

# The Role of Civil Society in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Focus on South-Eastern Europe



Published by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe  
Vienna, August 2018  
©OSCE 2018  
Designed and Printed by red hot 'n' cool  
Illustrations: © whitehoun/123rf; macrovector/123rf

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ISBN  
Transnational Threats Department  
OSCE Secretariat  
Wallnerstrasse 6, A-1010 Vienna, Austria  
[www.osce.org/atu](http://www.osce.org/atu)

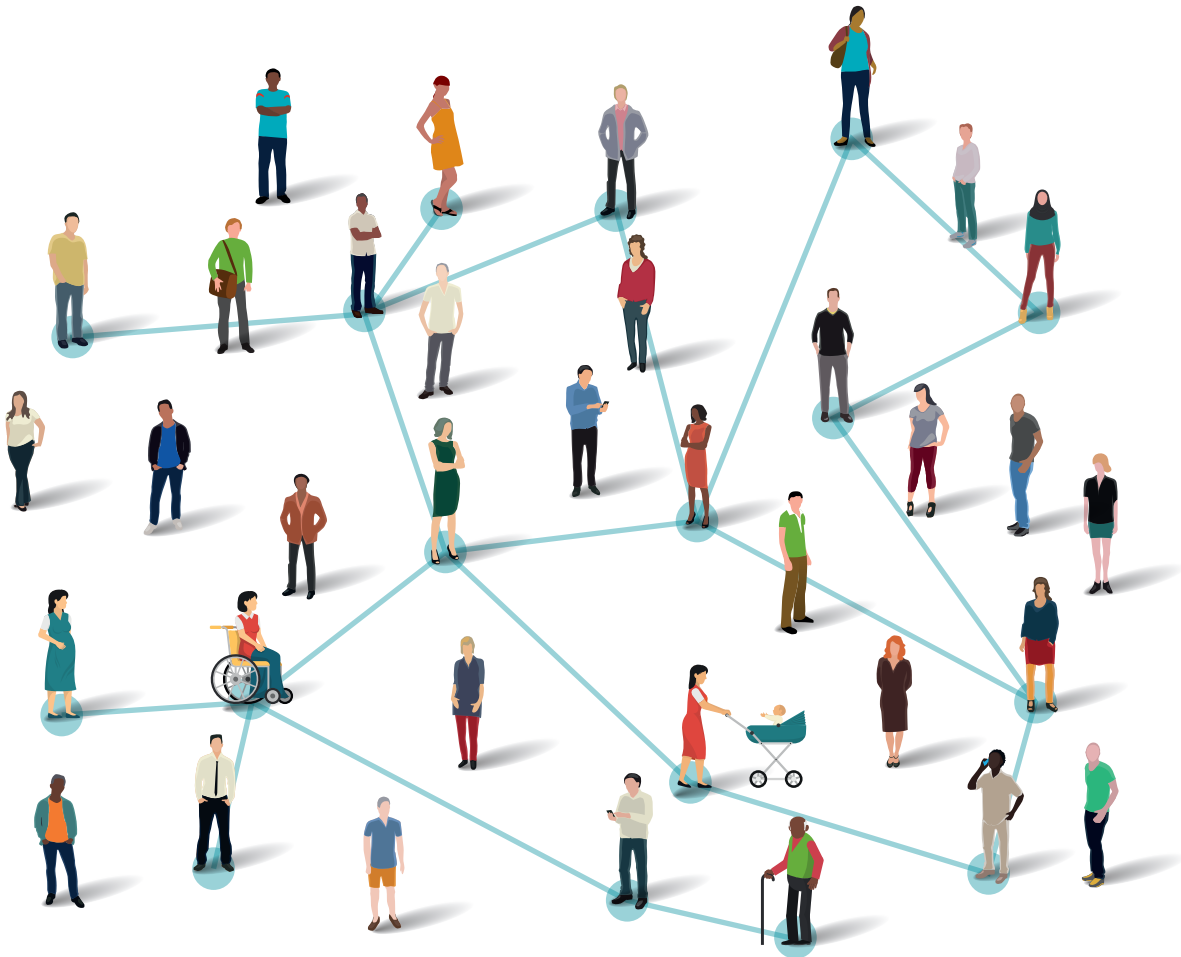
The publication of this guidebook was made possible thanks to a generous contribution from the Austrian Government, Federal Ministry of Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs. The content of this publication, including the views, opinions, findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed herein, do not necessarily reflect those of the donor. It is not a consensus-based document.

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Co-operation in Europe

 Federal Ministry  
Republic of Austria  
Europe, Integration  
and Foreign Affairs

# The **Role of Civil Society** in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Focus on South-Eastern Europe





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# Acknowledgements

This guidebook was prepared by the OSCE Transnational Threats Department (TNTD) Action against Terrorism Unit (ATU) under the direction of Georgia Holmer, Senior Adviser on Anti-Terrorism Issues.

The ATU would like to thank Adrian Shtuni (Shtuni Consulting, LLC, United States of America) for his contributions to developing and writing the guidebook. Valuable support was also provided by the Head of the ATU, Argo Avakov, and by ATU staff Camilla Bognoe, Yuri Fenopetov, Agnieszka Hejduk, Orlaith King and Katerina Koci.

The ATU is also grateful for the collaboration and feedback provided by staff in the OSCE Presence in Albania, Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mission in Kosovo, Mission to Montenegro, Mission to Serbia and Mission to Skopje, as well as other OSCE entities and institutions that provided critical input.

The ATU expresses its gratitude for the expert review and suggestions provided by the following individuals both through the peer review process and in the Expert Working Group Session that supported this project:

## **Veaceslav Balan**

OSCE Mission to Serbia

## **Elvira Hadzibegovic Bubanja**

Forum MNE

## **Sejjaf Hadzic**

OSCE Youth Advisory Group

## **Enri Hide**

European University of Tirana

## **Naim Hoxha**

OSCE Mission in Kosovo

## **Humera Khan**

Muflehun

## **Eric Manton**

formerly with OSCE Mission to Skopje

## **Afrodita Musliu**

NEXUS – Civil Concept

## **Eric Rosand**

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Organizing Against Violent Extremism

## **Edit Schlaffer**

Women without Borders

## **Serkan Serin**

OSCE Mission to Skopje

## **Selma Zekovic**

OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina

## **Susanna Naltakyan**

OSCE Presence in Albania

## **Lulzim Peci**

Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development

## **Valery Perry**

OSCE Mission to Serbia

## Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>ATU</b>	Action against Terrorism Unit
<b>BIH</b>	Bosnia and Herzegovina
<b>CSO</b>	civil society organization
<b>CVE</b>	Countering Violent Extremism
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>IT</b>	Information Technology
<b>ICCT</b>	International Centre for Counter-Terrorism
<b>ICAN</b>	International Civil Society Action Network
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organization
<b>ODIHR</b>	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
<b>OSCE</b>	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
<b>P/CVERLT</b>	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism
<b>PVE</b>	Preventing Violent Extremism
<b>RUSI</b>	Royal United Services Institute
<b>TNTD</b>	Transnational Threats Department
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UN Women</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>VERLT</b>	Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism

# Glossary

This glossary serves to clarify key terms used in this guidebook. The definitions are for this guidebook only and are not official OSCE definitions.

**Community** – women, men, social groups and institutions that are based in the same area and/or have shared interests.

**Civil society** – a diverse body of civil actors, communities, and formal or informal associations with a wide range of roles who engage in public life, seeking to advance shared values and objectives.

**Civil society actors** – key representatives of the community including women, youth, community and religious leaders who are well positioned to provide impactful and long-lasting contributions to the well-being of society.

**Community policing** – a philosophy and organizational strategy that promote partnerships between the police force and the public to increase the effective and efficient identification, prevention and resolution of problems of crime, and address concerns about physical safety and security, social disorder and neighbourhood decay in order to improve the quality of life for everyone.

**Countering violent extremism** – proactive actions to counter efforts by violent extremists to radicalize, recruit and mobilize followers to engage in violent acts and to address specific factors that facilitate and enable violent extremist recruitment and radicalization to violence.

**Counter-terrorism** – policies, laws and strategies developed by state actors and implemented primarily by law enforcement, intelligence agencies, and sometimes the military, aimed at thwarting terrorist plots and dismantling terrorist organizations.

**Former violent extremists or “formers”** – individuals who have disengaged from a path to violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism and who can have a useful role in raising awareness and communicating credible counter-narratives.

**Gender perspective** – awareness and consideration of differential needs, experiences, and status of women and men based on socio-cultural context.



**Intervention programming** – programmes that target “at-risk” audiences and seek to intervene in a person’s pathway to terrorist radicalization before the line of criminal activity is crossed. The type of programmes that falls under this category are sometimes referred to as “off ramps” or “exit programmes”. The programmes are voluntary and include referral mechanisms, psychosocial support, mentoring, theological/doctrinal debate, education and employment training and support, etc.

**Prevention programming** – programmes that seek to reduce the appeal of violent extremism and build resilience to its influence and spread. The types of programmes that may fall under this category are: awareness raising on the threat of violent extremism in schools, public information campaigns and community debates, inter-faith and intra-faith dialogues, capacity building for teachers and community leaders in identifying and supporting those vulnerable to radicalization, media messaging and counter-/alternative narrative campaigns, and community trust building with law enforcement, etc.

