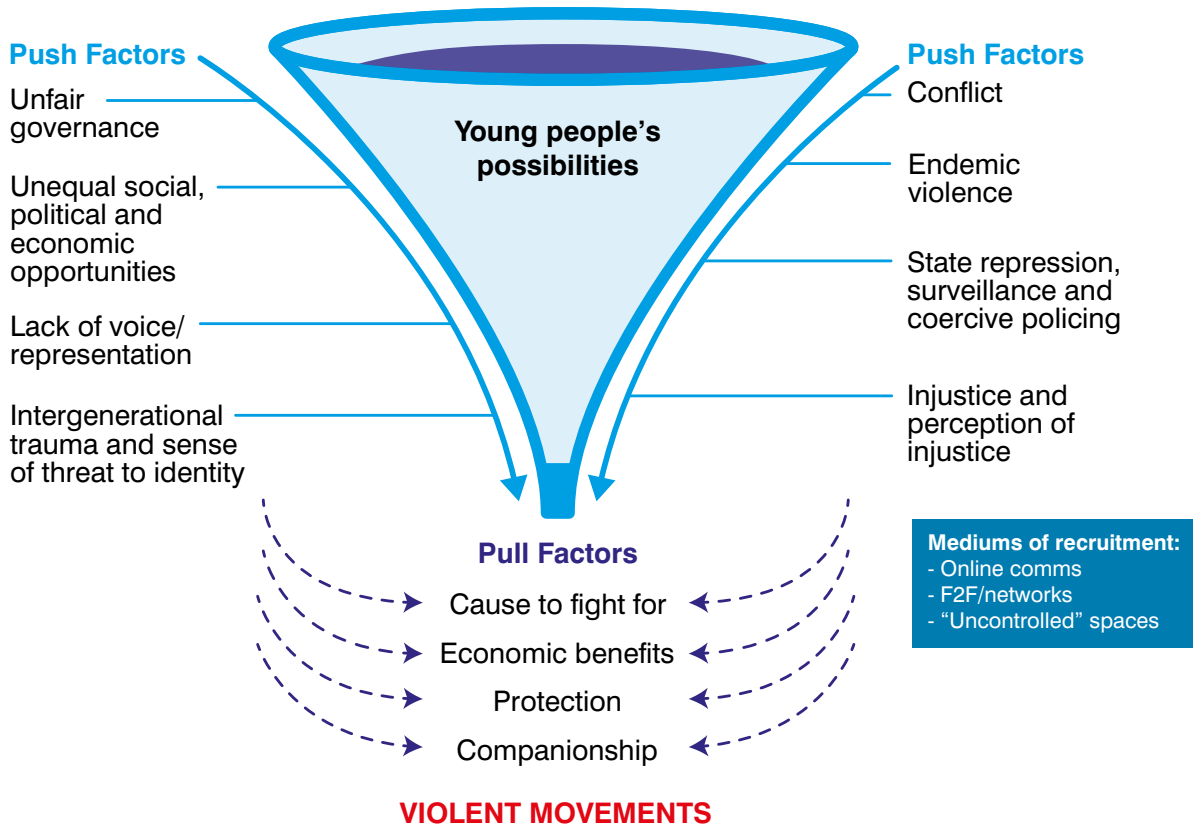
²⁶ UN (2015)

²⁷ British Council APPG 2017, p. 14.

²⁸ Horgan 2008, p. 89; See also Daxecker 2017; Hwang, J. 2018; Hwang, J. and Schulze, K. 2018.

Figure 1: Process resulting in violent extremism

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In summary, this analysis suggests that:

- Young people are and/or feel caught in a perfect storm where opportunities are narrowing across different mutually reinforcing levels;
- VE recruiters and networks, and recruiters for other conflicts, for example, over land rights, use narrowing opportunities as a foundation for suggesting that violence is the only route to change. Young people in these contexts can easily feel called to defend families and communities from violence, or to support values and activities including, for example, defence of the ummah;
- Contexts where opportunities are significantly narrowed, particularly when they cross-cut with state-enabled marginalisation, discrimination and poor governance, make the recruitment task easier;
- Nevertheless, there are many contexts where there is significant narrowing, but there is no violent extremism. This suggests that 'exposure' to recruitment is a factor in whether this is an option for young people. It is important to note that the harm for young people caused by narrowing opportunities is not limited to violent extremism. And, in fact, that violent extremism is not necessarily a problem prioritised by young people themselves. The COP members drew attention to gang violence, self-harm and diseases of despair, including drug addiction, as being harms that are of concern.
- There is no simple correlation between one cause and the effect; for example, that unemployment may facilitate VE recruitment but it does not cause violent extremism.

2: What does this mean for prevention of Violent Extremism? Lessons from the COP

This section sets out themes and lessons identified during the COP process. Overall, the analysis suggests that prevention responses to violent extremism need, in general terms, to 'reverse the funnel', by increasing the range of positive options for young people. This is complex and requires immediate responses, longer-term structural change and a pathway between the two. Through the process of the COP, we have encountered several effective responses which contribute to reversing the funnel. Broadly, these contributions fall into two categories: i) short-term relatively lightly funded work supported through emergency, stabilisation or prevention programmes and ii) longer-term work often funded under development programmes. The balance of this section will consider lessons and understanding from both sets of these examples. The programme also explored some of the research which supported the development of these programmes.

Short-term prevention programming

Examples considered under this rubric were specifically adapted to the context. Nevertheless, we identified core principles and patterns which are helpful both as a guide to the complexity of this work and as a set of principles for prevention work. They are detailed below.

Young people are NOT the problem

Young people are particularly important, because they are the focus of extremist recruiters.^{viii} Young people globally, and particularly in MENA, operate in an environment in which they have very few (and decreasing) opportunities for political, economic and social engagement. Political, economic and social opportunities have decreased considerably and significant improvements are likely to take time – possibly a generation. This increases young people's vulnerability to a range of harmful life choices, one of which is violent extremism. However, there are many areas where young people have few opportunities, but there is no violent extremism.

Even in areas where violent extremism is a hazard, the vast majority of young people do not take this path. Most young people are battling to create a positive future for themselves. Treating them as a problem to be 'fixed' can exacerbate stigmatisation and increase frustration and anger. Moreover, a focus on 'fixing' young people, whilst ignoring the very real barriers they face, will not work. Improving employability in areas where there is no work is pointless and probably counter-productive. Many young people have positive aspirations and motivations including, for example, a desire to protect their communities. This is energy that should – and can – be redirected towards something productive. Young people are a huge resource with enormous potential, not a threat or inevitable liability.

Effective prevention interventions are based on a granular understanding of the problem and context

Joining a VEO is not random and requires 'exposure' to violent extremist recruitment (VER). Consequently, effective prevention programming starts with a clear understanding of: i) the problem (the way in which options have been narrowed and how VER is exploiting this); ii) the issues and concerns of both affected communities and the power holders in the context; iii) power dynamics in the context; and iv) how to win the consent of key actors and beneficiaries. Programme objectives are realistic and are designed to adapt as the situation changes on the ground.²⁹

Strengthening Resilience Programmes, British Council

At the beginning of this programme in 2015 an initial study was conducted using a set of simple, open questions. These included the question "Where are people being recruited? Are there 'hubs', 'hotspots' or institutions which provide a significant portion of recruits?". This was broadly framed to include geographies, such as neighbourhoods or communities, and institutions, such as prisons or universities.

The study avoided the question of "Why are people being recruited?". This is because the question of why has two flaws. Firstly, it elicits justification, sometimes framed

in religious or ideological terms. Secondly, it produces very broad responses focused on issues which relatively small prevention responses cannot accommodate. The study chose instead to focus on practicalities like 'how' and 'where'. It also focused on the concerns, needs and interests of young people in these areas. This study meant that the programme was effectively focused on the problem and provided a baseline to design a programme which started with the problem and resonated with important needs and interests of the beneficiary community.

Prevention programming needs to adapt as contexts change

In marginalised and conflict-affected areas, in particular, the context changes rapidly. This suggests that programmes need to have both the capacity to constantly update their understanding and the flexibility to adapt themselves to reflect changes on the ground. The COP members noted that best practice for these contexts was the use of problem-driven, iterative and adaptive programming – PDIA. This is based on a detailed understanding of the local context. It aims to solve particular problems in their context by: i) enabling an ‘authorising environment’ for decision-making that allows experimentation; ii) involving active learning and using the learning to adapt responses; and iii) engaging diverse sets of agents across the community and with the local authority to ensure that reforms are politically supportable and practically implementable. Overall, this approach to programming is flexible enough to accommodate a rapidly changing environment and shifting political dynamics.³⁰

Prevention programming based on a single ‘pet’ cause of violent extremism is not effective

The COP participants also drew attention to a pattern of fixating on one cause – at the expense of an adequate response to a complex, multi-layered ‘wicked’ problem.³¹ In managing this complexity, policymakers and practitioners often ‘pick’ one aspect of the problem; for example, ‘religion’ or

‘ideology’, or ‘poor governance’. Whilst each of these problems does shed light on the drivers of radicalisation, they are all only partial explanations.³² Each focuses on a particular – or partial – element of the complex interweaving of mindset, circumstance and individual choice³³ that informs a decision to join any cause, including a violent extremist cause. Consequently, responses which focus on any one of these problems will also only be partial.^{ix}

A related problem is that each of the drivers³⁴ is complex, institutionalised and, therefore, slow to solve.³⁵ Putting together a series of complex, multi-system responses for each of the drivers would tax even a generous budget and would (conservatively) take a generation to implement.³⁶ This means that responding to the drivers has, in a number of significant instances, been overrun by a rapid mobilisation of violent resistance.^x

Effective preventions programming requires an understanding of how women have engaged with violent extremism

The COP participants noted that gender and violent extremism is poorly understood and seldom considered in the design and delivery of prevention programming.³⁷ The COP practitioners noted two specific issues. Firstly, that too little is known about gender and, secondly, that this is an area in which gendered assumptions – for example, about the inherently peaceful and/or passive nature of women – are too influential in programme design.

