

Community of Practice on Preventing Violent Extremism

Written submissions

The following material consists of evidence which has been individually submitted by members of the Community of Practice (COP), between September and October 2019, for the purposes of the group's final report.

The written submissions reflect members' evidence and approach in the area of preventing violent extremism.

As the convenor of the COP, the British Council is hosting the publication and members' written submissions, but none of these are British Council documents or reflect British Council policy.

Written evidence submitted to the British Council Community of Practice on Preventing Violent Extremism by BBC Media Action, August 2019

Evidence on counter-narrative and strategic communication initiatives

Many communication interventions on preventing/countering violent extremism are focused on “counter-narratives” and “strategic communications”. Over the past few years it is in these initiatives where much of the resources have been focused. The evidence base supporting the effectiveness of some counter narrative approaches, including strategic communication initiatives, is limited.

A 2016 Partnership for Conflict, Crime & Security Research (PaCCS) review of the evidence base around countering violent extremism through media and communication strategies concluded that there was a lack of evidence that counter-narratives work¹. As the report put it, “*The theory that the messages, myths, promises, objectives, glamour and other enticements propagated via Violent Extremist narratives can be replaced with, or dismantled by, an alternative set of communications is an assumption that remains unproven.*” The report suggests that because reactive counter-narrative strategies do not deal with the underlying reasons that extremist narratives gain traction in the first place, it is sceptical that evidence will be generated in the future.

In March 2016 UNDP’s Oslo Governance Centre and the Governance and Peacebuilding Cluster in the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support hosted a Global Meeting on Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity. The report from that meeting concluded that evidence indicates that a range of media strategies do not work². These include:

- Controlling media in the name of preventing terrorism (partly because controlling media enables corruption, which in turn fosters radicalisation);
- Using politically anchored counter-narratives or counter propaganda, which is often seen as partial, dishonest and condescending;
- Strategies that seek to persuade or ‘message’ rather than inform; and
- Media content that does not reflect a range of public opinion and diverse (including angry) voices.

Alternative approaches using media and communication to preventing/counter violent extremism

BBC Media Action is concerned that counter narrative and strategic communication approaches have often been favoured without supporting evidence at the expense of other efforts designed to support free and independent media and other information efforts that might be more effective at reducing violent extremism.

And there are alternatives to these approaches, rooted in recognition of the importance of independent, editorially robust and trusted media and the role it can play in supporting effective democracies and inclusive, peaceful societies (in turn helping to address the complex 'drivers' of violent extremism, including: corruption, political injustice, marginalisation, lack of economic opportunity and struggles with identity).

¹ See evidence base review by Dr Katherine Ferguson <http://www.paccsresearch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Countering-Violent-Extremism-Through-Media-and-Communication-Strategies-.pdf>. Dr Ferguson was hosted by BBC Media Action during her research

² <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/preventing-violent-extremism-through-promoting-inclusive-develop.html>

Specifically BBC Media Action's research³ and experience suggests trusted and independent media can make societies that are vulnerable to violent extremism more resistant to the phenomenon by:

- Creating trusted platforms for public debate so those who are politically or economically marginalised have a voice, feel their issues are being aired and addressed and have a greater sense of self-efficacy
- Providing public platforms for accountability and creating avenues for redress of grievances
- Helping those who disagree or who are different from each other to discuss their differences peacefully and better understand each other
- Supporting the development of positive and inclusive identity formation
- Providing information and practical skills to help marginalised groups access available opportunities
- Providing trusted information and challenging rumour and misinformation in conflict situations
- Using drama to break down social, religious or other tensions in society and fostering greater understanding of "the other"
- 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.

As the PACCS report referenced above concludes *"The theoretical foundations for these alternative approaches are supported by a stronger and more established research base, drawn from the multi-disciplinary fields of development, peace building, and social cohesion."* There is a *"growing evidence base [that] suggests that radio and television drama addressing issues of identity, reconciliation and tolerance have a positive an impact on public attitudes and behaviour."*

BBC Media Action has a growing evidence base for the impact of its work in these areas. For example an evaluation of the impact of BBC Media Action supported broadcasting over five years, across seven countries and reaching more than 190 million people concluded that BBC Media Action's audiences know more, discuss more and participate more in politics than people who don't listen to and/or watch its programmes. Evaluation of other projects have also shown that audiences of our programmes (compared to non-audiences): demonstrate higher levels of acceptance of people from different religious and ethnic groups; believe there are better ways than violence to resolve conflict; feel confident that they can use non-violent ways to resolve disputes; agree it is better to discuss differences calmly; and report that disputes in their community have been resolved peacefully.

In relation to projects with a specific P/CVE focus, our experience suggests some key factors that can contribute to the success of media and communication interventions, including:

- Conducting thorough research to understand the local context and key drivers of violent extremism in that area (recognising that at risk groups are not homogenous).
- Conducting thorough analysis of the current media environment to understand: how target audiences view the media at present and what they would like from it in future; what media is most likely to engage different target groups.
- Involving target audiences in the creative process and testing of content to ensure that media and communications will resonate with target audiences.
- Including credible and *realistic* role models and voices in programmes.

³ BBC Media Action was funded by the UK government's Conflict, Security and Stability Fund (CSSF) to undertake a seven month project to explore the factors that can lead to support for Violent Extremism in East Africa (Somalia, Kenya and Tanzania), and to develop and test mass media and communication strategies which can contribute to addressing these factors.

About BBC Media Action

BBC Media Action is the BBC's international charity. Our vision is a world where informed and empowered people live in healthy, resilient and inclusive communities. With our partners (local and national broadcasters, governments, non-governmental organisations and donors) we reach millions around the world through creative communication and trusted media, helping people have their say, understand their rights responsibilities and each other, and take action to transform their lives.

BBC Media Action is not funded by the BBC's licence fee and depends on the generous support of donors. The views expressed in this document should not be taken to reflect the views of the BBC itself or any of BBC Media Action's donors.

BBC Media Action has extensive experience of delivering media and communication in fragile settings, afflicted by violence and violent extremist groups. Our work supports the development of inclusive states and societies - helping populations that feel disengaged and excluded from society to raise their voice and access opportunities, supporting inclusive identities, and reducing the acceptance of violence as a legitimate way to resolve disputes. While we do not exist to use media or communication strategies to counter violent extremism, much of our work is highly relevant to addressing the drivers of extremism thereby creating a more hostile environment for violent extremism to take hold.