**Radicalization that leads to terrorism** – the dynamic process whereby an individual comes to accept terrorist violence as a possible, perhaps even legitimate, course of action. This may eventually, but not necessarily, lead this person to advocate, act in support of, or to engage in, terrorism.

**Rehabilitation programming** – programmes that target individuals radicalized to violence and possibly their families at different stages of radicalization. The types of programmes include both prison-based de-radicalization/disengagement and post-criminal aftercare programmes focusing on the rehabilitation and reintegration of terrorist offenders and returning foreign fighters, and their re-entry into society. Some programmes offer educational and vocational training, counselling, employment opportunities and ideological re-education, etc.

**Resilience** – the ability to withstand, respond to and recover from a wide range of harmful and adverse events.

**Whole-of-society approach** – an approach to preventing and countering violent extremism advocated by policymakers and practitioners that envisions a role for multiple sectors and civil society actors in prevention, intervention, and de-radicalization/disengagement rehabilitation programmes.

# Foreword

Violent extremism and terrorism in today's world are complex, multi-faceted challenges that are not confined to borders. Terrorist groups and violent extremist movements are less cohesive, and the threat is harder to understand and predict. We are witnessing not only directed attacks in the OSCE area, but also self-inspired acts of violence. Some terrorist actors are foreign fighters; others have never left their communities. The goals, motives and justification for the violence are diverse, as are the ideas that underpin them.

This reality requires a comprehensive, nuanced and internationally co-ordinated response. The OSCE participating States have been unequivocal in their condemnation of terrorism and violent extremism, but also in their support of a multi-dimensional approach that focuses on the prevention of radicalization violent extremism that lead to terrorism (VERLT).

The OSCE's commitment to preventing VERLT reflects the growing awareness and understanding that effective counter-terrorism efforts are critical but insufficient without an emphasis on prevention. Understanding why individuals are willing to give their lives to a violent extremist movement or cause, and working to address and mitigate the issues and grievances that push them in that direction are critical investments of our time and resources. While there is an increased awareness among the policymakers in the OSCE area of the importance of Preventing and Countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism (P/CVERLT), there is still not enough dialogue, engagement and co-operation with civil society and other non-governmental actors in conceptualizing, developing and implementing impactful P/CVERLT activities and policies.

Successful P/CVERLT initiatives are rooted in a whole-of-society approach that harnesses the influence and efforts of civil society, in particular, families, women, youth, educators, and religious and community leaders. This guidebook reflects the OSCE's commitment to supporting the important role that civil society plays

in the prevention of VERLT, as well as our understanding of the complexities, sensitivities and challenges of this role. It provides practical guidelines and a helpful background for both policymakers and practitioners who are working to advance civil society-led P/CVERLT initiatives.

The Action against Terrorism Unit (ATU) in the OSCE Secretariat's Transnational Threats Department is a resource hub for the OSCE's 57 participating States, field operations and independent institutions, and helps support and implement the OSCE's counter-terrorism commitments. It is our hope that this resource will contribute to inclusive, multi-stakeholder processes in developing P/CVERLT programmes and strategies. We also believe that the issues addressed in this publication will help shape constructive discussions and dialogue.

The guidebook also reflects an explicit regional focus on South-Eastern Europe. Challenges unique to the region and examples of emerging good practice are highlighted. A second iteration of this publication will be developed for the countries of Central Asia.

This guidebook is one in a planned series of regionally focused guidebooks by the ATU on challenges in developing and implementing effective programmes on P/CVERLT. We anticipate that this guidebook and our forthcoming publications will prove to be valuable resources for policymakers and practitioners across the OSCE area who are working to foster inclusive approaches to peace and security.



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# Executive Summary

Civil society is best understood as a diverse body of civil actors, communities, and formal or informal associations with a wide range of roles, who engage in public life seeking to advance shared values and objectives.

Civil society plays a crucial role in a whole-of-society approach to preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism (P/CVERLT). Civil society actors are often well positioned, credible and experienced in working with specific groups to help identify and address the grievances that make individuals more vulnerable to the influence of violent extremist groups.

Youth, women and community leaders are key civil society actors in P/CVERLT efforts because of their influence and ability to foster social change. Other stakeholders such as the media, law enforcement, educators, researchers and the private sector can also make significant contributions to preventing VERLT.

Civil society groups and actors, in South-Eastern Europe and elsewhere, face significant challenges in developing and implementing impactful P/CVERLT programmes to include: navigating political and legal restrictions; ensuring participation in government-level policy and strategy development; securing adequate and sustainable funding; building internal capacity; ensuring personal safety; and establishing effective partnerships with government actors.

There are a number of practical steps that can help support and advance efforts by government actors in developing productive non-instrumentalized relationships with civil society organizations (CSOs). They include establishing flexible multi-agency co-ordination mechanisms and codifying partnerships between government and non-government actors by delineating roles and responsibilities.

The capacity of CSOs can be strengthened by sharing good practices in P/CVERLT programming, identifying and supporting lesser known but credible groups, establishing regional networks and platforms for collaboration, and by linking researchers with practitioners to support evidence-based work.





# 1. Introduction

Violent extremism and terrorism are, fundamentally, repudiations of the democratic values of tolerance, respect, inclusion and diversity that underpin the work of the OSCE. While the 57 participating States of the OSCE experience different types and levels of threats associated with transnational terrorism, all have confirmed their commitment to work together in preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism (P/CVERLT). This commitment includes a consensual acknowledgment of “the important roles that youth, families, women, victims of terrorism, religious, cultural and education leaders, civil society, as well as the media, can play to counter the violent extremist narrative that can incite terrorist actors, and to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, in particular by fostering mutual respect and understanding, reconciliation and peaceful coexistence among cultures, and by promoting and protecting human rights, fundamental freedoms, democratic principles and the rule of law”.<sup>1</sup>

It is in governments’ best interest to work with civil society in the P/CVERLT, since civil society actors are often better placed, more credible, and more knowledgeable and experienced in working with specific groups to help identify and address the grievances that make individuals more vulnerable to VERLT. The importance of a “whole-of-society approach” to the prevention of VERLT is often, however, understood more in the abstract than in application. In many countries, notions of security that incorporate a role for non-governmental actors are new and untested. The need for genuine partnerships between civil society and governments may be understood but difficult to operationalize. In order for local authorities to constructively engage with civil society actors, governments must provide space and support for local organizations and initiatives to develop, and must reinforce the message that governments value the role that individuals, communities and civil society can play in strengthening security.

With these ideas in mind, this guidebook is written to help support a safe, constructive and impactful role for civil society in preventing and countering VERLT, one that reflects a trust-based relationship with government actors

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<sup>1</sup> OSCE MC.DOC/4/15 (4 December 2015)

and incorporates an understanding of a shared responsibility for security. The publication is written for **policymakers** who are working to craft policies, strategies and actions plans to prevent and counter violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism. Specifically, the publication seeks to help deepen their appreciation for the role of civil society in P/CVERLT and encourage an inclusive process in the conceptualization and design of these policies and strategies.

This guidebook is also written for **civil society actors** – organizations and individuals – who are engaging in the field of preventing VERLT. This guidebook should help illuminate the spectrum of activities that are relevant to P/CVERLT, and inspire new initiatives that are safe, impactful and sustainable. The ideas and guidelines presented in this publication are written to prompt dialogue and critical discussion on how to strengthen civil society-led initiatives in P/CVERLT.

This guidebook has been tailored to reflect guidelines and examples from, and relevant to the region of South-Eastern Europe, a critical area of focus for the OSCE and others, and home to six of the Organization's field operations. To this end, the ATU/TNTD convened a group of civil society actors, academics and other experts from the region to harness their insights on the challenges and emerging good practices in this regional context. The examples of emerging good practices highlight much of the powerful and important work being carried out in the region.

The next chapter, *Section 2* explains the key concepts in this guidebook to include an examination of civil society, and the nature and scope of terms such as radicalization, violent extremism and terrorism. The spectrum of policies and interventions that fall with the domain of P/CVERLT are also described and categorized.

*Section 3* clearly explains why a whole-of-society approach to P/CVERLT is critical and elucidates the value that civil society actors bring to security. Other stakeholders are also examined, including the police, educators and the media.

The specific region of South-Eastern Europe is considered in *Section 4*, and the unique challenges and nature of the civil society landscape are described.

Drawing from a variety of authoritative sources, *Section 5* provides clear, accessible and practical guidelines on civil-society-led P/CVERLT activities. Highlighted in this section are emerging good practices from South-Eastern Europe.



This guidebook draws upon the expertise and accumulated experience of the OSCE field operations in South-Eastern Europe and builds on previous OSCE publications, in particular, *Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A community-policing approach*. A *Select OSCE Resource List* and *Bibliography* outline key resources and publications used in developing this guidebook, which serve as valuable tools for those developing policies and programmes in P/CVERLT.