30 Andrews, M., Pritchett, L. and Woolcock, M. 2012, p. 2.

31 Crenshaw, M. 2012, p. 100; Taylor and Horgan 2012, pp. 130–132.

32 Neumann and Kleinmann 2013, p. 370.

33 See diagram on p. 9.

34 Glazzard, A. et al. op cit.

35 World Bank 2011 Global Development Report, op cit. p. 5; See also footnote 5.

36 World Bank 2011 Global Development Report op cit. p. 10.

37 Stickings, J et al 2019, p. 21.

Stereotypical gender assumptions compromise PVE responses³⁸

COP presentations including a paper authored by RUSI's Emily Winterbotham and published by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change³⁹ and a curriculum presented by Search for Common Ground⁴⁰ highlighted gendered blind spots which have featured in VE programming:

- Women are more peaceful than men
- Mothers are always influential in families and communities and are critical to preventing violent extremism
- Gender equality leads to a reduction in violent extremism
- Women are not recruited by violent extremist groups
- Women only support violent extremism when they are coerced or because of connections to male violent extremists

- Men take part in violent radicalism due to a personal desire to change their societies, while women have other reasons
- Women do not commit violence in violent extremist groups

These gender misconceptions hinder adequate responses to women's involvement in VEOs. Women have been taking part in extremist and violent movements throughout history. On the other hand, they have also always played an important part in preventing and countering radicalisation and violent extremism. Radicalisation is a complex, multi-causal phenomenon. Understanding and responding to female radicalisation requires the same granular analysis and multi-layered response that is focused on male engagement. Similarly, engaging women in PVE needs to be based on careful understanding of context and circumstances and not on crude old-fashioned stereotypes.

Participants note that failures to sufficiently incorporate gender stem from a belief that violent extremism is often described as a 'male' phenomenon. Consequently, the role of women in such extremist movements is often neglected or reduced to the passive role of being victims. The evidence suggests, in contrast, that women have played varied and significant roles in extremist and violent movements throughout history,⁴¹ either as direct perpetrators of physical violence, such as combatants, suicide bombers and bomb setters, or through supportive roles, such

as spying, propagandising and couriering. For example, between 1985 and 2010 more than 257 suicide attacks were perpetrated by women.⁴²

The trend has been growing. In 2017, 137 women carried suicide attacks worldwide, the highest number yet recorded.⁴³ Women have also played a role in a range of VEOs including the Red Army Faction in Germany⁴⁴ and several Jihadist groups, including ISIS⁴⁵ and the Islamic Palestinian Jihad.⁴⁶

38 Winterbotham, E. 2018, van Leuven, D. 2019, pp. 74–89.

39 Ibid.

40 Van Leuven, D. 2019, pp. 74–89.

41 See, for example, Alison, M. 2004; Bloom, M. 2011; Cohen, D.K. 2013; Kaufman, J. and Williams, K. 2010; Sjoberg, L. and Gentry, C. 2011.

42 Bloom, M. 2011, p. 2.

43 Mendelboim, A. and Schweitzer, Y. 2018, p. 4.

44 Whaley Eager, P. 2008, pp. 54–55.

45 Winter, C. 2018.

46 O'Rourke, L. 2009, p. 698.

On the other hand, women have also always played an important part in preventing and countering radicalisation and violent extremism. Effective prevention-related analysis needs greater focus on the underexplored part that women play in VEOs. Effective responses need to focus on women's active role as perpetrators or supporters of extremist violence and as actors in prevention and countering efforts.^{xi} This implies that we need to improve the evidence base on gender and violent extremism. Specifically, effective prevention programming requires an understanding of how women have contributed to and within VEOs.

Analysis focused on women's role tends to emphasise the world of 'jihadi brides', focusing on domestic chores and child-raising. One argument – that mothers are better able to spot signs of radicalisation and, therefore, divert their children from violent paths – was highlighted in the COP.⁴⁷ Women's role as mothers is certainly an essential opportunity for them to influence their children, but overemphasising women's matriarchal role limits their agency to stereotypical gender roles. Another often-repeated mantra suggests that reducing gender inequalities contributes to peaceful and stable societies.

However, violent extremism also emerges in societies with considerable levels of gender equality.

Again, in contrast, the evidence suggests that women's roles in VEOs have included professional positions, such as doctors, administrators, teachers, and movement positions as recruiters, propagandists and/or fundraisers. Women can be powerful propaganda assets, for example, when their willingness to use violence is used to shame men into participating in jihad. Finally, women have also been involved in carrying out militant operations themselves, including suicide attacks. For all these reasons, women play a fundamental role in sustaining and propagating VEOs.

...and a better understanding of why and how women engage in VEOs

Just as with men, there is no 'typical' profile of women supporting VEOs,⁴⁸ but rather a variety of pathways. For example, evidence about ISIS⁴⁹ suggests that women who joined have different socio-demographic make-up and background stories. Motivations range from a quest for belonging, the aspiration to help build a utopian Islamic state, a divine calling and a (perceived) moral duty to support their Muslim brothers and sisters, to a sense of adventure, the prospect of marriage, or a combination thereof.

47 Winterbotham, E. 2018.

48 Sjoberg, L. and Gentry, C. 2009.

49 Van Leuven, D., Mazurana, D., Gordon, R. 2016, p.103.

Centre for Mediterranean Integration (CMI) – Violent Extremism and Development

The CMI notes that increasing numbers of women participate in violent extremism. Indeed, young women, facing high levels of frustration and exclusion as they are increasingly integrated into all levels of the

educational system, yet are often unable to find jobs commensurate to their abilities, have been identified as one of the most vulnerable and at-risk groups of young people⁵⁰.

Effective prevention programming requires an understanding of how best to engage and involve women

Gender misconceptions and gender stereotypes often influence the ways in which women are able to contribute.⁵¹ Prevention programmes regularly fail the ‘Bechdel test’.^{xii} That is, women are often included only as adjuncts to men – mothers, sisters and wives – and, as such, ideally positioned to spot early warning signs of radicalisation. While this can be a valuable element of prevention programmes, it reinforces gender stereotypes and overlooks women’s capacity to contribute in many other areas. Different studies and experts point out that women can play a vital role as policy shapers, educators, community members and activists.

Effective prevention programming incorporates gender

In this regard, COP members again drew attention to a failure to ensure that gender is adequately reflected across all levels of prevention programming.

Evidence presented to the COP⁵² and from the literature suggests that approaches to this can include:

- Increased capacity-building and involvement of women-led CSOs, including in leadership roles;
- Accounting for female-specific issues in prevention responses;
- Ensuring that a clear analysis of risks to women and girls posed by involvement in prevention programming is built into programme responses;
- Increasing programming specifically focused on women, adapted to local contexts.

Effective prevention programmes engage their audience, but go beyond ‘diversion’

Effective prevention work seeks to mimic recruitment tactics by appealing to young people’s concerns and interests. There were two distinct tactics apparent in examples of the COP work. The first was engaging young people on the basis of their concerns – about their communities or about their futures. This might include working to improve the neighbourhood, or it might include involving young people in the redesign of services which they need.

50 CMI 2016.

51 Kaufman, J. and Williams, C. 2011, p. 4.

52 Presentation to the COP by RUSI on 29 November 2018 and by Search for Common Ground on 9 May 2019. Also see Van Leuven, D. 2019.

Mercy Corps' Somali Youth Leaders Initiative⁵³

The Somali Youth Leaders Initiative (SYLI) was a five-year USAID funded programme implemented by Mercy Corps whose overall goal is to increase education, economic and civic participation opportunities for Somali youth to reduce instability in target areas. Whilst it is unclear whether more and better education decreases violent extremism, what was clear was that young people in Somalia were interested in education as a way to improve their prospects.

However, employment in Somalia will be limited in the future. A civic engagement component was built into the programme and was effective in building confidence and a sense of self-efficacy in young people. The intervention included peer-to-peer

dialogue, allowing youth to engage in regional and national issues, interaction within communities through youth-led service learning and awareness activities, and participation in the design and implementation of government policies.

The intervention started with a way of engaging young people and then focused on increasing their opportunities for economic or political engagement in wider society. The evaluation found that this combination reduced young Somalis' support and participation in armed groups, in general, and political violence, in particular. In Puntland and South Central Somalia, youth were nearly 65% less likely to demonstrate moral or material support for political violence.

The second tactic for engaging young people is based on their interests. A number of the programmes we considered used sport, music, culture and arts to engage young people.

The role of arts – Prof David Cotterrell⁵⁴

There is already significant respect for the convening power of the arts within local contexts. Whether to promote tolerance, equality, consent or catharsis, the arts have effectively been used as a tool for engagement. In some countries, overseas aid is the principal funder of domestic cultural production and there is an increasing interest in humanities, social science and healthcare-led initiatives partnering with arts organisations to achieve shared goals. Performance, visual art, film and

music claim the potential to educate, to critically engage, to challenge, to heal, to absorb, to document and expose complex, contentious, sensitive and under-represented human experience. Cultural exchange has been invested in as a method of championing understanding of alienated communities, as a method for demonstrating benign engagement over exploitative power relationships and as a powerful tool for self-reflection.