Contact: James Deane, Director of Policy and Learning, BBC Media Action (james.deane@bbc.co.uk)

BBC Media Action: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/>

BBC Media Action Data Portal: <https://dataportal.bbcmediaaction.org/site/>

Examples of BBC Media Action work

Addressing drivers of violent extremism through radio drama, Syria

Against the backdrop of the war in Syria BBC Media Action produced and broadcast 150 episodes of the radio drama *Hay el Matar* (Airport District) on BBC Arabic between 2015 and 2017.

Set in a fictional Damascus suburb, Hay el Matar was scripted by a team of Syrian writers and touched on different issues such as violence, radicalisation, migration and economic insecurity. The drama featured the story of Nidal - a kind, helpful and well-meaning young man with supportive and well respected parents. Through a series of events, Nidal becomes increasingly isolated and repeatedly humiliated. Eventually, he becomes embroiled in a plot to blow up Hay el Matar's checkpoint. After this, he flees and his family is ostracised by the community. Nidal's storyline aimed to showcase the range of factors that can drive a young person to violence, raise the issue of how much choice and control young people have, show the impact of such decisions on wider families and communities and present possible alternative paths.

Evaluative research showed that Nidal was one of the listeners' favourite characters – they felt he was highly authentic and reported that his journey towards violence mirrored events in their own communities. This elicited a sense of shared experience and, overall, listeners felt a high level of empathy with him and his family. Nidal's storyline successfully captured the complex range of factors that can contribute to young men becoming radicalised – including isolation, rejection and the influence of others – and helped to encourage the non-acceptance of violent extremism narratives among listeners.

Inspiring young Somalis through radio drama and discussion programmes

BBC Media Action's Somalia Stability Fund funded 'Youth and Media' project aimed to provide a space for discussion about issues of importance to Somali youth, give young Somalis hope and motivation for the future and prompt dialogue, interaction and acceptance across divides in Somali society. The core components of the project were a radio phone-in programme and a radio drama (*Hiigsiga Nolosha*) broadcast via the BBC Somali Service and partner community radio stations throughout the country.

Evaluation of the project found that the programmes resonated highly with the target youth audience because they focussed on youth issues. They enabled youth from different parts of the country to hear from each other and interact (via both discussion programmes and social media) and this helped them to see the social and cultural commonalities and joint challenges that Somali youth face, which in turn encouraged positive attitudes among young Somalis towards each other. The programmes also helped youth to become more aware of the social and economic opportunities available to them and encouraged them to make use of these opportunities. These factors motivated youth to take action to improve their situation, encouraged them to take control of their own lives, gave them hope and motivation for the future and helped them to believe that they can contribute positively to their country.

*“Hiigsiga Nolosha is a programme for youth, it is for youth development,
It serves youth, Develops their aspirations,
It builds their ambition,
It puts them on the right path,
And it gives guidance to youth.
It is indispensable,*

It is encouragement for hope.”

Poem by male youth, Borama (Somaliland)

Creating trusted platforms for public debate to encourage inclusive governance in Kenya

Funded by DFID, BBC Media Action produced the weekly TV and radio programme *Sema Kenya* (Kenya Speaks), reaching an estimated 12.7 million people over three seasons. *Sema Kenya* featured a moderated discussion between a live panel of officials and an audience of ‘ordinary’ Kenyans and was designed to enable individuals, communities and governments to be better informed and more engaged in tackling governance challenges such as the elections and voter registration, violent extremism, hate speech versus freedom of expression and the effect of political instability.

Sema Kenya reached a broad cross-section of the Kenyan population, including traditionally marginalised groups. Audiences reported that hearing ‘people like them’ debate relevant issues with leaders inspired them to participate in politics.

“When you watch the show you see somebody like me and you... and it kind of inspires you to want to be like this other person... it makes you ask yourself – ‘if this person is participating, why am I not participating?’ – because most of the time people don’t participate because they feel the political process is for the elites.”

Male, 15–24, Nairobi

[Evaluation](#) of the project showed that audiences were more knowledgeable about politics, discussed it more with friends and family, felt more confident in their ability to influence political processes and participated more in governance related activities (particularly at the community level) – even when taking into account other factors that might influence these outcomes (such as education, age and interest in politics).

Empowering youth into becoming agents for change: the CMI's approach to PVE

The Center for Mediterranean Integration

The Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI) is a multi-partner knowledge exchange platform where development agencies, Governments, local authorities and civil society from around the Mediterranean convene in order to exchange ideas, discuss public policies, and identify regional solutions to address key regional challenges in the Mediterranean.

Members of the CMI include Egypt, France, Greece, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Tunisia, the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (Sud) Region of France, the City of Marseille, the European Investment Bank and the World Bank Group, with the European External Action Service (EEAS) as an observer.

The CMI's activities are centered around two main pillars: Socio-economic Transformation: Co-development and Integration, including migration and human capital mobility; and Resilience: Mitigation and adaptation to external shocks, mainly climate change and forced displacement.

The Center's work on PVE

A central and cross-cutting theme of the CMI's work is youth. Recognizing the common challenges that youth face across the Mediterranean region, the CMI aims to find regional solutions and innovative ways to enhance youth inclusion, increasing the opportunities available to them and empowering the youth to become agents of transformative change.

Terrorist attacks, posing an increasingly grave threat to stability and growth throughout the region over recent years, have mostly been seen through a security lens. However, terrorist attacks also have wide-ranging negative impacts on the development process, stifling economic growth and blocking the implementation of development interventions.

As a key development actor in the Mediterranean region, the CMI therefore takes a development approach to violent extremism prevention. Not only is violent extremism deeply disruptive to the development process, but also, development actions can be part of the solutions developed. This preventative approach takes the view that the recourse to violent extremism can be seen as a result of a deep malaise amongst the youth, and thereby aims to implement youth polices designed to reduce the risks engendered by exclusion. It also requires that the history and root causes of violent extremism be explored and understood in order to develop the most effective policies.

To this end, the CMI used its convening power to bring together a group of experts – from a variety of disciplines – from across the Mediterranean. The majority of the group coming from the southern shore, the experts brought invaluable intimate knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of violent extremism, its causes and history, to the discussions.

With the focus on youth, and through the development lens, discussions led to the publication of the CMI's 2017 report on "Violent Extremism and Development" which, disseminated to decision makers throughout the region including development institutions and the public sector, aims to inform policy at the regional level.