## 2. Key concepts

### 2.1 What is civil society?

While it has no precise definition, civil society is broadly understood as “the arena outside the family, market, and state”<sup>2,3</sup> Its components are often explained by what they are not, such as “non-governmental”, “not-for-profit”, and “non-commercial” entities, rather than what they are. In general, civil society is best understood as **a diverse body of civil actors, communities, and formal or informal associations with a wide range of roles, who engage in public life seeking to advance shared values and objectives.** Civil society actors typically include: community leaders and groups; grassroots associations; religious leaders and faith-based organizations; online groups and social media communities; international, local and grassroots non-governmental organizations (NGO); labour unions and professional associations; charitable and philanthropic foundations; academic and research institutions; and recreational community groups.<sup>4</sup>

Depending on the context, families and political parties can be considered part of the civil society mosaic; more commonly they are not. Although it seeks to shape policies, laws and rules, civil society does not seek to gain control of state office; therefore, it is distinctly different from political organizations and parties who compete for control of the government. By implication, political parties are generally not considered part of civil society, although

2 Report on Activities, July 2005 – August 2006 (Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics, and Political Science)

3 Concept and Definition of Civil Society Sustainability (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2017)

4 The European Union in a recent publication, *Multiannual Indicative Programme for the Thematic Programme 'Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Local Authorities' for the period 2014–2020*, includes the following examples of CSOs: “non-governmental organizations, organizations representing indigenous peoples, organizations representing national and/ or ethnic minorities, diaspora organizations, migrants’ organizations in partner countries, local traders’ associations and citizens’ groups, co-operatives, employers’ associations and trade unions (social partners), organizations representing economic and social interests, organizations fighting corruption and fraud and promoting good governance, civil rights organizations and organizations combating discrimination, local organizations (including networks) involved in decentralized regional co-operation and integration, consumer organizations, women’s and youth organizations, environmental, teaching, cultural, research and scientific organizations, universities, churches and religious associations and communities, philosophical and non-confessional organizations, the media and any non-governmental associations and independent foundations”.

sometimes they are regarded as hybrid civil society organizations (CSOs).<sup>5,6</sup> Similarly, families, households and kinship networks are commonly excluded from the civil society realm and regarded as part of the private domain that is centred on intimate and blood-relation ties.<sup>7</sup>

Traditionally, civil society has operated in the physical space, but information and communication technology (ICT) innovations in the last decades have ushered a new area of citizen engagement and have fundamentally changed the way people associate and seek to advance social goals. As of late 2017, half of the world's population, or about 3,819 billion people, were estimated to be active Internet users,<sup>8</sup> over three billion of whom were active social media users. This technological revolution has resulted in the proliferation of social media communities of networked citizens that transcend geographical and social divides. These formal or informal networks have the ability to rapidly engage the wider public and mobilize support, drawing attention to causes (positive or negative) that otherwise might have had very limited influence.

## 2.2 Understanding Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism (VERLT)

There are different legal, policy and academic definitions and understandings of terrorism, radicalization and violent extremism. These definitions serve different purposes and are not always aligned, which sometimes challenges efforts to advance good practices and build international co-operation. In general, **violent extremism** refers to acts of violence that are justified by, or associated with, an extreme religious, social or political ideology.

Conceptually, violent extremism is usually considered more expansive and nuanced than terrorism.<sup>9</sup> The United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism states that "violent extremism encompasses a

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5 Global Civil Society: Changing the world? (Scholte, J.A., 1999)

6 Conducting a DG Assessment: A framework for strategy development (USAID, 2000)

7 Nevertheless, some political theorists view the family or the sphere of domestic life as an integral part of civil society. See Gender and Civil Society (Jude Howell, GCS Knowledge Base, 2005).

8 See [www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com)

9 See Countering Violent Extremism Literature Review by Nasser-Eddine, Garnham, Agostino and Caluya (2011); Violent Extremism by Glazzard and Zeuthen (2016); CVERLT: Ideas, Recommendations, and Good Practices from the OSCE Region, Neumann (2017).

wider category of manifestations and there is a risk that a conflation of the two terms may lead to the justification of an overly broad application of counter-terrorism measures, including against forms of conduct that should not qualify as terrorist acts”.<sup>10</sup> There are significant semantic and conceptual challenges in the terminology related to violent extremism and terrorism, especially from a human rights perspective.<sup>11</sup>

**Radicalization** refers to the process by which an individual increasingly espouses or supports extremist ideas. It is a concept with various interpretations. Sometimes this term is used in ways that imply an implicit link between radical ideas and violence. These interpretations are problematic, not only because not all who hold radical ideas will engage or support violent activity, but also because the ability to hold ideas – regardless of their nature – is enshrined and protected as a fundamental human right.<sup>12</sup> The right to freedom of expression also protects views that some may consider radical or extreme to include ideas “that offend, shock or disturb the state or any sector of the population”.<sup>13</sup> Radical ideas can also be understood in a positive light, as fomenting beneficial social change. For example, advocates of universal suffrage and the abolition of slavery were once considered to be espousing radical ideas because they stood counter to prevailing norms of the time.

The OSCE has specific and intentional terminology for these concepts: **violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism (VERLT)**. “Radicalization that leads to terrorism” refers to “the dynamic process whereby an individual comes to accept terrorist violence as a possible, perhaps even legitimate, course of action. This may eventually, but not necessarily, lead this person to advocate, act in support of, or to engage in, terrorism”.<sup>14</sup> This term highlights the importance of distinguishing between criminal and lawful activity.

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10 Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary-General (United Nations General Assembly Seventieth Session, A/A/70/674)

11 UN Doc. /HRC/31/65 Report of Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism

12 The right to freedom of opinion without interference and of expression is protected under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948 and reinforced by Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1966.

13 ECtHR, *Handyside v. United Kingdom*, Application No. 5493/72, 7 December 1976.

14 Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Community-policing approach (OSCE TNTD and ODIHR, 2014)

## 2.3 Programmes and strategies in preventing and countering VERLT

**Preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism (P/CVERLT)** thus refers to a spectrum of policies, programmes and interventions aimed at preventing and countering extremism related to terrorist radicalization. Again, the framing adopted by the OSCE emphasizes the link between radicalization/extremism and acts of violence and criminalized terrorism, and thus explicitly underscores the importance of preserving fundamental freedoms when working to prevent these security threats.

For the purpose of this guidebook, P/CVERLT is distinguished from counter-terrorism in that it does not target terrorists or terrorist activity directly through investigations, arrests or prosecutions. Instead, P/CVERLT is focused on: (i) preventing and countering processes of radicalization that may lead to terrorism; (ii) addressing and reducing grievances and structural social, economic and political conditions that may be conducive to violent extremism; (iii) assisting those already radicalized to terrorism to disengage or de-radicalize, and reintegrate into society; and (iv) building community resilience to VERLT. Counter-terrorism, in contrast, refers to the suite of activities undertaken primarily by law enforcement, intelligence agencies, and sometimes the military “aimed at thwarting terrorist plots and dismantling terrorist organizations”.<sup>15</sup> Also, while P/CVERLT strategies are primarily designed and driven by state authorities, their implementation is not limited to government actors and includes a broad spectrum of stakeholders.

Other analogous or overlapping terminology used in the international community include: countering violent extremism (CVE), preventing violent extremism (PVE) and counter-radicalization (CR). One definition of CVE is “proactive actions to counter efforts by violent extremists to radicalize, recruit, and mobilize followers to violence and to address specific factors that facilitate violent extremist recruitment and radicalization to violence”.<sup>16</sup> PVE is the corresponding acronym that has gained more traction within the United Nations and among development agencies. It emphasizes addressing and mitigating enabling conditions and root causes of terrorism, such as weak governance,

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<sup>15</sup> Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism: Ideas, recommendations, and good practices from the OSCE Region (Neumann, OSCE 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Department of State and USAID Joint Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism (U.S. Department of State and USAID, 2016)

exclusionary social structures and inadequate education.<sup>17</sup> The term “counter-radicalization” also puts the emphasis on prevention, and according to one definition, “seeks to prevent non-radicalized populations from being radicalized. The objective is to create individual and communal resilience against cognitive and/or violent radicalization through a variety of non-coercive means”.<sup>18</sup> In sum, these terms all have proactive and preventive efforts at their core.

The spectrum of activities, programmes and types of engagements that fall under P/CVERLT is wide and encompasses efforts at the international, regional, central, community and individual levels.<sup>19</sup> The specific lines of efforts are determined by the priority action areas identified in the strategic framework for each government. Ultimately, the types of approaches and programmes are influenced by, among other things, the nature of the threat as well as prevalent social norms and political circumstances, structures of governance, resources, capacities, risk assessments and traditions.

Two common ways to categorize P/CVERLT programming are by **type** (awareness building, training, strategic communications, etc.) or by **function** (prevention, intervention and rehabilitation). Some types of programmes may fall under more than one functional area. Some experts suggest that gang violence reduction frameworks or public health models may be useful for the purpose of developing and grouping P/CVERLT programming.<sup>20,21</sup>

**Prevention programming** seeks to reduce the appeal of violent extremism and build resilience to its influence and spread. The types of programmes that may fall under this category are, *inter alia*: awareness raising on the threat of violent extremism in schools; public information campaigns; community debates; inter-faith and inter-faith and intra-faith dialogues; capacity building for teachers and community leaders to support vulnerable youth; media messaging and alternative/counter-narrative campaigns; and community trust building with law enforcement.

**Intervention programming** targets “at-risk” audiences and seek to intervene in a person’s pathway to terrorist radicalization before the line of criminal activity is crossed, or acts of violence committed. The types of programmes that fall under this category are sometimes referred to as “off ramps” or “exit programmes”.