53 Testfaye et al. 2018.

54 Cotterrell, D. 2019, p. 4.

Effective programmes provided something immediate, meaningful and structured for young people to do

Most of the contexts within which COP programming was developed were characterised by an absence of meaningful activities and opportunities for young people. Young people in these contexts often note that their lives feel wasted and that they feel guilty because they are a continuing burden on their families. Young people feel that they have no way to make improvements in their communities.

However, this energy can be redirected to something positive, and effective responses in these contexts need to draw as many people as possible into purposive structured activity.

Effective programmes go much further than diversion and create ‘positive pathways’ for young people

There is a legitimate concern that the short-term, lightly resourced nature of PVE programming means that it creates immediate relief, but only for those involved and only while the programme is operating.

Concerns about prevention programming

“While PVE/resilience programming has a lot of grand narratives of fixing massive underlying social issues, but if the programme cycles are so short (max 3 years) and budgets are small and you have to spend a good portion of that cycle building trust and capacity with ... programmes like ... football and food festivals, it leaves very little time to really address the difficult, underlying issues like human rights, marginalization, etc. So, unless you get that big government buy-in to address these massive problems, or massive amounts of support and capability from local NGOs/CSOs it seems like PVE programming is often repeating the same cycle in different locations, which is only really improving the lives the

participants and those immediate to them and possibly only for the time that the programme is present. Is it really impacting the long-term changes that need to occur for future generations not to face the same difficulties.”⁵⁵

Comments from review of the British Council Programme “Strengthening Resilience in MENA 2016-19”

These skills are important, but without a set of parallel activities which strengthen the social contract between individuals and the state, they could be quite dangerous. This is especially true where some countries are too fragile to create these parallel activities, and these are often the countries that suffer most from VE.

As the examples illustrate, however, the initial focus is not just diversion (of ‘idle hands’), it is instead a platform for building the individual and collective skills and attributes to ‘reverse the funnel’; that is, to create social, political and economic opportunities. It is possible to build an ‘alternative pathway’ for young people

through this combination of giving youth an opportunity to take a different path, by providing short-term assistance which supports immediate purposive activity married with something longer-term; for example, the opportunity to work on local solutions for change.

Mercy Corps' evidence from Afghanistan: "Can economic interventions reduce violence?"

"Our evidence indicates that a combination of short- and long-term support reduces support for violence. An impact evaluation of our INVEST programme in Afghanistan demonstrated that a combination of cash transfers to boost financial support in the short term and vocational education and training

to improve longer-term opportunity reduced young Afghans' willingness to support and participate in political violence, by 17%. This programme's design seek to secure 'quick wins' where possible or boost civic or economic integration in the short term while laying the groundwork for longer-term individual or systems change."

The other aspect of this type of work is that it builds the constitutive elements of an 'alternative pathway'. These are: i) contacts between citizens and the state; ii) the experience of having successfully worked together; iii) the skills and experience to continue the work or apply it to different endeavours. At heart, therefore, these programmes have the capacity to begin resetting the relationships between citizens and the state – at different levels, from the local to the national – at least where they are implemented. The civic engagement component of the Somali Youth Leaders Initiative, for example, creates community engagement and opens political opportunities – in this instance, "the chance to participate in the design and implementation of activities".

Effective prevention programmes manage unrealistic expectations

The type of structural change that is required to address the drivers of violent extremism takes at least a generation. This means that many young people will not get jobs they want or realise their dreams. At the same time, however, modest changes in local regulation or management can make a significant difference to citizens' perceptions and can sometimes impact on their ability to earn a living – and involving citizens in the process of making these changes is meaningful.

This type of programme design therefore seeks not only to build skills among youth, but also to secure productive ways for youth to apply those skills. Critically, it also mitigates and manages the (unrealistic) expectations – for example, in the SYLI programme⁵⁶ that better secondary education would ensure a job – by providing something worthwhile for young people to engage in. The SYLI did this through a civic engagement component which strengthened relations with the local authority and allowed the young people to see they could make change. The evidence suggests that reduced support for violence often results from an improved perception of governance. Therefore, perhaps most importantly, programme design should deliberately seek to improve youth's engagement in governance and decision-making while simultaneously seeking to improve governance systems.

The **design** of prevention programmes is critical if they are going to reset relationships across social economic and political divides. It is the **process** of working together to solve a specific problem that cements the partnership, builds respect across the different divides and results in the embedding of processes and structures that make the approach sustainable. Effective prevention programmes are local in scope, concentrating on specific relationships and specific problems.

Tone and messaging of success matters and once politicians understand the benefits of positive community relations, and more positive interactive relations with local media, they too are more likely to seek positive engagement in the future.

While it is clear that coalitions built through prevention programmes may change rapidly, because they are based on small changes and because the focus is immediate and short term, they nevertheless can buy sufficient time to effect medium-term institutional change and sometimes longer-term structural change, which together can make a difference in achieving sustainable stability and security. However, the scale of resourcing of prevention programming and the intensity of the focus required to reset relationships means that although effective, changes are limited to programming context.

Formal and informal education that builds resilience can play an effective role in prevention programming

The role of education in response to violent extremism is contested. There is widespread agreement about the potential for quality education to play a positive role in society. It can promote social cohesion, and build support for values and practices like democracy, justice and freedom of expression. Well-educated citizens are better equipped to claim their rights, find employment and contribute to their countries' socio-economic development. All those are elements which contribute significantly to peaceful and stable societies.⁵⁷

However, there are many ways in which education can promote inequality; for example, unequal access to educational opportunities and/or varying levels of support for school systems. Education may also be used to institutionalise discrimination, inflame ethnic division and reflect racist ideologies. And, educational systems can entrench prejudice, politicise historical narratives and deepen existing divides within society.⁵⁸ In some extreme cases, terrorist and extremist groups can infiltrate and manipulate education systems, using them as a tool to spread their messages, and embed calls for violent acts of extremism within resources or classrooms.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ See Gallagher et al., p. 2.

⁵⁸ Bush, K. and Saltarelli, D. 2000.

⁵⁹ Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2019 (forthcoming).

When it comes to violent extremism (VE), this relationship is even more complex. Although there is extensive literature arguing that the lack of access to education can increase the feelings of injustice and marginalisation that fuel radicalisation,⁶⁰ numerous studies have also shown that men recruited by violent extremist organisations have on average higher levels of education than those normally seen in their countries of origin.⁶¹ Violent extremism flourishes in environments where push and pull factors operate dynamically together – narrowing down positive opportunities available for young people. In these contexts, VE recruitment is easier and faster (see pp. 17–18 above).

When opportunities are so scarce, well-educated youth can develop even stronger feelings of frustration after finishing their studies, as their likelihood of finding a job or having any economic or social prospects is very low. This is a reality faced across the entire MENA region. When qualified young people have high aspirations that cannot be fulfilled through positive means, engaging in violent activities becomes an option.⁶² Whilst some studies suggest that there is a correlation between young people being more educated and having an increased acceptance of political violence,⁶³ others suggest that there is a growing argument for the potential of education to protect against VE-related threats⁶⁴ (although realising this potential can be difficult in practice⁶⁵). With violent extremism on the rise, education can play a vital role in reducing young people's vulnerability to the underlying forces of radicalisation.⁶⁶ This needs to be carefully designed and, in particular, draw clear distinctions between radicalisation^{xiii} and violent extremism.⁶⁷ Any approaches need to involve careful consideration of: i) what is taught, ii) how it is taught and iii) the relationships between students and the outside community.

A broader evaluation of preventing violent extremism (PVE) initiatives looks at the two programme areas of (a) formal educational institutions and (b) building community resilience through families and communities.⁶⁸ With regard to the former, the authors argue that educational institutions can contribute to PVE through channels such as critical thinking skills' development, civic education, community engagement and volunteering in schools. The work they report on stems from the recognition that there is no simple relationship between the overall quality of education and resistance or attraction to violent extremism. Overall, they conclude that there is value in continuing to develop prevention programming through formal education institutions, as long as these take sufficient account of context, that is, ensure the relevance of programmes to the local push and pull factors related to radicalisation and recruitment. Importantly, too, there is a need for those working on these issues within a formal education context to co-ordinate their efforts with others in the wider community to “create comprehensive, mutual, reinforcing approaches”⁶⁹

60 Gallagher et al. 2018, p. 13.

61 World Bank 2018.

62 The Global Terrorism Index 2017, p. 65.

63 Tesfaye, B. et al. 2018.

64 Ghosh, R. et al. 2017.

65 Ghosh, R. et al. 2018.

66 UNESCO 2017.

67 Sieckelinc, S., Kaulingfreks, F. and de Winter, M. 2015.

68 Veenkamp, I. and Zeiger, S. 2012.

69 Ibid, p. 161.

This means that, in some contexts, simply providing 'more education' is not enough to **increase** the positive options available for youth. In other words, although central in this process, programmes which aim merely to increase access to, or the amount of, traditional education alone are insufficient. What is critical is not 'more' education but ensuring that the education is the right kind of experience and has the right kind of quality. The Centre for Mediterranean Integration (CMI) note that "teaching methods that discourage critical thinking and employ rote learning have proved the limitations of a system that has produced individuals who use binary reasoning. [...] [The system] does not teach students about individual and collective responsibility or the rights and duties of a citizen. [...] Schools should play a role in demystifying the discourse of violence. They should promote an awareness of tolerance, dialogue, negotiation, and compromise."⁷⁰ In particular, a lack of specialist training for teachers and gaps in the curriculum can result in potential being squandered and the system failing to build resilience.