The report looks at violent extremism in its complexity, rather than taking a solely economic point of view, or accounting only for political or social elements. Root causes of involvement in violent extremism can be extremely

diverse: from identity-related causes rooted in humiliation from the colonial era, to the political dimension, where both trust in governments and social contracts are broken across the MENA region, and from geographical elements through to the socio-economic. In considering this complexity, the report maintains that prevention policies need to be implemented through a genuinely multi-sectoral approach.

Some of the key findings of the report are as follows:

- Youth: a sacrificed generation: Three groups of youth are highlighted as particularly vulnerable: economically excluded youth, often with little or no education, young graduates who are either unemployed or stuck in low-paying jobs that don't correspond to their qualifications, and young women who, although increasingly integrated into the education system, often remain excluded from the labor market. This exclusion and subsequent vulnerability can leave youth at risk of radicalization.
- Education: quality and employability: Teaching methods such as rote learning, or those that discourage critical thinking or fail to teach individual or collective responsibility, as well as education that does not equip the youth with the right mix of knowledge and skills to enter the labor market, all increase the risk of youth falling into violent extremism. Furthermore, when education no longer fulfills the role of driver of upward social mobility, and graduates remain economically, socially and politically excluded, the risk is even higher.
- New actors: women and adolescents: A combination of factors, including the emergence of step-families and the decreasing authority of parents, and the apparent failures of feminism along with the crisis of masculinity, have all contributed to the emergence of new actors. These are adolescents, driven by a crisis in parental authority, and young women, often drawn in by the image of the "hero", men who are ready to fight to the death for honor and whom they can "complement" as a good wife.
- Convergences in the North and South: Violent extremism is a serious threat in both the North and the South. Although it can take different forms and have different effects on each shore, dangers resulting from exclusion and those education-related remain present across the region. The most glaring convergence is the bleak employment outlook for youth throughout the region, and this remains a major risk factor for vulnerable youth on both sides of the Mediterranean.

Two main broad policy recommendations were drawn from the report:

- Youth policies: youth must be the central focus of policies that aim to prevent violent extremism. Youth policies must be organized with a long-term vision, and must consider the youth as societal actors, empowering them to take back their role in social, economic and political life.
- Education: education can be a key instrument in the prevention of violent extremism. Initiatives are needed that promote pluralist thinking in schools, and pedagogic methods need to be streamlined in that encourage civic engagement and critical thinking. In this way, school can help demystify the discourse of violent extremism. Also, the risks engendered by exclusion can be reduced if education focuses more on employability, better equipping students with the necessary vocational skills to find work and their place in social and political life.

Within these two broad areas, several specific policy recommendations are given, such as supporting youth organizations and those working with youth, as well as mobilizing the information organs, social networks, and artistic and cultural organizations to better reflect the situation of the youth, and further involving the youth in international cooperation efforts. Through recommendations like these, this report works to influence both regional PVE policy and the actions implemented by development actors at the regional level.

Cultural practice within polarised contexts catharsis, consent or critique?

David Cotterrell, Sheffield Hallam University, 21.02.19

Introduction

This paper considers the potential role of arts and culture within the context of PVE and CVE.

Culture in Crises

When people are at risk, society's obligation is to protect. Within a conflict zone the creation of humanitarian space through security is an acknowledged urgent pre-requisite to the delivery of life saving and life improving aid. Without security, NGO's can't function (without intolerable risks) and effective government cannot be established. While this statement is not without a counter argument, it is worth considering that the model of securing the landscape prior to addressing the underlying causes of suffering is based on well-established protocols within a context of war.

The problem is that, by the time the landscape is suffering within a state of war, we are already addressing a failed context. We may succeed in suppressing the violence, but to avoid the problem emerging in the first place (or even re-emerging as soon as the enhanced security recedes) we need to deploy all analytical and structural tools available to us to consider the causes of this extreme societal breakdown.

The root of conflict is a fragmentation of solidarity within a community or between communities. Empathetic breakdown is a fundamental pre-requisite to one individual's ability to harm another. Objectification produces the alienation required to facilitate violence. Protecting communities by preventing them from interacting with each other may reduce the tangible manifestation of violence but it will not challenge (and may even exacerbate) the polarisation, which lies at the root of the problem.

'Violent Extremism' is something we associate with foreign contexts but react most urgently to when it appears to impact us directly. When anger has managed to provoke violence across national borders, it may be too late to mitigate for the causes of hatred. We may just have to barricade ourselves against the outcomes.

Of course barricades work in many ways. They keep people from getting in, but they also stop people from venturing out. As a physical obstacle and a metaphor, being barricaded in opposition to each other, only suspends the symptoms of the problem.

Methodological Challenges

A longer-term approach and considered engagement prior to the descent into violent polarisation has been effectively argued for, by educationalists, development organisations and others. But understanding the roots of grievances and mitigating for dialogic impasses that can incentivise factional opposition are not simple tasks. Even with benign intentions

there are some significant methodological barriers that need to be countered by development, diplomatic and military actors.

- **Scale of view:** Within any strategic policy, the challenge is to consider a context at scale, while still recognising the diversity of experience within it. Macro-interventions rely on collated data, approximation of complexity and trend analyses. For international policy, factors must be assessed, decisions made and outcomes analysed based on mediated understandings. Fine grain understanding of the context may well exist, but developing diversified interventions within a dynamic context, of which we ourselves are major players, can be hard to achieve at scale.
- **Pluralism of perspectives:** Social-science-based methodologies for assessment of context are rigorous and yield vital insights. However, the empathetic understanding of the pluralism of subjective experience remains a challenge within policy development. Within a mandate to achieve results and allocate resources statistical analysis may omit parallel concerns and present false metrics to assess achievement.
- **Emotional not rational power:** The draw to the Taliban, ISIS and other groupings, while accentuated through governmental weakness, economic inequality and historic tension, is often romantic rather than rational. If fostering empathy is one of the methods to reducing conflict, the dominance of causational arguments rather than engagement with perceptual narratives for convergence could be a strategic weakness.
- **Seeing ourselves as others do:** Particularly in contexts of perceived risk, there is an empathetic danger of foreign actors losing their awareness of how they and their actions are perceived beyond the secure protocols and vetted networks they exist within. This situation is exacerbated by the airtight contexts of living, where agencies and individuals travel, but bring their contexts with them.
- **Tolerance of unknown outcomes:** The funding and management of development aid and governmental initiatives is generally tied to hypothesized outcomes. While this is a sensible approach to ethical management of precious resources, there is the fundamental risk that the success of outcomes are measured against flawed metrics rather than enabling the question itself to be re-evaluated through dynamic engagement.
- **Feedback from ground level to government:** Within development, the advances of dialogues often occur through the engagement of organisations with local communities. While the success of these initiatives are often lauded as case-studies, the mechanism for the insights gained through arts and other activities are not effectively articulated to policy makers.
- **Impact timeline:** Within academic research, impact is now assessed over a 20-year period rather than a four-year assessment cycles. This approach supports the recognition of unknown outcomes, engagement with emergent opportunities and iterative engagement at depth. Within contested landscapes, development funding is often applied to limited term initiatives and the potential for exploring and claiming support for speculative engagement is often compromised.
- **Fast turnover of personnel** – from the lowest ranks of interns, to the highest posts of power, there now exists a culture of fast turnover of staff within international postings. Whether this is to provide a more varied global experience to persons within these industries, an attempt to share information globally, or a response to