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17 Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary-General (United Nations General Assembly Seventieth Session, A/A/70/674)

18 Preventing Violent Radicalization in America (National Security Preparedness Group, Bipartisan Policy Center, 2011)

19 Taking Stock: Analytic Tools for Understanding and Designing P/CVE Programs (Holmer and Bauman, USIP, August 2018).

20 Canaries in the coal mine: Interpersonal violence, gang violence, and violent extremism through a public health prevention lens (Eisenman D.P., Flavahan L., 2017)

21 Promising Practices in Engaging youth in Peace and Security and P/CVE (USAID, PEPFAR, YouthPower)

The programmes are voluntary and include: referral mechanisms, psychosocial support, mentoring, theological/doctrinal debate, education and employment training and support, etc.

**Rehabilitation programming** targets individuals radicalized to violence and possibly their families at different stages of radicalization. The types of programmes include both prison-based de-radicalization/disengagement and post-criminal aftercare programmes focusing on the rehabilitation and reintegration of terrorist offenders and returning foreign fighters, and their re-entry into society. Some programmes offer educational and vocational training, counselling, employment opportunities and ideological re-education, etc.

P/CVERLT policies and programmes designed and implemented by government and civil society actors should target all forms of violent extremism to include ultranationalist and far-right or far-left extremism. Equally important is that these programmes protect human rights and not infringe upon civil liberties, in particular, the freedoms of opinion and expression, association and religion or belief, and that they do not stigmatize particular communities or groups. These rights are particularly at stake in efforts to prevent VERLT, and governments must take care that any qualified restrictions are legitimate, necessary and proportionate.<sup>22</sup> In addition to ensuring that P/CVERLT programmes do not infringe upon human rights, it is also important to remember that the promotion of human rights is in itself a powerful deterrent to violent extremism and terrorism.<sup>23</sup>

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22 Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A community-policing approach (OSCE TNTD and ODIHR, 2014)

23 Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary-General (United Nations General Assembly Seventieth Session, A/A/70/674)







# 3. The role of civil society in preventing and countering VERLT



## 3.1 Civil society's added value

There is broad international consensus that the kinetic counter-terrorism efforts adopted in the past decades have been insufficient in undermining the appeal of extremist ideologies and preventing the spread of violent extremism. As underscored in the United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism and various strategic policy documents by key international organizations working on security issues, traditional counter-terrorism tools often target the symptoms but not the drivers of violent extremism. Governments have the responsibility to ensure security and respect for human rights, as well as uphold the rule of law and implement policies that counter discrimination, marginalization and exclusion. These are considered important components of any strategy to counter the violent extremist threat.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, some grievances exploited by violent extremist groups lie beyond governmental reach. Civil society actors are often better placed, more credible, and more knowledgeable and experienced in working with specific groups to help identify and address the grievances that make individuals more vulnerable to VERLT.

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<sup>24</sup> Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary-General (United Nations General Assembly Seventieth Session, A/A/70/674)

Various OSCE policy documents in recent years, particularly Ministerial Declaration 4/15, have strongly encouraged participating States to work across sectors and proactively engage civil society and other community actors in P/CVERLT efforts.<sup>25</sup> One of the main advantages of adopting a whole-of-society approach to P/CVERLT is its inclusiveness. Indeed, it is lack of government accountability, and social and political exclusion that sometimes fuel violent extremism. There are a number of reasons for which civil society is critical to P/CVERLT:

- Civil society has the **capacity and experience** in working on programmes that foster peaceful and inclusive societies, and mitigate structural conditions that are conducive to the spread of violent extremism. Although these programmes may not fall specifically under the P/CVERLT rubric, they are often considered P/CVERLT-relevant. Some of these programmes focus on peacebuilding, reintegration of war-affected populations, good governance and rule of law, human rights, women's rights and gender issues, inter-faith dialogue and conflict transformation, youth engagement, and crime and drug use prevention, etc.
- Civil society efforts are often **locally rooted, have access, legitimacy and influence**, and are driven by genuine concern for their communities' wellbeing and safety. This makes them dependable allies who are willing to be innovative, versatile and more prepared to take risks in order to address their communities' security concerns.
- Civil society often has **extensive knowledge** of the local dynamics, trends and drivers of violent extremism, and present the **best "early warning" mechanisms** for emerging threats. This positions them to provide timely interventions and context-specific responses.
- Civil society often works with marginalized groups, promotes political participation, and **provides outlets for addressing demands and grievances**. These outlets can potentially help diffuse tensions between government authorities and communities, challenge violent extremist narratives, and counter efforts by violent groups to leverage community grievances for recruitment purposes.
- Civil society can be **connected** regionally and internationally to a larger community of civil society actors and practitioners who work across relevant

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<sup>25</sup> See "Strengthening co-ordination and coherence in the OSCE's efforts to address transnational threats" (OSCE MC.DEC/9/11), "The OSCE role in countering the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters in the context of the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2133" (MC.DOC/5/14), "Preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism" (MC.DOC/4/15), and "Strengthening OSCE efforts to prevent and counter -terrorism" (MC.DOC/1/16).

disciplines. Being locally rooted yet more broadly connected positions them to exchange and refine good practices.<sup>26,27,28,29</sup>

## 3.2 Key civil society actors in P/CVERLT

**Youth, women, and community leaders**, including religious leaders, are key civil society actors who can provide impactful and lasting contributions to preventing and countering VERLT. Strategic P/CVERLT frameworks and policy documents increasingly call for more focus on, and support for, these specific actors. Youth and women, in particular, are recognized as agents of social change and as invaluable partners in efforts in P/CVERLT efforts. Community leaders are critical for fostering cultures of tolerance and open dialogue, and for working with vulnerable community members in order to reject violent ideologies.<sup>30,31</sup>

### Youth

Young people are the main target of recruitment and mobilization efforts by violent extremist organizations. Irrespective of country, religion, social background or level of education, youth constitutes the social group most vulnerable to violent extremism. Psychologists attribute this vulnerability to a number of factors, including but not limited to, young people's search for identity, a sense of meaning, fellowship, purpose, recognition and belonging. Their natural impulsivity and willingness to take greater risks may also be contributing factors to their propensity to join groups or movements that may espouse violence.<sup>32,33</sup>

By implication, youth can also be one of the most strategic source of resilience against VERLT if their energy, activism and innovative ideas are given due

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26 10 Reasons Why Civil Society Is an Ally and Not an Adversary in the Struggle Against Violent Extremism (Global Solutions Exchange, 2017)

27 Engaging Civil Society in Countering Violent Extremism: Experiences with the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (van Ginkel, ICCT Hague, 2012)

28 Friend Not Foe: Opening spaces for civil society engagement to prevent violent extremism (Cortright et al., 2011)

29 Barcelona Declaration: Plan of Action of the Euro-Mediterranean civil society to prevent all forms of violent extremism (Observatory to Prevent Extremist Violence, 2017)

30 Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary-General (United Nations General Assembly Seventieth Session, A/A/70/674)

31 Council Conclusions on EU External Action on Counter-Terrorism, General Secretariat of the Council, Council of the European Union, Brussels (19 June 2017)

32 Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism: Ideas, Recommendations, and Good Practices from the OSCE Region (Neumann, OSCE 2017)

33 Youth Engagement to Counter Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: Report on findings and recommendations (Joint OSCE Secretariat and OSCE ODIHR Expert Roundtable, 2012)

support and channelled constructively. The United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism highlights the importance of paying particular attention to the world's 1.8 billion young women and men who constitute invaluable partners in P/CVERLT, and urges United Nations Member States to identify the right instruments for supporting and empowering youth as they take up the cause of peace.<sup>34</sup> The OSCE calls for engaging and empowering youth by: creating opportunities for them to participate in public life through the promotion of human rights, dialogue and democratic principles; facilitating their access to social services; and enhancing educational opportunities and access to employment.<sup>35</sup>

Youth representatives, activists, volunteers and young professionals often engage effectively in preventive programming at the local level – both offline and online – by engaging their peers and/or their communities, and raising awareness about the potential negative consequences of terrorist groups and providing positive alternative ideas. Dialogue facilitation is another common area of practice for youth. This practical approach provides opportunities for reflection and constructive debate on themes such as personal and societal development, education, independence, justice, honour, identities, gender norms, belonging and post-conflict reconciliation, etc. Other themes to explore, which warrant assistance from professional counsellors, include dealing with post-traumatic stress, discrimination, intolerance and domestic violence, among others.