As noted above, education can also be used for explicitly negative ends. Systematic change is therefore necessary to make the most of the potential that education offers for PVE by encouraging dialogue across cultures, critical thinking and ethical decision-making.^{xiv}

Within and beyond the classroom: what works in protecting young people from VE?

Prevention work should focus on increasing the range of positive options available for young people. The process of broadening options goes through two different spheres. Firstly, the internal dimension, reflected in an increase in personal resilience, including the broadening of an individual's mindset and capacity to recover, keep going and grow through adversity (resilience). Secondly, an external dimension, where this person is given the space and the opportunity to apply skills in practice through positive means and interaction with others. This suggests that in areas where recruitment levels are high, PVE programmes should be framed by a complementary approach that includes different components of both personal resilience and collective interaction.

Building resilience

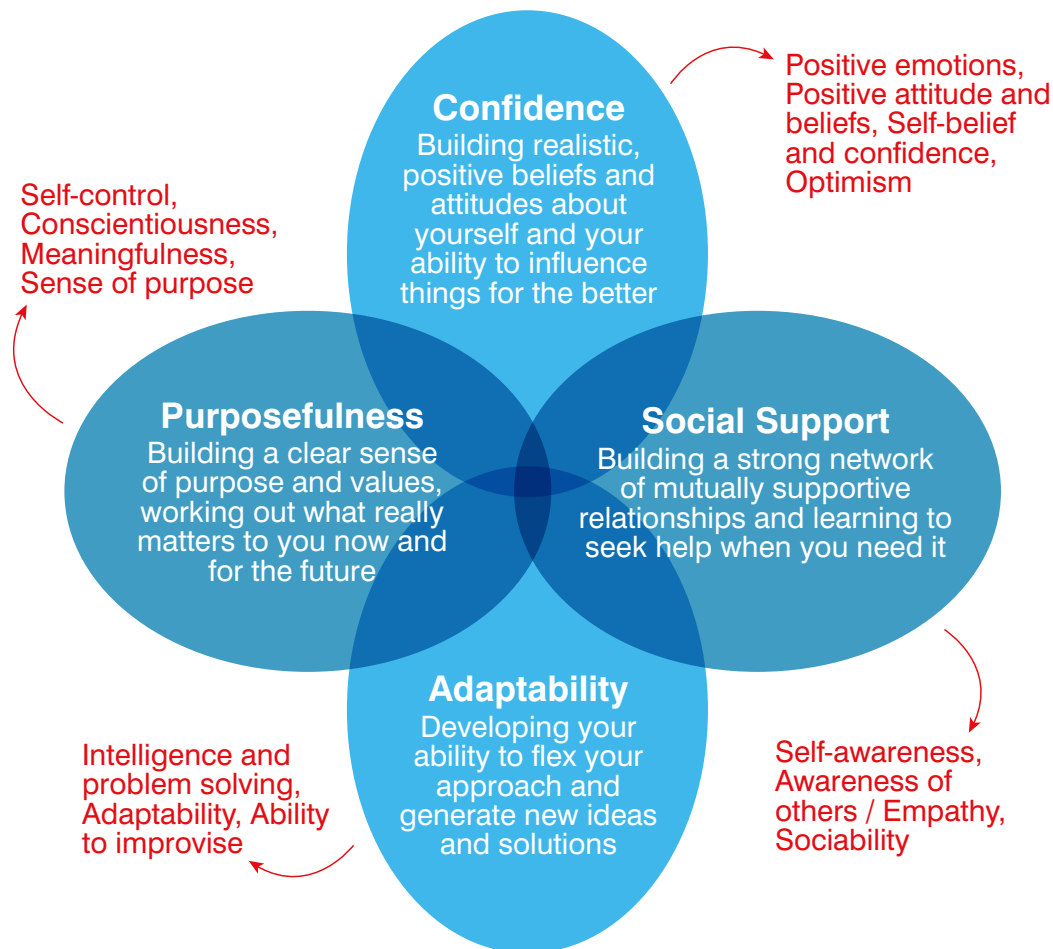
Evidence from British Council programmes in MENA suggests that it is this combination of working with others and negotiating solutions to issues and concerns in a challenging but safe real world context which builds 'resilience'.^{xv} Resilience is a word that often features in discussions of effective prevention programming – but what is it? There are a number of distinct definitional threads in relation to resilience.

In the first, building resilience is limited to building the ability merely to 'survive' or 'cope'. In the second – the definition used by the British Council – the concept is more expansive and focuses on the ability to both 'survive' and 'thrive'. Formally, it is to "recover, keep going and grow through adversity".

Current evidence about individual resilience suggests that it is not a static character trait, but rather a cluster of capacities and resources. A framework of personal resilience resources is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Building resilience: the four personal resilience resources

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What is particularly useful about this understanding is that it suggests that resilience can always be built or strengthened. And, that it is strengthened through interaction with other individuals and with organisations and institutions. Contextual resources such as family,

friends and community are also important, as in the social ecological resilience framework of the Resilience Research Centre.⁷¹ So, while personal resilience enables individuals and systems to cope with pressure, the experience of pressure is central to how resilience develops.

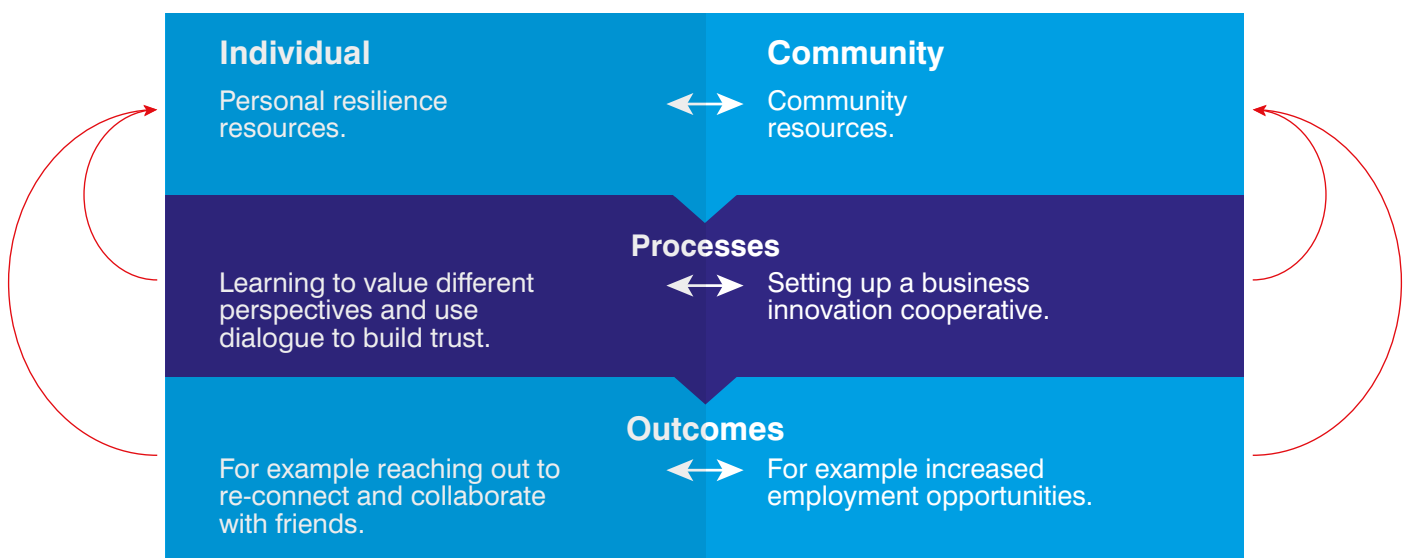
The management of pressure is integral to both the process and the outcomes of building resilience. Programmes like the Somali Youth Leaders Initiative⁷² or the Strengthening Resilience sports programming in Lebanon⁷³ provide testing opportunities through which resilience to pressure is consolidated collectively.

We now also understand that resilient communities are connected communities and that three types of connections matter: i) bonding between individuals

who share similar social identities; ii) bridging between groups with diverse social identities; and iii) linking between communities and institutions or governing bodies.⁷⁴ The connection between programming designed to build trust and increase opportunity has been demonstrated through the British Council's Strengthening Resilience programme. The diagram below illustrates the connections between personal resilience resources, community resources and collective resilience.

Figure 3: Individual and community resilience – interaction and outcomes

© Davda, Flint-Taylor 2013 (adapted with permission)



Evidence from the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change also suggests this two-phase approach. The Institute works within and beyond a curriculum-centred approach and focuses **firstly** on developing social skills, education and other forms of training which have the potential to strengthen young people's resilience, particularly their critical thinking. For example, through developing open mindedness and the ability to dialogue, education can help young people to navigate differences peacefully and understand diversity as an asset rather than an issue. Similarly, when providing children and adolescents with a safe space for expressing their ideas and taking part in constructive discussion and confrontation, schools can contribute

significantly to the development of free and critical thinking.⁷⁵ All these skills are extremely important in enabling young people to think beyond common assumptions and resist an over-simplified view of the world that is often present in extremist discourses.

However, it is not enough to provide young people with skills if they are not able to use them positively. In the MENA region, youth frequently have relatively high levels of education and qualification but do not have the chance to put them into practice in the 'real world', as the possibilities for social, political and economic engagement are narrow.

⁷² See textbox on p. 10.