the 'high risk' nature of these jobs, short spells of engagement has an impact on institutional memory, decision making, relationships, meaningful engagement and learning.

The Role of Arts

Though aspects of arts research and practice attempt to subvert the above tendencies, I am not arguing for a foregrounding of arts within foreign policy. However, the arts need to be moved to a more critical and central position within decision making so that a healthier balance can be achieved in our strategizing and policy making.

There is already significant respect for the convening power of the arts within local contexts. Cultural exchange has been invested in as a method of championing understanding, demonstrating benign engagement over exploitative power relationships and as a powerful tool for self-reflection.

However, this recognition has also been associated with cultural instrumentalisation.

- **Instruments for project delivery.** The arts are rarely deployed as an investigatory tool. Culture is not commonly seen as a method by which the questions can be articulated, and the searching, questioning investigative methodology of independent artists is rarely harnessed within the analysis of context.
- **Under-represented within analytical forums.** It is common for the arts to be present within interdisciplinary projects but rare for the arts to lead them. The arts can reveal deep understanding of subjective experience but the manner in which this knowledge can be used to inform and challenge policy is rarely understood by arts organisations, their commissioners or participants.
- **Rarely used to critique international policy and institutions.** Cultural activity is often seen as a method of gaining consent or celebrating relationships rather than revealing misunderstandings or insensitivity

Conclusion

The role of arts for deep engagement, extended analysis and subjective contradictions to objective assessments must be embraced in order to critically evaluate the data, analysis and methods that are informing our interventions overseas.

To reframe the role of arts within foreign policy, I would argue for a close consideration of the precedents for artistic collaboration within our domestic landscape. The evolved understanding of the role of the arts within urban planning, medical humanities and cultural geography can be applied to development, diplomatic and military debates. A close-reading of the 2014 academic Research Excellence Framework provides a compelling evidence-base for the policy and community impact that culture-led activity may offer. Valuable local precedents may enable a broader understanding of the potential role of arts within foreign contexts of polarisation, extremism and threat.

If there is to be a vital role for the arts within the context of threat and crisis a broader understanding of the nature of arts-based research may need to be adopted. Effectively undermining the propagation of hatred toward ourselves may require responding to uncomfortable perceptions about the efficacy of our own activities. I would argue that the most compelling (and under-realised) value of cultural activities could be their ability to re-evaluate our questions rather than deliver our solutions.

IARS' Approach to PVE

About Us

The IARS International Institute is user-led and user-focused organisation with a mission to give everyone a chance to forge a safer, fairer and more inclusive society. Over the last 10 years, the Institute has been providing world-class and cutting-edge educational, research, policy and networking services of local, national and international significance.

Our Research Team

Theo Gavrielides is an international expert in restorative justice, human rights and youth justice. He is the Founder and Director of The IARS International Institute and Restorative Justice For All. He is also an Adjunct Professor at the School of Criminology of Simon Fraser University and a Visiting Professor at Buckinghamshire New University (UK). Professor Gavrielides is the Editor-in-Chief of the peer-reviewed International Journal of Human Rights in Healthcare, Youth Voice Journal and the Internet Journal of Restorative Justice. He has published extensively in the areas of human rights, criminal justice and restorative justice including *Reconstructive the Philosophy of Restorative Justice*, the *International Handbook of Restorative Justice* and *The Psychology of Restorative Justice*. Professor Gavrielides advises a number of governments on policy reform, and he is an expert evaluator for the European Commission's criminal justice, security and migration programmes under Horizon 2020.

Maija Linnala is The IARS International Institute's User Engagement Leader. She works to ensure that IARS remains true to its user-led mission. She leads on the development, delivery, monitoring, and appraisal of all IARS' User Groups. She also leads on the management and delivery of local, national, and international projects and carries out qualitative and quantitative research and evaluations. She is currently testing the YEIP GLM-based policy intervention through capacity building of professionals and overseeing the triangulation of the project findings. Maija holds a BA in International Migration and Ethnic Relations by Malmö University, Sweden, and an MA in Public Policy and Practice by the University of Greenwich, UK.

Alex Goldhill The newest member of IARS team Alex was brought in as a research associate after having worked with us as an intern the previous month. He has an educational background in social research having completed a BA in Philosophy and Politics and an MA in International Political Economy in 2014 from the University of Manchester. Since then he has worked in an eclectic range of areas including volunteering with young children and in overseas development projects and



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

working in schools. He is currently considering a career in the Civil Service and is working with us to gain experience in social research.



About The Youth Empowerment and Innovation Project (YEIP)