#### Women and gender considerations

There is broad international consensus among policymakers and practitioners that efforts to engage women in P/CVERLT are critical and should be intensified. Their centrality in international peace and security efforts was highlighted by the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security,<sup>36</sup> and more specifically, with respect to P/CVERLT, through the development of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2242 (2015).<sup>37</sup>

This intensified engagement of women may benefit from additional and more comprehensive approaches that explore the gender dynamics around terrorist radicalization and incorporate the knowledge into P/CVERLT policy and

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34 Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary-General (UN General Assembly Seventieth Session, A/A/70/674)

35 Preventing and Countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism (OSCE, 2015, Ministerial Declaration MC.DOC/4/15)

36 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) (United Nations, 2000, S/RES/1325)

37 United Nations Security Resolution 2242 (2015) (United Nations, 2015, S/RES/2242)

programmatic action.<sup>38,39</sup> Gender refers to socially constructed roles, behaviours, needs and expectations considered appropriate for women and men in a particular society. These roles are considered context- and time-specific, and changeable.<sup>40</sup>

A gender perspective (i.e. consideration of the differences between gender roles) is important in P/CVERLT work because it sheds light on existing power dynamics within a socio-cultural context (i.e. what is expected, permissible and valued in a man or woman, as well as in decision-making processes). Using a gender lens affords a deeper understanding of how men and women engage in VERLT differently, and also how violent extremism impacts them differently. This type of analysis helps identify effective engagement opportunities for women in P/CVERLT. The positive impact of a gendered approach to security challenges has already been tested successfully. The integration of a gender perspective and the inclusion of women in peacekeeping and peace processes have resulted in a significant increase in effectiveness and resolution.<sup>41</sup>

Research on the role of women in terrorist activity shows that it is a misconception to understand women only as victims or passive supporters of violent extremism.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, women are known to play a number of active roles in violent extremist organizations, from gathering intelligence, recruiting and mobilizing resources, to carrying out suicide attacks.<sup>43</sup> Violent extremist organizations sometimes enlist female combatants as a tactical tool to humiliate and shame men into joining, thus playing on masculinity and gender norms.<sup>44</sup> An objective assessment of women's involvement in violent extremism activities in any context helps debunk gender stereotypes and improve understanding of the various roles they can play in P/CVERLT.

While considered critical players in the P/CVERLT field of practice, women may not achieve their full potential as agents of positive change in societies where they are invisible in the public space and marginalized in private life; their empowerment is an essential condition for effective engagement in the P/CVERLT space. Research indicates a strong correlation between women's

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38 United Nations Security Council Resolution 2242 (2015) (United Nations, 2015, S/RES/2242)

39 A Man's World? Exploring the roles of women in countering terrorism and violent extremism (ed. Fink, Zieger, Bhulai, Hedayah and the Global Center on Co-operative Security, 2016)

40 Gender mainstreaming: Strategy for promoting gender equality (Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, UN Women, 2001)

41 59 A Man's World? Exploring the roles of women in countering terrorism and violent extremism (Fink, Zieger, Bhulai, Hedayah, eds. and the Global Center on Co-operative Security, 2016)

42 Women and Terrorist Radicalization, Final Report (OSCE Secretariat and ODIHR, 2011)

43 "Escaped Isis wives describe life in the all-female al-Khansa Brigade who punish women with 40 lashes for wearing wrong clothes" (*The Independent*, 2015)

44 From WWI to ISIS, Using Shame and Masculinity in Recruitment Narratives (START, 2016)

empowerment and a reduction in violent extremism, and conversely, between gender-based inequality and violent conflict.<sup>45</sup> An inclusive engagement of women in P/CVERLT also requires that they be involved in policymaking and represented in the security and law enforcement sectors. This would ensure that their involvement is genuine instead of selective and tokenistic.

Women can have an impact on P/CVERLT efforts as policymakers, political leaders, educators, mothers, community members and activists. They can shape and lead education programmes, proactively engage with vulnerable youth, and author powerful counter-narratives, especially when speaking out as victims or survivors of terrorist attacks, but also as former violent extremists. One of the more critical roles they can play in the P/CVERLT field of practice is linked to their ability to intervene directly with girls and women at risk of terrorist radicalization or already radicalized, and those who have returned from conflict areas in foreign countries where they may have been actively involved in violent extremism. This is particularly critical in culturally conservative communities where communication and access to women are limited to other females and male relatives.

It is important to also recognize that fathers have a significant role to play in P/CVERLT work, particularly in gender-mainstreaming efforts, and are essential in family-based P/CVERLT programming. Due to their influential role in the family setting, they can be instrumental in shaping positive non-violent notions of masculinity. Nevertheless, this potential is yet to be fully explored and adequately leveraged in P/CVERLT programmes. Incentivizing additional and more substantive research on the role of fathers, both in facilitating and mitigating the influence of violent extremism, would be an important step towards more effective gender mainstreaming in P/CVERLT programming.<sup>46</sup>

#### Community leaders

**Community leaders** can play a powerful role as mediators between communities and government bodies. The resulting partnerships are useful in addressing a range of public safety concerns that include P/CVERLT. Working with community leaders to style a sense of common purpose around P/CVERLT is a good investment, which is known to increase the likelihood of successful outcomes.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Women and Countering Violent Extremism (Idris, GSDRC 2017)

<sup>46</sup> The Role of Families in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: Strategic recommendations and programming options (Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2016)

<sup>47</sup> Ankara Memorandum on Good Practices for a Multi-Sectoral Approach to Countering Violent Extremism (Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2012 and 2013)



Community leadership is not limited to traditional stereotypes, and therefore, it is wise to engage with a wide range of community members in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and beliefs when looking to identify and engage with community leaders. Religious leaders represent a specific form of community leadership, and faith communities are some of the most well-organized civil institutions in the world. Religious leaders serve not only as spiritual guides, but also as influential decision-makers in a community, and have both popular and political influence.<sup>48</sup> The role of religious leaders in P/CVERLT thus transcends the domain of religious doctrine. Beyond “theological antidotes to extremist interpretations of religion”, it is possible to engage religious actors in P/CVERLT in wider roles and harness their influence in governance, human development and peace-building.<sup>49</sup>

It is important, however, to be mindful of the negative implications of instrumentalizing community or religious actors to provide information or report to authorities on their communities. While safety is everyone’s concern, positioning community and religious leaders as informants erodes their credibility and standing within the community. Finally, it is critical to recognize that, in some cases, religious leaders hold illiberal and even extremist views, and promote intolerant ideas. Engaging with ideologically extreme but non-violent religious leaders can be counterproductive in P/CVERLT.

Community leaders can be impactful in a range of efforts from early stage prevention to the rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremist offenders and returning foreign fighters. As credible actors with unique knowledge of what messages resonate with vulnerable members of the community, they can be highly effective communicators of alternative narratives. They can especially leverage their position of authority, credibility, and close ties to community members to mentor youth on the values of peace and tolerance, and build resilience against messages of hate.<sup>50</sup>

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48 Engaging Religion and Religious Actors in Countering Violent Extremism (Mandaville and Nozell, USIP 2017)

49 *ibid.*

50 Civic Approaches to Confronting Violent Extremism: Sector recommendations and best practices (Barzegar et al., Report financed by the European Union, Georgia State University, British Council and Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2016)

## 3.3 Other important stakeholders in P/CVERLT

The effectiveness of a whole-of-society approach to P/CVERLT is largely dependent on the active and continued participation of a wide range of actors in its implementation. In addition to the key civil society actors outlined above, other important stakeholders include educators/teachers, law enforcement, academics/researchers, former violent extremists, the information technology and social media sector, journalists and media specialists. It is also important to acknowledge the influence of counterproductive community actors and formal or informal grassroots organizations that might adversely impact the P/CVERLT agenda. Below is a more comprehensive, although non-exhaustive, exploration of the spectrum of actors who can have a direct – and positive – impact in the field.

- **Educators/teachers/schools** – Schools are particularly prone to being affected by the influence of VERLT because they are hubs of social interaction where young people congregate in the building of personal and social identities. Educators, as first-line practitioners and leaders, are key to preventing violent extremism, not only because of their ability to impart knowledge by which they can influence the students’ worldview and system of values, but also because they may be able to identify those who are vulnerable to influence and need support. Training teachers to understand the risks of VERLT and approach the situation in a measured and constructive way is a critical investment. They can also support P/CVERLT efforts by developing curricula and textbooks that foster respect for diversity and promote non-violent social norms. Educators may also play a valuable role in rehabilitation and reintegration efforts by providing technical vocational training and programmes to enhance cognitive skills to violent, extremist offenders to prepare them for re-entry in society.<sup>51</sup>

Nevertheless, it is important to point out that education is an instrument that may be leveraged to achieve beneficial or harmful results, and while educators are in a unique position to influence their students’ mindsets and behaviours, this may not necessarily always be constructive. Educators and education institutions that reinforce exclusionary world views and tolerate violence of any kind would not be suitable P/CVERLT partners.<sup>52</sup>

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51 Rome Memorandum on Good Practices for Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders (Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2012)

52 Preventing Violent Extremism through Education: A guide for policy-makers (UNESCO, 2017)

- **Law enforcement/community police services** – Police services are responsible for maintaining public order and safety. The practice of community policing puts emphasis on “partnership-based, collaborative efforts between the police and the community to more effectively and efficiently identify, prevent and solve problems of crime, the fear of crime, issues of physical safety and security, social disorder and neighbourhood decay in order to improve the quality of life for everyone”.<sup>53</sup> In the P/CVERLT context, the premise is that close, trust-based co-operation between law enforcement and the communities they serve will result in reduced tensions and discontent, and an improved ability to intervene earlier in the cycle of terrorist radicalization, lower threats to public safety and foster more resilient communities.