⁷³ Oral evidence presented in the COP by the British Council 23 October 2019.

⁷⁴ Ellis, H. and Abdi, S. 2017.

⁷⁵ Macaluso, A. 2016.

The **second** component of the work, therefore, focuses on widening possibilities for young people by enabling space to foster change in their communities, engage in collective action and use or create alternative pathways in the social, political and economic levels. This could be translated, for example, into providing them with opportunities for interaction with youth from different cultures and beliefs, space for positive political engagement and incentives for the creation of social enterprises.

The overall result of this combined approach is that young people become more resilient – at personal and collective levels – and better equipped to deal with real-world challenges. The Community of Practice has brought together a good amount of evidence from successful programmes that reflect this approach.

Generation Global, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change⁷⁶

Generation Global is the Institute's pioneering global education programme for 12- to 17-year-olds, providing them with the skills and experience they need to navigate difference in a peaceful way. Underpinning the programme is the Institute's expertise in approaches to developing pluralist, cohesive communities that are open-minded and at ease with diversity. Generation Global is schools-based, using a dialogue skills-led approach to enable students to explore their own identity, be open to difference and think reflectively about the issues affecting their lives. The programme operates in over 30 countries around the world in partnership with governments and schools' networks to embed the programme within existing education systems.

The skills developed through the programme help young people to be resolute in the face of narratives that can feed the development of extremist ideologies.

The Institute's approach is based on three fundamental understandings:

1. Teachers are often underprepared to facilitate dialogue in the classroom, particularly on contentious issues, and need access to training and classroom resources.
2. Dialogue is a set of skills that can be taught and, with practice, students can develop and master these skills.
3. Open-mindedness and respect for others are the cornerstones of building safe, cohesive and harmonious societies and can be supported by the development and practice of dialogue skills.

⁷⁶ Written evidence submitted to the COP by Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 1 November 2019. Evaluation of this programme was completed by Professor Rupert Wegerif.

In recognition of this, the programme is structured around three main pillars:

- 1. Professional Development for Teachers:** A suite of core trainings on the pedagogy of dialogue as well as a range of bespoke training options.
- 2. Classroom Supports for Teachers:** A range of adaptable curricular resources, lesson plans and activities for teachers to use in the classroom as well as briefings on difficult topics.
- 3. Opportunities for Global Dialogue:** Opportunities for students to engage in dialogue on a range of topics with students from other countries through videoconferencing and an online digital dialogue platform.

The programme was externally evaluated by Exeter University in 2016, which found a potentially transformative effect on young people (and teachers) and their vulnerability to radicalisation by opening their minds to diverse cultures and ways of life. Qualitative

data demonstrated that students' thinking changed from an initial 'us and them' division to a wider sense of inclusive community by taking part in dialogue with their global peers. Participation in dialogue enabled them to explore both their own experience and that of others, becoming more comfortable with diversity and in dealing with complex and ambiguous ideas. This increased awareness of complexity, and tolerance for complexity is likely to be a good way to prevent future radicalisation.

"Those who have experienced the positive potential of dialogue across a range of different perspectives are less likely to fall prey to the simplistic black and white ways of thinking that underlie extremism. It is reasonable to say that this programme serves as a kind of inoculation against extremist violence. Exeter University's evaluation found clear evidence that it is effective in its main goal of increasing open-mindedness."

As suggested above (pp. 20–23), gender has emerged as a consistent blind spot in effective prevention programming. A 2016 UN study⁷⁷ suggests that education is a critical platform for engaging young women and building their resilience, "... empowering women as leaders" and recognising women as active agents in their own lives and in their communities can contribute to "decreasing the risks that violent radicalization poses to both women and society".

Compass, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change⁷⁸

Compass works with young minority women in the UK, supporting them to be empowered and valued.

The institute works with schools in marginalised communities where many young women are impacted by high levels of hate crime, economic deprivation and under-representation in employment and positions of influence. This results in a lack of equitable access to opportunities that support them to achieve their potential and participate fully in society. This works both ways, with negative feelings of identity and belonging having an impact on education outcomes and active participation. Failing to address these issues at a crucial point in a young woman's development risks perpetuating a vicious circle of marginalisation and under-representation, which in some cases increases vulnerability to extremist ideologies that seek to exploit grievances and divide populations.

Delivered over three years, Compass has demonstrated that to achieve their potential, young women need exposure to opportunities, access to inspirational role models, safe spaces to explore their identities and mechanisms to influence issues affecting them. This is achieved by utilising the network of established partners including universities and businesses to build understanding and advocate for equal access to opportunities, gender equality and fair representation.

Over 11 months, young women aged 15 to 17 participate in three core elements, which are continually adapted to reflect insights from the project participants:

- **Aspirations and empowerment:** Through a professional group mentoring scheme with diverse female volunteers from a range of careers, the programme aims to expand young women's knowledge of career choices. The institute works

with partner universities to provide opportunities for mentees and their families to discuss obstacles to further education and how they can access support to overcome them.

- **Identity and belonging:** Compass connects mentees to inspirational, international women to support them in exploring complex and multi-faceted issues relating to identity and active participation in society.
- **Voice and influence:** Young women have the opportunity to design and deliver their own advocacy campaign focused on influencing long-lasting change at a policy level, that is, increased representation within spheres of influence.

Since 2016, the organisation has facilitated over two thousand hours of support for young women in deprived areas of London, such as Tower Hamlets, Redbridge and Newham, by training over 130 professional women to be mentors. The volunteer mentors reported increased self-awareness and better understanding of the challenges young women face and increased confidence to engage with young people from different socio-economic backgrounds.

The young women reported positive changes to their sense of motivation to achieve despite adversity; 93% felt they could overcome the barriers they may face in the future and 83% felt less anxious about pursuing their chosen education pathway.

"Compass has truly made me a proud and strong female. It's helped me recognise my true identity and I've learnt what I can do if there are barriers in the future."

Communication can play an effective role in prevention programming

Work using communications as a way to prevent violent extremism started in the aftermath of the Iraq War (2003–2011) and was developed as a response to the realisation that as new technologies became available VEO were using them to communicate their aims and increase recruitment.⁷⁹ Early phases of this approach were distinguished by a belief that it was possible to develop ‘counter-narratives’ that could reduce the attraction of violent extremism and win ‘hearts and minds’. Programming focused on the development of uni-directional messages from the sender to the receiver. There is growing evidence which suggests that this approach has not been effective.⁸⁰

Recent communications work, however, reflects many of the themes discussed above and, broadly, is focused on **opening**, rather than **winning** hearts and minds and building the connections we associate with resilient communities⁸¹ (see p. 31 above). The COP evidence suggests programming in this area should focus on creating trusted spaces for inclusive public discussion, and increase the representation and voice of under-represented/marginalised groups. Over the longer term, the more sustainable approach is to build the capacity of local independent and editorially robust media to perform this role. However, if this objective is politically impossible, because the media is state-controlled and/or the media is distrusted, British Council

evidence suggests that an effective initial approach can be to build messages and brands which can be trusted and can serve as initial platforms for public debate. BBC Media Action, a COP member, noted that these platforms can then play a critical role in addressing or undermining the various push/pull factors (‘reversing the funnel’) that can increase the likelihood of someone joining a violent movement by:⁸²

- Creating spaces where those who are politically, economically or socially marginalised can have their voices heard, feel their grievances are being aired and have a greater sense of self-efficacy;
- Breaking down social, religious or other tensions in society and helping those who disagree to discuss their differences peacefully and better understand ‘the other’;
- Supporting the development of positive and inclusive identity formation;
- Influencing social norms around the acceptance of violence;
- Supporting community and other media to facilitate independent, trusted and inclusive dialogue, produce conflict-sensitive broadcasting and tackle hate speech at a local level.

Communications have a transformative potential that can act positively on negative feelings by enabling young people to discover and pursue positive pathways, at the same time as maximising their voices and facilitating dialogue between different communities and with authorities.

79 Schmid, A. P. 2014.

80 See Ferguson 2016.

81 Ellis, H. and Abdi, S. 2017.

82 Written evidence submitted to the COP by BBC Media Action, 5 September 2019.

TripoliLives, British Council

For the past decade, Tripoli (Lebanon) has been stigmatised because of the clashes that happened between its communities and relations to the Syrian conflict. Many Tripolitans were without hope, thousands have been displaced and many people lost friends and family, but what Tripolitans have not lost was the great pride of being a Tripolitan and the unity of its community with the decision to live through it all.

TripoliLives is a small demonstration of what the city really is. It is a platform that aims to show the good things happening in Tripoli – something that the mainstream media has been failing to highlight.

In this platform, Tripolitans share with the world personal initiatives they are doing to revive their city. They bring the best of Tripoli, its places and its people, to encourage the public to meet the bravest who still believe in a united, peaceful Tripoli.

Through TripoliLives, young people from Tripoli have been bringing the city together and contributing to restoring confidence amongst its youth, at the same time as encouraging them to pursue positive pathways that will foster change and help to build a better society.

Communications programming can complement programmes within communities by: i) emphasising and reiterating positive actions and values; ii) providing for discussion and debate – for example, between politicians and communities; and iii) creating the potential for different and sometimes opposed voices to engage each other more positively. Perhaps most importantly, though, programming in this space has the potential to ensure impact with far larger audiences, which is a key part of scaling expensive and intensive community interventions.