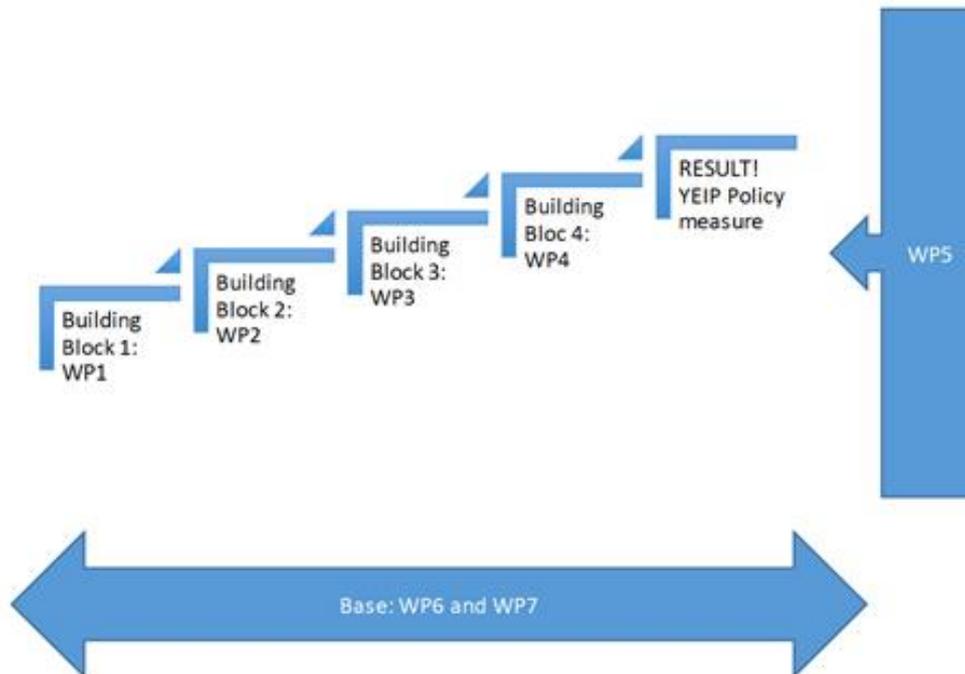
The Youth Empowerment and Innovation Project (YEIP) is a 3-year Erasmus+ funded programme that aims to design a youth-led, positive policy prevention framework for tackling and preventing the marginalisation and violent radicalisation among young people in Europe. Working with partners in several EU countries (Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Romania, Portugal and Sweden) YEIP aims to craft youth-led, innovative grassroots approaches to tackling violent extremism grounded in the values of restorative justice, positive psychology and the Good Lives Model (GLM).

We are concerned about the shortcomings of the existing approaches to tackling extremism based on the Risk Need Responsivity model (RNR) grounded in “disadvantage thinking” which assumes that if someone is using a public service they must have/be a problem. We believe that these approaches are deeply inadequate. Instead we are proposing an approach that promotes the talents and strengths of vulnerable young people that seeks to help develop positive identities.

Our innovative youth-led methodology places young people at the very heart of our research and sets us apart from other EU funded initiatives on radicalisation which have thus far treated them as passive observers. Although this heavily youth-focused approach is relatively new and there are many risks associated with it, IARS is a pioneer in the area having introduced some of the first youth-led fieldwork in Europe and tested them for policy reform.

Summary of IARS' work in relation to PVE – Key Findings from the YEIP project delivery

The scientific work of the YEIP project comprises of five different building blocks that are represented via different WPs. As of writing WP1 & WP2 are complete whilst WP3 & WP4 are ongoing.



WP1 analysed the current state of the art through a desk-based literature review. Existing knowledge in the 8 selected case study countries was assessed in terms of policy, research and practice. A comparative analysis between the case studies and a cross European review was conducted alongside stakeholder mapping.

Among the key findings for the UK in this WP are that the existing Prevent strategy has a culture of over-zealous referrals, there has not been substantial research into whether students enrolled in higher education/university are more susceptible to radicalisation, and that the government does not have a successful countering intervention for online radicalisation.

WP2 had two aims. First, to test the underlying hypothesis of the GLM-based YEIP policy measure. Second, to construct tools to implement YEIP's policy measure. Both goals were achieved through youth-led primary research in four environments: schools, universities, Youth Offending Institutions

and online. This was achieved through interviews and focus groups overseen by young researchers trained by YEIP as part of our youth-focused methodology.

We found that that young people in the UK felt a lack of clarity with the definition of radicalisation and the distinction between radical behaviour and radicalisation and believed in the importance of equal opportunity and positive intervention, such as the GLM.

WP3 has two aims. First, to test the YEIP GLM-based policy intervention through capacity building of professionals using the tools constructed under building blocks 1 and 2. Second, to identify and evaluate the link between YEIP's policy measure and tools, and the change that has occurred in our target groups within selected environments. The findings will determine the logic behind the change. A quasi-experimental method is being used that relies on assumptions that will help us justify the claim that the comparison group is similar to the treatment group. To this end, we are carrying out before-after comparisons using the same population which undertook the YEIP intervention within a 4-month period. At present the data collected from this WP is being analysed and will be available in the near future.

WP4 aims to triangulate our findings through a quantitative methodology that will counteract the weaknesses found in qualitative methods. Two online surveys, one for young people (16-29) and the other for professionals who work with young people, have been designed and are being disseminated internationally. We will then compare the results of these surveys with the data we have gathered through our previous WPs. One finding from our preliminary data gathered so far indicates that a vast majority (80%) of professionals in the UK would include young people as advisors or part of the decision making processes, which we feel vindicates our strong focus on youth-led approaches to tackling youth radicalisation and violent extremism.



In conclusion YEIP is seeking to develop a new approach to tackling youth radicalisation and violent extremism based on a positive and proactive approach that places young people at the heart of the matter. Our current findings have highlighted shortcomings in current approaches in the UK, as well as the wider EU, and is being used to develop and trial innovative approaches which will be used in a wide variety of contexts and help lay the foundations for future research and policy development.

More information about the project can be found on our website here: <https://yeip.org/>



Photos



Photo 1. Dr Theo Gavrielides presenting the YEIP project and the results from the WP1 at the Opening Conference in Italy in January 2018.