Such partnerships are long-term investments that require patience and consistent outreach and engagement efforts. Experts point out that these efforts are more likely to yield genuine results if the outreach police components reflect the racial, ethnic and religious diversity of the communities they serve. Moreover, developing clear and transparent policies that separate outreach and engagement work from intelligence collection efforts and criminal investigation goes far in preserving trust and increasing the effectiveness of police engagement in P/CVERLT.<sup>54</sup> Community advisory boards and security councils have proven to be effective forums for raising and addressing P/CVERLT-relevant issues. These are also useful and transparent platforms for civil society and community leaders to engage and provide feedback to law enforcement on ongoing efforts, and coordinate possible interventions.

- **Academics/researchers** – The effectiveness of P/CVERLT policies is inextricably linked to the quality of research and analysis underpinning their development and guiding the implementation of programmatic efforts. Therefore, the integration of experienced researchers, think tanks and academic institutions in both P/CVERLT policy-making and programme implementation processes is of strategic importance. Evidence-based P/CVERLT research efforts that rely on rigorous techniques and objective assessment methodologies are more likely to accurately identify root causes and dynamic trends of terrorist radicalization. In turn, this can help tailor effective responses.

Nevertheless, adequate research capabilities may not always be available, and government actors should consider integrating training and capacity building for researchers as one of their core P/CVERLT lines of efforts. Research quality

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53 Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A community-policing approach (OSCE TNTD and ODIHR, 2014)

54 The Challenge and Promise of Using Community Policing Strategies to Prevent Violent Extremism: A call for community partnerships with law enforcement to enhance public safety, Final Report (Schanzer et al., NCJRS, 2016)

is also dependent on access to information. Thus, by facilitating researchers' access to relevant and reliable data more systematically and frequently, policymakers and government authorities would contribute to more accurate assessments and better policies. Another step to developing a strategic approach to P/CVERLT would be setting up policy forums to discuss policy priorities, disseminate research findings, and facilitate regular exchanges between researchers, policymakers and practitioners.

- **Former violent extremists or “formers”** – There are both opportunities and risks associated with involving “formers” in P/CVERLT efforts, i.e. individuals who have disengaged from involvement in VERLT.<sup>55</sup> Due to their first-hand experience with the process of terrorist radicalization – and possibly recruitment and mobilization – they may have a good understanding of the process and useful insights on how to prevent it. Their status as individuals, who have either supported or engaged in terrorism-related activities, may give them more credibility with at-risk audiences and potentially make them more legitimate and effective communicators when speaking out against violent extremism. They can connect at a deeper and personal level. By sharing their stories and experience, they may help de-glamorize violent extremist narratives and show that it is possible to abandon the path of violence and rebuild a new life. “Formers” can therefore have a useful role in a wide range of P/CVERLT efforts, from raising awareness and communicating credible counter-narratives, to supporting programmes of CSOs focusing on disengaging or rehabilitating and reintegrating convicted violent extremists.

Nevertheless, few of those who withdraw from extremist environments are willing and able to partake in P/CVERLT efforts, and when they do, they mostly require thorough training, support and supervision. Also, withdrawing from violent extremism is not a linear or permanent process, and relapsing is a constant risk. One of the main liabilities associated with enlisting “formers” to support de-radicalization/disengagement programmes has been that, at times, despite renouncing active violence, they have continued to hold views that promote intolerance, thus undermining others' rehabilitation efforts.<sup>56</sup> Ultimately, “formers” may be best suited for supplementary roles in P/CVERLT efforts after undergoing thorough training, and regular screenings and risk assessments.<sup>57</sup>

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55 Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A community-policing approach (OSCE and ODIHR, 2014)

56 Returning Foreign Fighters and the Reintegration Imperative (Holmer and Shtuni, United States Institute of Peace, 2017)

57 Dos and don'ts of involving formers in PVE/CVE work (RAN C&N and RAN Exit, 2017)

- **Information Technology and Social Media (IT) sector** – The Internet and social media revolution has broken down traditional communication barriers, creating a more interconnected world. Violent extremist organizations have recognized and exploited the power and unrivalled outreach opportunities that social media platforms provide, using them to inspire, recruit and mobilize support, wage psychological warfare, incite and coordinate attacks, and raise funds. Their propaganda refers to these media platforms as tools of comparable importance to lethal weapons used in the battlefield. Given the extensive strategic and tactical use that violent extremists make of the Internet and social media, the IT sector has a key role to play both in disrupting the abusive use of their platforms and supporting civil society P/CVERLT initiatives.

Over the past years, most of the main social media platforms have stepped up their efforts targeting online abuse and hate speech, resulting in the removal of extensive amounts of online content promoting violent extremism. These efforts must be carefully navigated within the parameter of laws protecting freedom of speech. Adding a more proactive approach to this reactive posture may produce even better results. Tech companies have the technological capacities and resources to develop, in partnership with CSOs and IT-savvy youth, tailored communication strategies and campaigns that challenge violent extremist narratives and promote a culture of tolerance, dialogue and non-discrimination. They may also encourage and support research on the misuse and exploitation of the Internet and social media platforms by violent extremist organizations helping policymakers develop more effective responses. Other efforts may focus on empowering victims to engage in P/CVERLT work by providing them with online forums to share their stories.<sup>58</sup>

- **Media/reporters** – The Internet revolution in the past two decades has reshaped the media environment, where the tools of mass communication are no longer the exclusive domain of professional journalists. Mainstream media outlets are increasingly contending the news space with smaller news portals, and identifying trustworthy sources is increasingly challenging. The way violent extremism-related issues or incidents are reported in the media has a profound impact on community dynamics, safety and P/CVERLT efforts. Biased news reporting can polarize communities, promote intolerance and hatred, and reinforce or exacerbate factors that are conducive to terrorist radicalization. While the core principles of ethical journalism offer a sound framework for professional news coverage, reporting on a sensitive subject

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58 Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary-General (United Nations General Assembly Seventieth Session, A/A/70/674)

like violent extremism requires heightened awareness of the laws on the rights to privacy and presumption of innocence.

The role of responsible, objective and professional reporters in P/CVERLT is not confined to being firefighters of “digital wildfires”<sup>59</sup> sparked by misguided or malicious misinformation. Reporters and media associations can use their technical expertise to train civil society actors on developing and disseminating impactful alternative and counter-narratives, information campaigns and culturally sensitive P/CVERLT materials.<sup>60</sup> They can also provide space and amplify positive community-led messaging. Moreover, capacity-building efforts for media practitioners may focus both on building knowledge of core P/CVERLT principles and terminology, as well as practical guidance on avoiding indirect promotion of violent extremist content, imagery, or messaging in their reporting, sensationalistic or provocative language, or stigmatization of particular ethnic or religious communities.

- **Illiberal civil society actors** – The work of CSOs is very often constructive and results in efforts and programmes promoting good governance and anti-corruption, rule of law, human rights protection and humanitarian assistance. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that civil society and grassroots organizations do not always and exclusively seek to advance the cause of peace, social progress and non-discrimination. For example, some grassroots organizations seek to advance racist and discriminatory objectives. In some cases, civil society associations have promoted caste and class prejudice, homophobia, sexism or oppression of the disabled.<sup>61</sup> In other cases, fringe faith-based organizations are known to have incited violence based on race, ethnicity, national origin, or religious affiliation.

Counter-terrorism operations have revealed that entities sometimes operating formally or informally as so-called cultural associations, youth forums, or faith-based charities have engaged in terrorism-related activities or have intimidated and targeted activists and investigative journalists who speak out against violent extremism or expose it. Empirical research indicates that these fringe outfits have often operated in communities that have shown disproportionately high rates of participation in violent extremist activities.<sup>62</sup> Although they have been targeted by law enforcement, in many cases, not all of them have ceased their activities; instead, they have adapted and morphed into more clandestine

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59 Digital Wildfires in a Hyperconnected World (World Economic Forum, 2013)

60 Mightier than the Sword? The role of the media in addressing violence and terrorism in South Asia (Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation, 2013)

61 Towards a Global Polity: Future trends and prospects (Higgott, Morten Ougaard, ed., Routledge, 2002)

62 Dynamics of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo (Shtuni, USIP, 2016)

formats. Taking into account the presence, motivations and activities of these actors when designing and implementing P/CVERLT interventions is critical in improving their effectiveness, impact and safety. However, governments must have clear evidence of criminal activity and intent of such organizations before targeting them so that groups are not unfairly or inappropriately censored merely for holding contrary views or expressing dissent.







# 4. The South- Eastern European context



Much has been achieved in the past several decades in South-Eastern Europe in terms of developing a vibrant and pluralistic civil society. Despite persistent challenges, civil society has steadily positioned itself at the forefront of transformative movements seeking to transition the region away from their authoritative past marked by sectarian wars and to a path of democratic transformation and reconciliation. The number and diversity of CSOs have steadily increased, and while this reality does not necessarily speak to effectiveness, it speaks to scale. Their engagement has focused on a wide variety of efforts addressing peacebuilding, stabilization, post-conflict issues, democratization, good governance and rule of law.