Effective prevention programming is sustainable

The relatively small scale of prevention programming means that these programmes are often seen as ‘islands of excellence’ which are not sustainable. If by sustainability we mean that the programme continues exactly as before once funding stops, then prevention programming is not sustainable. If, however, we mean that the programme has: i) left sustainable changes in personal and collective resilience resources, skills, attributes and attitudes (e.g. trust) and ii) increased the capacity and willingness for target communities and relevant power holders to increase opportunities, then they are sustainable, in that they build the foundation for citizen-state co-creation of economic, political and social opportunities.

An analysis of the programmes presented across the COP suggests the following elements which increase social political and economic opportunities:

- Skills from negotiation to numeracy have improved;
- Attitudes have changed. There is more trust across different ethnic, religious and structural boundaries. There is also evidence of increased confidence, purposefulness adaptability and better evidence of the ability to be involved in positive collective action;
- Practically, those involved in the programme understand what is possible and have the contacts required to build change programmes;
- Practice has changed and in some instances this change is institutionalised in policies, procedures, norms and rules.⁸³ Within communications programming, a focus on working with/ building the capacity of local media organisations themselves to deliver this kind of media work, rather than simply creating or inserting one-off media campaigns, increases the likelihood that similar communications work can continue once the intervention finishes.^{xvi}

Monitoring, evaluation and learning from prevention programming needs significant improvement

The COP process has reflected a body of prevention theory and practice that has emerged from a multitude of fields and disciplines, including psychology, education, development, governance, peacebuilding, conflict, security and justice. The COP reflected that interventions aiming to prevent violent extremism have not been sufficiently tested through systematic and empirically-based research and evaluation.⁸⁴ The fast pace with which the PVE sector has been expanding over recent years has led to a number of benefits, including greater involvement from development and humanitarian actors who add different perspectives to programming approaches. This is appropriate and reflects the understanding that violent extremism (in common with conflict and political violence) is a complex phenomenon, which requires a complex nuanced response. However, it makes prevention work particularly difficult to evaluate and the COP noted the critical importance of improving evaluation of prevention programming.

83 Mercy Corps 2013.

84 Stickings, J. et al. 2019; Stephens, W., Sieckelink, S. and Boutellier, H. 2019.

DFID study

A recent DFID study⁸⁵ of the effectiveness of identification of populations vulnerable to violent extremism and interventions utilised illustrates this problem. The study focused on nine questions:

1. Approach

- What methodologies were used to identify populations at risk of violent extremist recruitment and radicalisation?
- How effective have these different approaches been at identifying the groups most at risk and the underlying risk determinants?
- To what extent does the evidence differentiate women, girls, men and boys?
- What are the key strengths and limitations associated with different identification methodologies?
- Are there differences between effective methodologies in low- and middle-income countries compared with high-income countries?

2. Intervention

- What interventions have been used to address the vulnerable groups identified?
- What indicators have been used to monitor progress and measure the impact of these interventions and how robust are they to measure change?
- What effect have interventions had (positive and negative)?
- Are there differences between effective interventions in low- and middle-income countries compared with high-income countries?

Using a structured database search protocol and expert consultation, the study identified a total of 2,243 potentially relevant studies. This was narrowed to a final total of 38 studies based on a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria. The studies were then evaluated using a quality assessment framework. Of these 38 studies, 25 were rated 'low quality'; five were classified as being of 'moderate quality'; and eight were rated 'high quality' (based on DFID's March 2014 How to Note on "Assessing the Strength of Evidence"). Low-quality studies were excluded from the analysis.

RUSI⁸⁶ and SFCG⁸⁷ noted a number of reasons for this difficulty, including:

- Proving the effectiveness of prevention programming is based on proving a counterfactual – that due to the intervention someone did not join or support a violent extremist movement. Counterfactuals in any field are notoriously difficult to prove and this generates a consistent lack of outcome-level data. Many programmes use behavioural and attitudinal changes as proxy measures, but these too are difficult to measure;
- Behavioural and attitudinal changes are often measured at an individual level, whereas governance, development, educational and peacebuilding changes are measured at community or societal level;
- Many prevention programmes are relatively short in duration, and programme impact may take longer to develop;
- Difficulty in identifying those at risk, which leads to lack of clarity on who the recipient of the programmes is – whether it is people at risk of recruitment, communities at risk of violent extremism (where there is already significant recruitment), or society in general;^{xvii}
- PVE programmes do not operate on their own and results are likely to be affected by less-focused interventions taking place in parallel. They can also be affected by factors external to the programme; for example, a change in security response, or popular demonstrations like the 2019/2020 global wave of mass protests;
- Very few young people choose to join a VEO – so it is difficult to observe changes;
- Programmes need to adapt to fluid contexts.⁸⁸ This requires evaluation methods which can reflect an iterative and adaptive approach. Many standard Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) processes reflect linear assumptions about programme impact and are ill-equipped to reflect programme adaptation;
- The complexity of prevention programming makes it particularly difficult to evaluate. Prevention programming involves numerous activities, which makes it difficult to connect specific outcomes to specific impact, and provides an additional challenge for standard M&E processes;
- Not enough is known about the impact of prevention programming on women. This is in part due to a lack of attention to potential gender dynamics in existing programming. Ensuring gender is tracked and measured in existing programming will help to further assess whether specific programming should be aimed at women in certain local contexts.

These concerns have generated increased attention on the need to develop tools for measuring the effectiveness of prevention programming. There is now an expanding investment in the creation of toolkits and other guidelines for policymakers and practitioners to draw on to improve the design and M&E, and thus the overall impact, of prevention programming. The COP heard about a promising approach from SFCG.

86 RUSI presentation in the COP, 5 September 2018; Dawson, L., Edwards, C. and Jeffray, C. 2014; RUSI 2020 (forthcoming).

87 See Van Leuven, D. 2019, particularly Module 10, slides 4 and 5.

88 See p. 12.

Understanding the effectiveness of PVE programming, International Alert⁸⁹

Building a solid evidence base of the impacts of PVE programming, gathered over time and from different contexts, is critical if we are to understand its effectiveness, ensure that interventions 'do no harm' and support mechanisms that prevent conflict and build peace.

International Alert has been working with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Arab States Regional Hub to test new approaches and adapt existing design and monitoring and evaluation tools to improve PVE programming.

This led to the Design, Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit for PVE programming and guidance for UNDP.

Designed as an accessible toolkit for practitioners, this offers practical guidance on how to base a PVE approach on a conflict analysis, how to prioritise needs, build an understanding of gender dynamics, think through the sensitivities around targeting and manage risk. Using the toolkit, we accompany teams through training and advice on improving their analysis, developing theories of change, establishing their baseline, monitoring, data collection and evaluation.

Improved tracking of gender dimensions and impact across existing programming and policy related to PVE

The COP also considered how to improve our ability to track the gender dimension. This involves reflecting on three separate, but related questions: i) how many women are participating in current prevention efforts? ii) what roles are the women undertaking in these efforts? and iii) how are prevention programmes and policies influencing and impacting women differently from men? In addition, donors should pay attention to their requirements for PVE grants, proposals and plans to ensure that gender markers are identified and tracked.

Measurement which spans the different levels of analysis

The COP also saw evidence of some important advances in the ability to connect measurement of individual behavioural and attitudinal changes to the wider societal level.

⁸⁹ Written evidence submitted to the COP by International Alert, 30 September 2019.

Strengthening Resilience Programmes, British Council

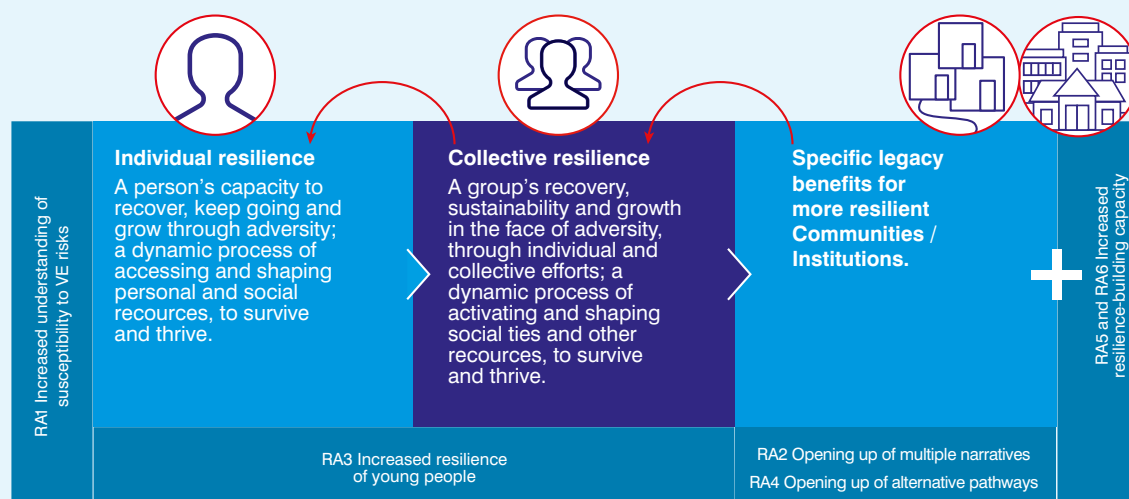
Resilience is the ability to ‘survive and thrive’ – or more formally, “the capacity to recover, keep going and grow in the face of adversity”. In the British Council’s Strengthening Resilience (SR) programmes, the primary focus is on the processes and outcomes (including lasting community benefits) of strengthening the individual resilience of participants and the collective (group) resilience

of the action project teams they work in for several months while on the programme.

Studying the collective resilience of participant groups who work together to achieve social goals is central to making clear, rigorous connections between the programme intervention and increased resilience capacity at the community/institutional levels.