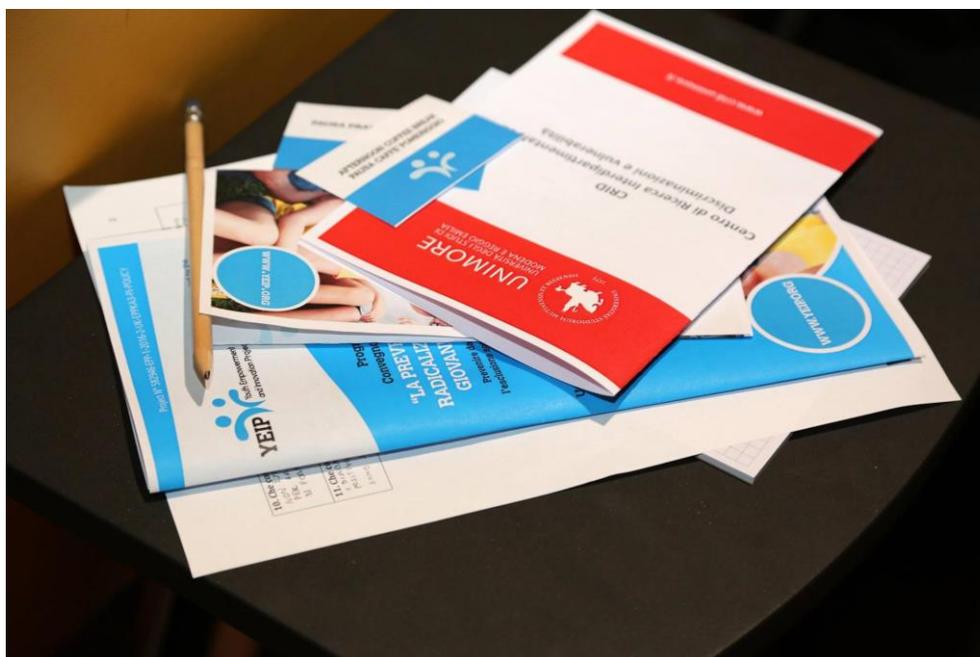


Photo 2. Promotional material from the Opening Conference in Italy 2018.



Photo 3. Youth-led research training of seven young people took place in IARS' offices in April 2018 as part of WP2.



Photo 4. WP3 Training and capacity building of professionals using the tools constructed under work packages 1 and 2 in April 2019.



Photo 5. WP3 Training and capacity building of professionals using the tools constructed under work packages 1 and 2 in April 2019.



Photo 6. The official project logo.

Institute for Strategic Dialogue

Programme examples

1. Young Cities

Young Cities works in partnership with both young people and local government to enhance and support youth-led solutions to community challenges such as hate, polarisation, extremism and violence.

Young people have the insights, ability and creativity to affect change on deeply entrenched community challenges. Young Cities supports and amplifies these efforts through local research, capacity-building, seed funding and direct support, giving young people the skills and freedom to develop programming that responds to the needs of their communities. Simultaneously, Young Cities works with local government to support city-level youth collaboration and to develop more effective policy that champions youth as key partners in resilience building efforts.

By working simultaneously with both groups – youth and local government – Young Cities fosters a shared understanding of local youth issues, facilitates new opportunities for cooperation, and ultimately enhances both groups' capacity to tackle community-level challenges of hate and polarisation.

To date, Young Cities has supported initiatives tackling issues such as discrimination, gangs, stereotyping refugees, and the stigmatisation of young people charged with crime. By leveraging culture, and counter culture, young people develop rap, poetry, music, dialogue sessions, and sports initiatives in order to create stronger and safer communities. The programme also supports youth-led research to feed into municipal youth engagement strategies and future Young Cities programming.

Young Cities is currently working with six municipalities across Kenya, Senegal and Lebanon, where it has trained 148 young people and 50 municipal leaders, and supported over 20 local initiatives. Young Cities will partner with four additional cities in the Western Balkans and South Asia in 2020-2021.

Managed by the [Institute for Strategic Dialogue \(ISD\)](#), Young Cities is a joint effort by two of the organisation's longest-running programmes, the [Strong Cities Network \(SCN\)](#) and the [Youth Civil Activism Network \(YouthCAN\)](#). This joint programme supports a collaborative approach that bridges the gap between municipal efforts to engage youth in P/CVE and the needs and contributions of their young citizens.

Example from Young Cities Lebanon: Farha Taysha

ISD's Young Cities programme supports the development of youth-led solutions to issues such as violence, extremism, hate and polarization, in coordination with local city officials and decision-makers.

As part of this programme, Young Cities works with local artists such as rappers, filmmakers, videographers and photographers to utilize culture and the arts to broadcast key messages in a way that is relatable to young audiences. One youth-led initiative that stands out in this regard is Farha

Taysha, driven by a group of youth in Tripoli, with the support from the local municipality. Roughly translated as *stray bullets kill joy*, the team behind Farha Taysha made it their mission to raise awareness about the sometimes deadly consequences of celebratory gunfire. The idea originated from some of the youths' personal experiences: some of them had lost relatives, friends and acquaintances to a stray bullet fired in celebration. Following a capacity-building and ideation workshop from Young Cities, the group designed a two-fold activity, using both online and offline components to prompt the local community to reflect on the implications of celebratory gunfire, and private possession of weapons more broadly. With the help of the municipality, the youth staged a mock wedding in one of the busiest streets of Tripoli, forming the basis for an online video campaign. Bringing traffic to a standstill, people stopped their cars and some pedestrians joined the festivities before fake gunshots were fired, in which one of the actors pretended to be shot. The scene was meant to elicit shock from members of the public who were watching, followed by discussions with onlookers. The whole act was filmed and the video was released on social media, attracting over 200,000 views within the first week, including over three thousand reactions and comments.

The event quickly garnered national interest, enabling the group to present their work to both national and international government stakeholders. They were also featured on a radio show and one of Lebanon's top TV stations, alongside advisor to the Prime Minister Dr. Fadi Abi-Allam, families of victims and other local campaigners. Farha Taysha was highlighted as an important part of burgeoning local efforts to end the use of gunfire as a mode of celebration, and helped to put the issue on the agenda in Tripoli in partnership with the local municipality.

2. Campaign Toolkit

The Campaign Toolkit is a free resource for individuals or organisations looking to create and deploy campaigns against hate, polarisation and extremism. It is intended as a starting-point or a guide for those interested in developing and running social good campaigns, regardless of experience.

Toolkit

The Toolkit immerses you in the journey of planning, producing and promoting campaigns for global audiences. It is built from insights we've drawn at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) from a decade of research and work with practitioners and activists around the world. It provides a step-by-step guide as well as resources from leading technology companies and civil society.

Information

The Toolkit is first and foremost an Information hub. Among others, we provide activists and organizations with resources on the following topics:

- Ads and targeting
- Audience interaction
- Hateful content
- Measurement and evaluation
- Platform policy
- Safety and social good

Resources can be used to support the creation of campaign strategies or simply to learn more about the given topics.

Inspiration

To inspire its users, the Campaign Toolkit highlights historic and existing examples and case studies of social good campaigns. Examples included in the Toolkit span the globe and range from online to offline activities, from campaigns countering neo-Nazi ideology to those addressing hate speech, from video content to text-based campaigns, and more! Users will have the option to submit their campaigns to be showcased.

The Campaign Toolkit is managed by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue and can be found at www.campaigntoolkit.org. It is currently available in Arabic, English, French, German and Urdu. The Toolkit is funded by the founding members of the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT), Facebook, Google, Microsoft and Twitter.