A large number of CSOs were established in the aftermath of the armed conflicts of the 1990s in the region primarily to implement foreign-funded programmes dedicated to humanitarian assistance and reconstruction. Some of these CSOs gradually transformed into entities specialized in supporting good governance and fostering transparent and accountable public institutions; others have since emerged focusing on promotion of youth, women and minority rights, and contributing to the process of European Union accession.<sup>63</sup>

Despite its achievements, civil society in South-Eastern Europe reflects some of the same structural problems of the respective societies where they operate. While specific issues vary across the region, the civil society scene in South-Eastern Europe is sometimes described as fragmented and ethnically segmented, insufficiently based on membership, overly dependent financially and politically

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63 "Public Pulse Analysis Perceptions of Civil Society in Kosovo" (UNDP, 2016)

on the support of international donors, and partially reflecting and addressing the priority concerns of its constituencies.<sup>64,65,66</sup>

Assessments by international organizations share some of the same conclusions. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index measures the strength and viability of civil society sectors and their overall level of development. It achieves this by analysing seven key components: legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, service provision, infrastructure and public image. According to the 2016 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index, the overall sustainability in the South-Eastern Europe has seen no signs of improvement in the last decade. The areas where CSOs score best on average are infrastructure and advocacy, whereas financial viability constantly earns the lowest score, denoting a chronic dependence on foreign donors that continues to be the “Achilles’ heel” of CSOs in South-Eastern Europe.<sup>67</sup>

Although a marginal phenomenon, another development in the region has been the emergence of the “illiberal civil society” represented by groups that espouse ultranationalist and intolerant views, or that display a selective preference for targeting some forms of discrimination while consistently ignoring (and sometimes endorsing) other engrained prejudices or forms of extremism.<sup>68</sup> In some other cases, populist political actors have used state media or other mass media platforms to target civil society and accuse CSOs of being foreign-funded agents undermining national interests. While these developments are often a direct manifestation of regional dynamics that play across political borders, they are also a reflection of a broader global trend in which democratic values and fundamental freedoms are being eroded.<sup>69,70</sup>

The South-Eastern Europe Expert Working Group meeting on P/CVERLT convened by TNTD/ATU for the purpose of this guidebook identified a number of challenges and opportunities for improvement faced by CSOs in the region:

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64 “Mapping study of civil society organizations in BiH” (EPRD Policy & Development, 2016)

65 Monitoring Matrix on enabling environment for civil society development (Kosovo Civil Society Foundation, 2016)

66 Civil Society and Transitions in the Western Balkans (New Perspectives on South-Eastern Europe) (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2013)

67 2016 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia (USAID, 2017)

68 Civil Society and Transitions in the Western Balkans (New Perspectives on South-Eastern Europe) 2013th Edition

69 “Supporting civil society in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans” (The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2018)

70 A useful reference on this topic is “The Responsibility of States: Protection of human rights defenders in the OSCE Region”.

- **The legitimacy and credibility of CSOs**

One of the more commonly cited challenges relates to issues of insufficient legitimacy and credibility resulting from some organizations' unclear goals, opportunistic positioning, and at times overt pursuit of political agendas.

- **The relationship between CSOs and the government**

While acknowledging that, overall, the relationship between governments and civil society has improved significantly due to a mutual willingness to engage, experts noted that CSOs are not always treated as tangible partners, and the role of youth organizations, in particular, is not sufficiently enhanced. The lack of capacity of CSOs and of direct communication with government actors make it difficult for a more meaningful and co-operative relationship to thrive.

- **Co-ordination vs. control in CSO/government co-operation**

Closely related to the above, it is important to establish a solid co-ordination channel between CSOs operating in the field of P/CVERLT and the government in order to boost transparency and ensure effectiveness. Yet, the experts emphasized that there is a thin line between co-ordination and controlling, and therefore they tend to take a step back in order to prevent their projects from becoming directed or too closely monitored by the government.

- **Networking and co-operation among CSOs**

Experts noted that co-operation among CSOs in the region varies from the specific background of each CSO, yet the overall level of direct communication and co-operation is often insufficient and infrequent. Civil society networks are often mentioned as a good practice, but meaningful regional linkages are rare. Although civil society actors often meet during conferences, they do not engage as often in common project implementation efforts.

- **Duplication of efforts**

The experts highlighted that there is no shortage of new ideas and P/CVERLT initiatives, but the inclination to set up new structures and dedicated platforms for every challenge may be inefficient, especially when there may already be some relevant capacity. Local safety councils were cited repeatedly as useful vehicles of engagement in the context of P/CVERLT.

- **Reputational and personal safety issues**

There is both reputational and personal safety issues associated with the involvement in P/CVERLT work, especially if branded as such. From fear of jeopardizing their reputation and safety, but also due to potential legal liabilities that may result from working with radicalized individuals or those convicted of terrorist crimes, many CSOs are reluctant to engage in this field.

- **Issues of terminology**

Some experts pointed to issues of terminology that may not translate well in the context of the region such as “community leaders” and “youth leaders”. Further, “countering violent extremism” is translated as “war against violent extremism” in all the local languages of the Western Balkans. Nevertheless, participants also suggested that this challenge should not be addressed by coining new terms or adopting language-specific terminology, but rather by providing contextual explanations and examples.

- **Lack of access**

Highly conservative communities rarely provide an opportunity for CSOs to engage with them. Religious leaders, who enjoy higher credibility than others with particular communities, may be more able to work in these settings.

The complex challenges listed above will require approaches tailored to each specific context. The guidelines outlined in the next section present an opportunity to learn from existing good practices and develop effective responses to these and other challenges in the field of P/CVERLT.





# 5. Ensuring an impactful and effective role for civil society in P/CVERLT: Guidelines and emerging good practices



Awareness of the critical role of civil society and grassroots activism in P/CVERLT is not enough; practical steps are necessary to encourage and enable their efforts, from inclusion in strategic planning at the policy level to support of programme development and implementation. There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ framework for engaging civil society in P/CVERLT programmes or designing civil society-led interventions; developing local solutions is critical. However, there are common challenges and factors that cut across most contexts, which should be carefully considered.

## 5.1 Key challenges

**Political and legal space** – Violent extremism is a sensitive subject with complex security implications. Civil society and grassroots actors seeking to contribute to P/CVERLT are not always provided with the necessary political and legal latitude to work effectively. Some CSOs and field experts have voiced their concern about what they consider to be a restriction of the space for civil society in the name of security, safety and fighting terrorism.<sup>71</sup> Some legal limitations and consequences to working with individuals who face prosecution on terrorism charges or are serving sentences as violent extremist offenders are understandable and inevitable. Nevertheless, at times, broad counter-terrorism legislations make it extremely hard for civil society actors to engage with individuals most at-risk of terrorist radicalization or already radicalized, because of the risk of being charged with provision of “material support” for terrorism.<sup>72</sup> These limitations end up reducing the range of intervention options. The more that restrictions are removed, and clearer, more transparent legal and policy frameworks for safe engagement in the P/CVERLT space are introduced, the broader and more impactful civil society and grassroots actor's engagement is likely to become.

**Inclusion at the strategic and policy level** – The process of developing P/CVERLT strategies and corresponding Action Plans provides a unique opportunity for stimulating a whole-of-government and whole-of-society response to violent extremism. Experts agree that an inclusive process is as important as the strategy itself. Since there are often both time and resource constraints in the development of these policy documents, there may be a tendency to resort to what sometimes is referred to as a “cut and paste” mentality.<sup>73</sup> This may entail adopting language that reads well and includes approaches that may have worked in different contexts with different levels of expertise and resources. The same time constraints may limit the level of engagement with civil society to superficial consultations after the draft strategy has been compiled. This post-factum approach is unlikely to yield effective outcomes.

Experts broadly agree that the prerequisite of an impactful P/CVERLT strategy is a substantive and inclusive approach that integrates independent civil society actors, especially those underrepresented, as a core component of the drafting process. The inclusion of independent CSOs at the strategy development stage

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71 Barcelona Declaration: Plan of Action of the Euro-Mediterranean civil society to prevent all forms of violent extremism (Observatory to Prevent Extremist Violence, 2017)

72 Communities First: A blueprint for organizing and sustaining a global movement against violent extremism (Eric Rosand, the Prevention Project, 2016)

73 Ensuring an Inclusive Approach to the Development and Implementation of National P/CVE Action Plans: The role of civil society (The Prevention Project, 2017)



not only expands the diverse pool of expertise and makes the process more representative, but also creates an opportunity for meaningful engagement between government and locally rooted stakeholders. Ultimately, the successful implementation of any P/CVERLT strategy and the impact of interventions by both government entities and civil society actors will be determined to a large extent by the effectiveness of sustainable partnerships built on trust, a shared vision and common purpose.

**Adequate and reliable funding** – P/CVERLT is a long-term investment geared toward proactively addressing chronic grievances that violent extremist organizations seek to exploit. This is unquestionably a complex process that requires as much passion and dedication because it requires patience and reliable support in funding and other resources. However, field specialists often find that neither donor patience nor funding is in adequate supply. This is primarily manifested in the short-term nature of most funding timelines with “CSOs often facing three to six-month implementation periods for work that requires long-term commitment to establish relevance and authenticity at the local level, and to overcome the perception that international actors view the lives and communities of those affected by extremism as a ‘project’”.<sup>74</sup> Pilot programmes are important for testing new and potentially innovative approaches, yet their longer-term impact is inevitably determined by the availability of follow-up resources.

Moreover, the pool of donors allocating funding for community-led P/CVERLT efforts remains relatively limited to Western governmental donors and international organizations. The private sector, despite the adverse economic impact of terrorist activities, has yet to show signs of support that go beyond symbolic gestures. The exception may be the technology sector, where social media companies are progressively investing in preventing the use of their platforms for terrorist radicalization.<sup>75</sup> Involving civil society in these efforts more widely may prove mutually beneficial.