Figure 4: SR resilience framework with key outcomes

© British Council, 2019 (developed by the British Council through the Strengthening Resilience Programme – funded by the European Union)



SR2 Resilience: A Systemic Approach

Effective prevention programming relies on long-term structural programmes which have the potential to address the drivers of violent extremism

As noted above (p.18), COP members were clear that reversing the funnel required long-term structural change, in addition to the time-limited, lightly funded prevention responses. The DFID⁹⁰ describes the building blocks which provide a framework for longer-term responses to violent extremism. They are:

- Fair power structures;
- Inclusive economic development;
- Conflict resolution mechanisms;
- Effective and legitimate institutions⁹¹

These building blocks address the narrowing of economic, social and political opportunities aka 'push' factors.⁹² Inclusive economic development provides increased economic opportunity. Fairer power structures and effective and legitimate institutions increase opportunities for political engagement. Improved conflict resolution mechanisms delivered through "sustained engagement at multiple levels and solid local expertise",⁹³ reduce social tension and increase social coherence through opportunities for positive social interactions across different communities. Inclusive policies that address both horizontal and vertical inequalities⁹⁴ contribute to social cohesion, but also to reducing violence by reducing grievance-driven recruitment. As the paper notes, these sorts of reforms "take at least 15–30 years – a generation – and are subject to reversals".⁹⁵

In essence, there is a 'stabilisation conundrum' in that long-term structural changes are ultimately what underpin and maintain stability, but the problem – rapid mobilisation of political violence and related 'reversals' on the back of long-term structural dysfunction – is immediate and fast-moving. This suggests that better co-ordination between short-term prevention responses and longer-term structural programmes is at the heart of more effective prevention programming.

This is explicitly acknowledged in DFID's approach. In terms of increased political opportunities, the paper notes that "interventions should help broaden inclusion, voice and accountability [...] over time while managing tensions with what may be needed to prevent violence in the short-term".⁹⁶ It goes on to note that this "includes addressing growing restrictions on civil society and the media".⁹⁷ Civic space, particularly in humanitarian contexts, has been eroded⁹⁸ along with respect for and adherence to international humanitarian law and women's rights.⁹⁹

To increase economic opportunities, the paper notes the need to directly target the economic exclusion of certain groups or regions and focus on interventions that can help build trust. In terms of increased social opportunities, they note that "conflict resolution mechanisms need to be appropriate for the context in which they operate".¹⁰⁰ Overall, the paper commits to "incorporating stability [which includes violent extremism] into [the] wider portfolio".¹⁰¹

While the COP agreed the need for longer-term structural changes, there was significant disagreement about whether it is possible, or desirable, to use the lens of violent extremism to re-orient or frame either i) programming which

90 DFID 2016.

91 DFID also adds a fifth building block – a "supportive regional environment". Evidence on this aspect of the work was not presented in the paper, so we have not included it in this discussion.

92 See diagram on p. 9.

93 DFID op cit. p. 10.

94 Stewart, F. 2010.

95 DFID op cit. p. 12.

96 DFID op cit. p. 6.

97 DFID op cit. p. 6.

98 Carothers, T. and Brechenmacher, S. 2019.

99 Taylor, S. and Baldwin, G. 2019.

100 DFID op cit. p.10.

101 DFID op cit. p.16.

supports long-term structural change or ii) programming which aims to prevent violent extremism. Discussion centred on the risks of this re-orientation.

“Our national security is not the same as their development...”¹⁰²

Working and delivering programmes on violent extremism does, by definition, involve working in areas where violence at every level is endemic, communities are fractured and polarised and there is significant distrust, both of the state and of outside intervention. This is complicated by

the erosion of civic space, which reduces opportunities for political engagement, and the toxic unregulated echo chambers enabled by social media, which amplify disagreement, ratchet up tension, legitimise violence and leave little room for compromise. Any conflation of wider structural reform programmes with national security concerns could exacerbate distrust within these communities and could ‘taint’ development programmes, limiting their impact on longer-term structural problems. They can also trigger arguments about failing to respect sovereignty.

Evidence from Prof Mark Sedgwick¹⁰³

“A second possibility [of harm when an initiative is associated with PVE] is that the original initiative may be entirely discredited and thus defeated. The classic example of this is the

vaccination programmes in Pakistan which became associated with foreign intelligence agencies to the point where the programmes themselves were severely jeopardised.”

There is potential for harm to participants and communities

As noted, the process of recruitment draws on the tensions in contexts which have been marginalised and which are, as a result, polarised, conflictual and violent. Young people in these communities face daily risks. They can be stigmatised just by inclusion in programmes focused on violent extremism. Structural reform programmes – framed as part of a national security ‘agenda’ – could expose (sometimes already vulnerable) participants to greater harm. Staff too can be endangered by their role in these programmes.

¹⁰² Presentation in the COP by Oxfam, 23 October 2019.

¹⁰³ Written evidence submitted to the COP by Prof Mark Sedgwick, 14 September 2019.

Evidence from Oxfam¹⁰⁴

Oxfam noted that the labelling of one side in a conflict as violent extremists, and therefore a problem to be 'prevented' and managed through humanitarian or development programmes, contravenes the ability to be impartial. This created a particular issue for gender programming in the displaced communities in Mosul where ISIS was declared defeated. ISIS was able to gain a foothold in this area in part because of the marginalisation and stigmatisation of Sunni Moslems in Mosul. Rural women, in particular, live in a deeply patriarchal context and, regardless of who is in control, women's rights continue to decline.¹⁰⁵ The re-taking of Mosul from ISIS did not reduce gendered pressure or discrimination.

The most appropriately consistent analysis in this type of context is (intersectional) gender norms. Furthermore, the P/CVE labelling that resulted meant that both women and their children struggled to escape the stigmatisation that accompanied the P/CVE labelling. Humanitarians and human rights advocates have been documenting unequal application of justice, unequal access to documentation – including for children, restrictions on human mobility that amount to violations of humanitarian law and unequal access to livelihoods.¹⁰⁶ Global practice indicates that such grievances associated with inequalities and social exclusion (whether perceived or actual) tend to be what drives tensions and leads to conflict recurrence – and not which group is in charge.¹⁰⁷

Communities which already suffer from lack of access to services and negative perceptions in wider society may be further stigmatised by the presence of programmes focused on violent extremism, which can appear to confirm existing negative stereotypes. Programmes – especially those programmes which are focused on prevention and use area or community focus as a way of demonstrating impact – can easily exacerbate negative views of specific communities. Support of prevention can increase polarisation in communities involved, particularly if it can be portrayed as aligned in some way with 'western interests', for example.

¹⁰⁴ Oral evidence presented in the COP by Oxfam, 23 October 2019.

¹⁰⁵ Vilardo, V. and Bittar, S. 2018.

¹⁰⁶ Norwegian Refugee Council 2019.

¹⁰⁷ UNDP 2017b.

Strategy of the Government of Lebanon for mainstreaming PVE in the country¹⁰⁸

The Government of Lebanon is currently delivering a strategy of mainstreaming responses to violent extremism across Lebanon. They have been acutely aware of the risk of 'naming' specific problem communities and areas and therefore do not target communities or highlight specific areas at risk. They are managing this risk through the establishment of inclusive principles and approaches. These include a focus on regaining social

trust amongst Lebanese citizens and promoting identity, national belonging and citizenship for all Lebanese. The state is seen as the principal guarantor of this citizenship and of national belonging. Dialogue and conflict prevention is therefore "central to the implementation of the strategy because it establishes values of pluralism, acceptance of the other and reliance on peaceful means to resolve problems".

Further erosion of trust

As noted above, the erosion of trust is fertiliser for violent extremist narratives. But, so is the way in which the West is seen (or can be portrayed) as having intervened and put its thumb on the scale with regard to different issues. Support of PVE, no matter how well-intentioned, and no matter how positively focused, can easily be spun into a far more sinister 'conspiracy' to influence young people, particularly in contexts where a lack of trust is endemic. At the same time, because PVE is very sensitive, particularly with partner governments, it is often necessary to be careful about the way in which programmes are framed. This positioning can be seen as dishonest and can exacerbate suspicion.

3: Conclusions and recommendations

Prevention programming needs to focus on young people – both because they are most often targeted by VEOs and because their potential plays an important role in any solutions.

Programming needs to work both on increasing young people's ability to recover, keep going and grow in the face of adversity, but also needs to address the global and local factors which have contributed to a significant narrowing of economic, social and political opportunities in the last 25 years.

Policymakers should ensure that programme funding and length takes account of the complexity of violent extremism and political violence.

This would enable the research required to ensure that programmes are based on a granular understanding of both the problem and the intervention context. In particular, because violent extremists exploit existing conflict and tension, this would allow time for detailed and careful conflict analysis. Short-term funding cycles inevitably limit the ability to use positive approaches which take time – for example, building trust between citizens and local authorities – which form the basis for success of longer-term programming.

Policymakers and practitioners should resist the temptation to design programmes based on a singular assumption about the cause of violent extremism.

Violent extremism is a complex problem and stems from a complex interaction of context, recruitment strategies and individual choices and motivations. Responses which privilege one explanation – for example 'religion' or 'ideology', or 'poor governance' – over another focus only on part of this complexity and may miss other important variables.

Prevention programming needs to be based on a far better understanding of the relationship between gender and violent extremism.