Tales from the Frontlines: a comic book and video series for youth between ages 15 and 25*

Tales from the Frontlines (TFF) was a campaign based on a comic book and video series, and sought to undermine the drivers that motivated youth to engage with Daesh's ideology by using the narratives of former extremists and individuals who had undertaken the process of de-radicalization. The campaign had a highly specific target audience - youth between the ages of 15 and 25 who were at risk of becoming foreign fighters and travelling to join Daesh - which allowed to tailor its content more effectively.

Over a ten-month period, the campaign's creators produced three main outputs: illustrated narratives in the form of comic books, video footage, and social media engagement. Key to the campaign was to leverage forms of media that resonate well with young people and use different mediums (including printed comic books, and animated video content) to accommodate different preferences for increased engagement. The first phase involved the production of illustrated narratives, which focussed on the stories of at-risk youth, told in the form of animated videos and comic books. The second phase of the video campaign was a series of 10-minute long video clips of anonymized former extremists sharing their personal experiences. These were shot on a handheld camera, making it an affordable option, and also giving the videos a raw and gritty feeling that reflected the tone of the message and its content.

The third phase was an interactive social media campaign of digitized video, derived from the comic books produced in the first phase, to engage at-risk youth over set periods of time. In addition to this, a *Tales from the Frontline* website was created to act as a platform for all of the campaign's content, making the content available in English, Arabic, French and Darja to further increase its reach and opportunities for audience engagement.

TFF's success lay in its well-defined target audience and project outputs, in addition to its creative use of different mediums which allowed it to increase reach. In addition, the focus on narratives of former extremists added an emotive element that helped to reach youth who had already begun to engage with Daesh's ideology, as well as those who had not.

** This example is based on an entry in the Campaign Toolkit, available at <https://www.campaigntoolkit.org/casestudies/tales-from-the-frontline/>*

International Alert's approach to PVE programming

International Alert is an organisation working with people directly affected by conflict to build lasting peace. International Alert focuses on solving the root causes of conflict, bringing together people from across divides. In collaboration with local communities, partners, businesses and policymakers, Alert turns its in-depth research and analysis into practical solutions that make a difference on the ground.

International Alert's PVE approach is based on the premise that violent extremism emerges out of conflict rather than the other way around. Alert takes the starting point of any intervention as the context itself. Building an understanding of that context and the different conflict dynamics at play, Alert prioritises needs and shapes responses based on what is happening on the ground. For example, in Nigeria, we work with women and girls escaping Boko Haram and their communities to find ways to promote successful reintegration back into the community. In Lebanon, we evaluate programming to address the problem of lack of conceptual and programming clarity on PVE and the gaps in assessing impact. In the central Sahel we conducted research to build a better understanding of the reasons behind the rise in violent extremism through extensive interviews with Fulani communities. This diversity of approach allows us to understand VE in a range of contexts, explore the results of different programming tools and the differing values of these approaches.

Example 1: Understanding the effectiveness of PVE programming:

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.

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 in improving their analysis, developing theories of change, establishing their baseline, monitoring, data collection, and evaluation.

The screenshot shows the top section of a website. On the left is the International Alert logo, which features a yellow hand holding a white dove. To the right of the logo are two buttons: a red 'DOWNLOAD TOOLKIT' button and a blue 'M&E FOR PVE RESOURCES' button. Below these is a search bar with the placeholder text 'Type Keywords...' and a magnifying glass icon. To the right of the search bar is the UNDP logo, which consists of the letters 'UN' stacked above 'DP' in a blue square, with the tagline 'Empowered lives. Resilient nations.' below it. Below the search bar and logos is a navigation menu with four items: 'INTRODUCTION', 'ABOUT THE TOOLKIT', 'CONTACT US', and 'EMPOWERED LIVES. RESILIENT NATIONS.'. Below the navigation menu is a horizontal bar with four sections: 'LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS', 'DESIGN THE PROGRAMME', 'MONITORING STRATEGY AND DATA COLLECTION', and 'EVALUATION AND LEARNING'. Below this bar is a large orange banner with the text 'Improving the impact of preventing violent extremism programming' and 'A toolkit for design, monitoring and evaluation'. In the bottom right corner of the banner is a red button with the text '← BACK TO HOME'.

Example 2: *Engaging with communities to address social, economic and civic barriers:*

In Tunisia, Alert's programming began with analysing the findings of interviews with almost 800 young people living in two neighbourhoods in Tunis. This generated an in-depth understanding of the needs and expectations of young people to build a greater understanding of political, economic and social marginalisation and programming options to address youth exclusion that leads to violence. International Alert began implementing a series of activities to address this marginalisation. Combining dialogue and political participation with innovative digital community mapping tools, the project focused on encouraging young people in two Tunis suburbs to convey their views to local and national authorities. The project used OpenStreetMap to allow young people to work together to create a map of their neighbourhood in a pioneering exercise in social re-appropriation, geared towards both identifying problems and suggesting ways to improve neighbourhood life. As a result of the project, the local authority began to invite young people to consultation meetings and allocated 50% of the municipality's 2017 development budget based on a participatory budgeting process, integrating a focus on young people's needs.



© Callum Francis Hugh/International Alert

Written evidence submitted to the Community of Practice on Preventing Violent Extremism
September 2019

The dangers of doing harm in PVE interventions

Drafted by Mark Sedgwick

Not only are some PVE interventions more effective than others, but some may actually do harm. This is a risk to be guarded against. As ever more interventions and initiatives are pulled into the orbit of PVE, the risk of doing harm increases. This risk is especially present when working in countries where regimes are widely seen as illegitimate, repressive, and corrupt. It is often necessary to work with problematic regimes, of course, to build diplomatic alliances, deliver aid, or encourage reform. There are, however, costs associated with this, and these rise as the cooperation becomes more visible and more political.

It is sometimes suggested that if something is worth doing anyhow and may contribute to PVE, there is no harm in emphasizing the PVE value of an initiative, and that this may even increase support and funding for the initiative in question. This is not entirely true. When an initiative is associated with PVE, damage may be done in three ways. One of these is that modification of the objectives of the original initiative may make the implementation of that initiative less effective, as when a program aimed at helping troubled school students, which needs students to speak freely, begins to promote perspectives that it is hoped may counter extremism but may also discourage students from speaking freely. A second possibility is the original initiative may be entirely discredited and thus defeated. The classic example of this is the vaccination programs in Pakistan which became associated with foreign intelligence agencies to the point where the programs themselves were severely jeopardised.

A third way in which a PVE initiative may cause harm is when it supports agendas that should not actually be supported. All regimes seek to bolster their own legitimacy, delegitimize their opponents, and attempt to silence them. One of the best ways of delegitimizing a view or a group is to label it as extremist. This is what the Chinese government is currently doing with almost any person or organization promoting local or Islamic awareness or activity in Xinjiang, for example. The issue is not

just that Chinese PVE initiatives in Xinjiang use means that are widely seen in the West as problematic, but that the central aims of Chinese policy in Xinjiang can easily be seen as almost equally problematic. It would be morally and ethically wrong, then, to support any variety of PVE initiative in Xinjiang under current circumstances; it might well be preferable to support what the Chinese government see as extremism.

The Xinjiang example is an extreme one, but clear. There are many other cases, sometimes less clear-cut, in which it is not obvious that regime PVE initiatives should be supported. These include the many cases where the group that is seen as extremist is associated with an ethnic minority. The grievances and aspirations that fuel extremism in many parts of the world may deserve to be accommodated, not repressed. The status quo that many regimes are attempting to maintain may be a status quo that should not actually be protected.

It should not be assumed, then, that governments are always well-intentioned, or that all government policies deserve active support. This applies also to friendly governments with which Western governments are aligned on a range of important issues.

Similarly, it is often best that initiatives that are good in themselves and may also have a useful PVE impact be left to have that impact indirectly. An initiative that reduces poverty, ignorance, or injustice is probably also indirectly a PVE initiative. If more such an initiative come to focus on PVE, however, it may lose something of its focus on reducing poverty, ignorance, and injustice. If it becomes *seen* as a PVE initiative, it may fail altogether. It is often be better in terms of PVE to address poverty, ignorance, and injustice without even thinking of PVE.

Bio

Mark Sedgwick is professor of Arab and Islamic Studies at Aarhus University in Denmark, and previously spent twenty years at the American University in Cairo. He originally trained as a historian at Oxford University and now works with modern Islam, including the history of terrorism and the theory of radicalization. Two of his most cited articles are “The concept of radicalization as a source of confusion” (in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2010) and “Al-Qaeda and the nature of religious terrorism” (in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2004). His “Anti-Colonial Terrorism: Egypt and the Muslim Brotherhood to 1954” is to appear in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Terrorism*. Sedgwick is a member of the European Expert Network on Terrorism Issues (EENeT), and Chair of the Nordic Society for Middle Eastern Studies.



HOW TO REDUCE VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Using development and peacebuilding approaches to address proximate and underlying drivers

Mercy Corps 2019

About Mercy Corps

[Mercy Corps](#) is a leading global organisation working in some of the world's toughest places, addressing the devastating impact and the root causes of conflict and fragility. Since the late 1990s, we have implemented more than 100 peacebuilding programmes in over 30 countries.



Corinna Robbins / Mercy Corps

Our PVE approach

Our PVE work seeks to **enhance young people's resilience to VE**, support communities to **reintegrate VE associates**, and help **address systemic drivers of VE**. Violent extremism (VE) never arises in a vacuum so our preventing violent extremism (PVE) work encompasses a range of multi-faceted approaches that seek to prevent not only VE, but other forms of conflict and violence that create a space for VE. Many of our responses leverage peacebuilding and development approaches to address grievances at both community and state levels. We also deliver or combine PVE-relevant projects with PVE-specific interventions, such as working with parents to spot potential signs of radicalisation within broader informal education interventions.

We ensure that local organisations and actors take a lead to create projects that are sustainable, sensitive to local concerns, and perceived as legitimate. Our work also reflects our view that VE is a form of political violence and conviction that young people are a huge resource with enormous potential, not a threat or inevitable liability.

Testing impact through rigorous research methods

We pride ourselves in investing in rigorous research to understand conflict and VE dynamics and measuring what works to address them. Mercy Corps' findings, and a growing body of international evidence, informs programme design.

We have learnt that combining multiple approaches is most effective for tackling the complex web of drivers leading youth to be vulnerable to recruitment. Our **Somali Youth Leaders' Initiative** (2011-16) reduced instability in Somalia by fostering good governance and reducing the appeal of violent extremism through education. The programme targeted Somali youth aged 15 to 24 in 13 regions with secondary education and community service that fostered youth's positive and productive participation. Through impact evaluations of the programme, [Critical Choices](#) (2016) and [If Youth are Given the Chance](#) (2018), we found that coupling the two activities had the greatest impact. In Puntland and South Central Somalia, youth were nearly 65% less likely, as non-engaged youth, to demonstrate moral or material support for political violence.

Our evidence also indicates that a combination of short- and long-term support reduces support for violence. Through a randomized controlled trial in **Afghanistan**, we tested the impact of economic interventions on political violence. [Can Economic Interventions Reduce Violence?](#) (2018) found 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 Afghan's willingness to support and participate in political violence reduced by 17%. These programme designs illustrate the importance of securing 'quick wins' where possible to boost civic or economic integration in the short-term while laying the groundwork for longer term individual or systems change.

Additional programmes

In northeast Nigeria, we designed a CSSF-funded youth stabilization programme following [significant research into Boko Haram's](#) recruitment tactics. It strengthened local government capacity to increase young peoples' inclusion in decision-making processes and worked with businesses to improve job opportunities and financial access. In nine months, the percentage of people in target communities reporting satisfaction with state and local governments increased 9% and 12% respectively.

The EU-Funded **Youth Advancement for Peace and Productive Tomorrow (Peace-Pro)** programme (2016-18) worked in Jordan's most vulnerable communities using a holistic, systems approach to prevent Syrian refugee and Jordanian youth from joining VEOs in Syria. Working with strong local partners, we built the capacity of key community stakeholders to recognise and address vulnerabilities among 6,000 youth aged between 15-25, supporting them to create and sustain mentorship programs and community action hubs, implement service projects, and establish referral mechanisms. Peace-Pro also worked to improve psychosocial well-being, promote civic engagement and equipped parents to talk with their children about the dangers of VEOs so that they were less likely to be susceptible to recruitment.

The **Advancing Reconciliation and Promoting Peace (ARPP)**, in northern Mali supported traditional, elected and religious leaders to reduce violence and promote reconciliation within and between ethnic communities and reduce youth involvement in violent and armed groups, including VEOs.

For more information about Mercy Corps' work and research, please visit www.mercycorps.orgresearch