There is currently a gap in our understanding and this means that gender is not mainstreamed in prevention strategy responses. When women are included it is as 'adjuncts' to men, rather than as actors who can exacerbate the problem or contribute fully to its solution. Both policy research and context analysis need a greater focus on this issue. In addition, programming should actively seek to incorporate women, both as participants and as leaders.

Prevention programming should allow space for engaging the audience.

There are two ways of doing this, either responding to young people's concerns or grievances, or by using platforms; for example, arts, culture and sports which interest young people. Programmes which specify intervention sectors, or a specific focus – for example, employment – run the risk of missing elements of the problem or critical parts of the audience.

Prevention programming needs to provide something immediate, structured and concrete for young people to do ... but needs to go beyond diversion and build a pathway towards increased economic, political and social integration.

The initial focus needs to operate as a platform for building the individual and collective skills, contacts and attributes required for young people and the state to increase opportunities. Prevention programmes need to build the constitutive elements of an alternative pathway: i) the ability to work collectively; ii) positive contacts between citizens (collective action groups) and the state and iii) the experience of having worked successfully together. This combination provides the skills and experience to sustain positive pathways – even in the absence of financial support.

Prevention programming needs to manage expectations. The sort of structural change required to address the drivers of violent extremism takes at least a generation. Many of those involved in prevention programming will not get the jobs they want or realise their dreams. This does not mean that they cannot forge positive pathways forward or find meaning. Modest changes in regulation can make a significant difference to perceptions of the state and can create space for meaningful activity. However, if programmes fail to manage expectations, or promise what they cannot deliver, trust will be further eroded and there is potential to increase cynicism and exacerbate grievances.

Education can play a role in building the resilience needed to manage challenges and hazards including violent extremism. This is not related to levels of education. Many violent extremists are well-educated. To build resilience, education needs two components. The first is a focus on encouraging debate, tolerance, openness and adaptability. And the second is a focus on enabling students to use their skills positively and in interaction with others, even in contexts where employment is limited.

Communications which are focused on ‘opening’ rather than ‘winning’ hearts and minds can play an effective role in preventing violent extremism. Communications have the potential to: i) create spaces for marginalised voices; ii) reduce social, religious or other tensions in society; iii) support the development of positive and inclusive identities; iv) influence social norms around the acceptance of violence and v) support independent, trusted and inclusive dialogue. However, communications approaches which respond to violent extremist narrative with binary counter-narratives have proved to be unsuccessful and can increase distrust and cynicism.

Policymakers and practitioners need to focus on ensuring that measurement of the impact and lessons learnt from prevention programmes is significantly improved. Monitoring, evaluation and learning from prevention programmes is particularly difficult because of the fluid and rapidly evolving nature of prevention contexts and because evaluation of adaptive programmes is challenging. Nevertheless, this is a critical area, as the ability to improve approaches is hampered by the lack of systematic review and analysis.

Policymakers need to ensure greater coherence between short-term prevention programming and longer-term structural reform programmes which have the potential to address the drivers of violent extremism. Effective responses to violent extremism need both short-term and longer-term structural reform programmes, but they need to work more effectively in tandem.

Prevention policy and practice needs to find a better balance between coercive CT responses and the need to protect citizens. The use of coercion – force, surveillance and other measures associated with CT – will always play a part in the range of responses brought to bear on the problem of violent extremism. However, when coercion is not balanced with protection of citizens’ rights, it can drive violent extremism. Indeed, in some instances, violent extremists seek to provoke coercive responses because it aids their cause. Prevention policy should focus on strengthening the ability of police and security structures to take a ‘human security’ approach and to include the communities they police in the development of local and national security policy.

Policymakers should consider whether it is appropriate or effective to use violent extremism as the sole framework for prevention programmes.

Focusing on violent extremism has the potential to erode trust in external intervention. For some partner countries, the focus on this problem amounts to a failure to respect their sovereignty. It may make sense instead to target the source of vulnerability – the narrowing of young people’s options particularly in marginalised and conflicted areas – rather than one of the symptoms of this narrowing, violent extremism. This approach would recognise the range of negative outcomes and pathways resulting from this and other related vulnerabilities. It would see the needs of young people

in these areas being put at the centre – mitigating the risk of increased distrust – and would see violent extremism – as one of a number of negative pathways – reduced (alongside, for example, drug addiction, criminality and delinquency). It may, as a consequence, provide an opportunity to mainstream PVE outcomes by allowing them to sit alongside other objectives and results. A more human security focused approach will enable better co-ordination and will tackle the negative outcomes that result from the growing demographic divide, which leaves the vast majority of young people with little stake in stable states that cannot offer them security.

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Endnotes

- i This subheading is derived from John Horgan's seminal 2008 article 'From Profiles to Pathways and Roots to Routes: Perspectives from Psychology on Radicalization into Terrorism'. Horgan, J. 2008.
- ii Research by Mercy Corps in different countries found no causal links between youth employment status and support for or engagement in political violence and/or VEOs. See Mercy Corps 2013 and Kurtz, J., Tesfaye, B. and Wolfe, R.J. 2018.
- iii The World Bank notes that "... insecurity ... has become a primary development challenge of our time. One and a half billion people live in areas affected by fragility, conflict or large scale organised criminal violence, and no low-income fragile or conflict-affected country ... achieved a single United Nations Millennium Development Goal". World Bank 2011, p. 1.
- iv Globalisation also plays an important role in this process, as it creates awareness about what is available elsewhere – feeding feelings of victimisation amongst Arab youths. Taspinar 2009, p. 38.
- v Conventional knowledge about lone-actor terrorists has mainstreamed the idea that there are individuals who radicalise, plan and operate in isolation from terrorist networks or any form of organised VET group. There is, however, growing evidence that challenges this notion and demystifies the "loneliness" aspect of lone-wolf terrorism. As Spaaj and Hamm point out, "[The idea of] lone-wolf terrorist attacks occurring "in the absence of collaboration with other individuals or groups" does not mean that lone-wolves are truly alone in their cause, or that they operate in a social or political vacuum. Put differently, lone-wolf terrorism must be placed within the broader context of the individual's personal history, social relations, and political or religious struggles. A degree of external social influence is often employed during the terrorist attack cycle, notably at the level of ideological formation and (online and/or offline) communication with outsiders, including engagement with extremist materials or "terrorist PR". Spaaj, R. and Hamm, M. S., 'Key Issues and Research Agendas in Lone-Wolf Terrorism', 2013.
- vi In a special report published by the United States Institute for Peace on 'Engaging Religion and Religious Actors in Countering Violent Extremism', Peter Mandeville and Melissa Nozell note the genuine tensions that exist between focusing on structural versus ideological factors, acknowledging the political expedience of both positions. USIP, 2017.
- vii Hardin explains the creation of narrower views through the idea of the economics of knowledge: extremist groups reduce the flow of knowledge, leading to a) oversimplification of complex issues, b) binary 'us vs them' thinking, and c) a negative feedback loop, in which moderate members of groups leave or are excluded. For a more practical example, Wiktorowicz describes how the Salafi jihadist group Al-Muhajiroun literally narrows down recruits' sources of knowledge, then act to sever members' relationships with outside influences. Hardin, R., 'The Crippled Epistemology of Extremism', 2002; Wiktorowicz, Q., 'The Rationality of Radical Islam', 2016.
- viii "In the North as well as the South, involvement in violent extremism primarily concerns the youth who comprise the "labor force" of the movement and who constitute the majority of those engaging in a violent struggle against an enemy. The leaders of the movement are between 30 and 60 years old, or even older, but the overwhelming majority consists of young men (and increasingly, young women) whose average age is around 25 years in the North (statistics for the South are less accessible) and includes adolescents and even children." Centre for Mediterranean Integration 2016, p. 13.
- ix For a discussion of the way in which partial responses – in this instance, a focus on madrassah schools only – run the risk of missing important aspects of the problem see Fair, C. 2007, pp. 107–134.
- x The World Bank notes that "... insecurity ... has become a primary development challenge of our time. One and a half billion people live in areas affected by fragility, conflict or large scale organised criminal violence, and no low-income fragile or conflict-affected country ... achieved a single United Nations Millennium Development Goal". World Bank 2011, op cit. p. 1.
- xi As highlighted by UNSCR 1325 (2000), UNSCR 2122 (2013), and UNSCR 2422 (2015).
- xii The Bechdel test (used metaphorically here), is a measure of the representation of women in fiction. It asks whether a work features at least two women who talk to each other about something other than a man. The programming equivalent asks whether women are involved only because of their potential to influence men, or their relationship to men, or whether they are involved because they themselves are entitled and allowed to exercise influence through the programme.
- xiii Macaluso, A. (2016, p. 2) points to the danger of emphasizing radicalisation as an issue that needs to be countered. In several instances throughout history, positive change arose from ideas that were traditionally considered as radical, such as the democratic and feminist ideologies – both of which are now foundations of contemporary thinking. This means that education's role in prevention programmes should not be to demonise radicalisation, – but, instead, incentive young people's abilities to think beyond mainstream expectations and common belief in a peaceful way.
- xiv UNESCO (2018) has a range of resources available to support governments, schools and, educators to prevent young people's engagement in violent extremism.
- xv For a full discussion on the British Council approach to Resilience, see Jill-Flint Taylor's written submission to the Community of Practice annexed to this report.
- xvi This approach has been developed in British Council's Strengthening Resilience programmes (I and II), funded by the European Union.
- xvii Saltman and Smith, for example, argue for a focus on the broadest cohort showing no signs of being "at risk" 2015, p. 52. Saltman, E. M. and , & Smith, M. (2015). 'Till Martyrdom Do Us Part – Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon'. Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