**Capacity-building support and realistic expectations** – The effectiveness and impact sustainability of civil society-led P/CVERLT efforts are as much dependent on reliable funding as on the capacity and expertise of implementing actors. Quite understandably, international donors focused on project delivery often prefer directing P/CVERLT funding to a small number of established organizations that have a successful track record in complying with complicated application and implementation requirements.<sup>76</sup> While this approach may at

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74 ICAN Preventing Violent Extremism, Protecting Rights and Community Policing: Why civil society and security sector partnerships matter (2017)

75 Communities First: A blueprint for organizing and sustaining a global movement against violent extremism (Eric Rosand, the Prevention Project, 2016)

76 *ibid.*

first appear to increase resource efficiency and the probabilities of successful outcomes, it also indirectly restricts opportunities for less skilled and established actors to gain traction, build expertise, and expand the pool of field practitioners for the future. Also, this approach may disregard the possibility that the most technically established actors are not necessarily those with the most credibility in vulnerable communities.

Experts agree that funding for capacity-building support for local partners – not only through training, but also opportunities to engage in project design and implementation – is the optimal course of action for sustainable results. This requires donors to adopt a less risk-averse approach to supporting entry-level grantees, streamlining funding procedures, and adjusting short-term expectations to take into account expertise limitations and the complexities of the reality where civil society and grassroots activists operate. In time, this inclusive approach followed by adequate technical capacity-building efforts is likely to yield a more robust pool of P/CVERLT actors better positioned to maximize the impact of short-term, donor-funded projects.

**Non-instrumentalization** – To a significant extent, the success of P/CVERLT efforts hinges on the establishment of meaningful engagement and transparent partnerships among law enforcement, community leaders and civil society actors. These partnerships work better when they are co-operative instead of extractive or directed. While timely reporting of suspicious terrorist activities and possible threats are a civic duty and legal obligation for every citizen, efforts involving civil society centred around criminal intelligence collection and threat detection are often counterproductive and may end up undermining the credibility of civil society and community leaders in the eyes of their constituencies.<sup>77</sup>

**Personal security and safety** – Civil society actors working in the field of P/CVERLT face numerous challenges; threats to personal safety are among the main ones. By engaging with individuals who are on the path to terrorist radicalization or may have already committed terrorism-related criminal offences, civil society activists and community leaders expose themselves to great personal risks. It is important to recognize that the space where they engage is rarely neutral and often polarized and volatile. Violent extremist networks responsible for recruitment and mobilization into terrorist organizations often operate in particularly vulnerable communities or prisons. Whether by challenging their narratives or attempting to draw individuals away from their gravitational pull, civil society activists and community leaders directly antagonize and undermine particularly dangerous organizations that embrace violence as an acceptable

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<sup>77</sup> Returning Foreign Fighters and the Reintegration Imperative (Holmer and Shtuni, United States Institute of Peace, 2017)

tool even in the civilian context. Calculating the appropriateness, timing, level, and extent of civil society engagement in P/CVERLT interventions, and taking active measures to mitigate safety risks in co-ordination with law enforcement entities is critical.<sup>78</sup> In particular cases, it may even be best not to label P/CVERLT efforts as such, since this can be not only counterproductive, but also unsafe.

**Local dynamics and socio-political sensitivities** – In today’s globalized and interconnected world, violent extremism is an increasingly complex phenomenon resulting from the dynamic interplay between geo-political factors and a highly contextual set of local conditions, grievances and circumstances. Therefore, addressing local manifestations of violent extremism requires both a general understanding of its transnational dimension and ideological nature, as well as an objective and nuanced assessment of the local drivers and dynamics of terrorist radicalization. In communities with highly politicized ethnic or religious identities that may have experienced sectarian discrimination or violence in the past, violent extremism can be played out along political, ethnic, or religious divisions. Programmes must be designed so that they do not target or stigmatize specific groups, increase polarization, or exacerbate ethnic tensions.

**Monitoring and evaluation of programme effectiveness** – Measuring and demonstrating programmatic effectiveness and impact are critical components of every P/CVERLT programme. This is not only for the purpose of justifying and attracting funding, but more importantly, for assessing impact. In the case of P/CVERLT, this is particularly challenging for a number of reasons. First and foremost, radicalization to terrorism is a complex psycho-social phenomenon resulting from the convergence of factors that are both structural and deeply individual. In preventive initiatives, “measuring the negative”, or assessing that VERLT was averted because of his/her participation in a specific preventive programme is extremely hard and inconclusive.<sup>79</sup>

This is particularly difficult for civil society actors and grassroots organizations that often do not have the institutional resources to develop and/or implement rigorous evaluation metrics and methodologies. Nevertheless, some current practices from the fields of peacebuilding and development may prove useful in setting up effective evaluation tools for P/CVERLT programming. Some of these practices include: developing clear theories of change; collecting baseline data before the implementation of the programme; being context-sensitive; and integrating both quantitative and qualitative components in the evaluation process.<sup>80</sup>

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78 Countering violent extremism: A peacebuilding perspective (Holmer, USIP 2013)

79 Measuring Up: Evaluating the impact of P/CVE programs (Holmer, Bauman, Aryaeinejad, USIP, August 2018)

80 Improving the Impact of Preventing Violent Extremism Programming: A toolkit for design, monitoring and evaluation (UNDP and International Alert, March 2018)

## 5.2 Guidelines and emerging good practices

The following is a non-exhaustive list of guidelines and recommendations that reflect current knowledge about the role that civil society can play in preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism, and the ways in which government stakeholders can support this role. The list was generated through a desk study review and an analysis of available resources on best practices, which include those developed by the OSCE, the United Nations, the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), the Global Solutions Exchange (GSX) and the Prevention Project. Other utilized resources were developed by Hedayah, the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) and the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). The bibliography has a comprehensive list of sources consulted in the development of this guidebook.

1. Effective civil society-led P/CVERLT initiatives require an environment in which civil society groups and actors can perform their work without interference and in line with the fundamental human rights of freedom of expression, assembly and association. This requires public and political recognition of the important roles that a diverse and broad civil society can play in the prevention of VERLT.
2. Government stakeholders should facilitate the involvement of civil society in the full spectrum of P/CVERLT programming and policy development. By establishing partnerships and platforms for collaboration, governments can facilitate trust-building with civil society and better integrate their involvement in P/CVERLT efforts.
3. Regular engagement with CSOs can be established through agreed upon, flexible and responsible multi-agency co-ordination mechanisms, such as:
  - a. civil society advisory committees to better incorporate input from different actors (including valuable early warning details and community concerns and grievances) into P/CVERLT strategy and policy, and donor planning;
  - b. P/CVERLT-focused centres that support and foster international research, information exchange and sharing of good practices;
  - c. periodic roundtable discussions and other platforms for dialogue and trust-building exercises between government and civil society actors, to include, when possible and as appropriate, law enforcement representatives;

- d. institutional alliances with other governments, as well regional and multilateral organizations, to facilitate dialogue and coordinate action around P/CVERLT issues, such as the joint crafting and implementation of Action Plans and other co-operative projects.

### **ALBANIA: Establishing a platform for government–civil society co-operation**

In December 2017, Albania’s Council of Ministers established the Co-ordination Centre for Countering Violent Extremism (CCCVE), upgrading the existing institutional framework on countering violent extremism (CVE) by transforming the position of the National Coordinator for CVE into a more structured platform. The mission of the CCCVE is to develop the capacities of various actors engaged in P/CVERLT and promote the values of tolerance and inclusion. This is a promising government-led mechanism designed to ensure a coordinated implementation of the National Strategy against Violent Extremism and its corresponding Action Plan, and promote co-operation with civil society actors.

4. Government actors should enable credible civil society actors and organizations to engage in prevention by assessing and removing legal, political and logistical barriers to their operation, particularly by:
  - a. actively facilitating their work and ensuring their physical safety (especially when civil society work in spaces contested or populated by violent extremist organizations), protection from harassment and intimidation, data security, their ability to organize, freedom of travel and to participate in international conferences/workshops (including by streamlining visa processes) and independence from government interference;
  - b. mitigating financial obstacles (e.g., international counter-terrorism financing and anti-money laundering policies) that may impact civil society’s access to external funding and self-funding, thus hampering their self-sustainment;
  - c. providing capacity-building support (including in translation, publication, and/or dissemination of findings/practices); promoting platforms for cross-fertilization with relevant disciplines such as development, conflict prevention and peacebuilding; and providing P/CVERLT-specific training to stakeholders with valuable expertise in related fields but little experience in the prevention space.

### OSCE Leaders against Intolerance and Violent Extremism (LIVE) Initiative: Building the capacity of civil society

LIVE is an OSCE programme designed to build the capacity of civil society in fostering community resilience to VERLT. Three distinct, intensive training courses have been developed for young people, women and community leaders throughout the OSCE area. Participants are carefully selected for their community engagement and commitment to peace and tolerance, and refine their technical skills in key areas such as media literacy, critical thinking, policy influence, strategic communications, project design and evaluation, and security awareness. Informed by a range of practice examples, equipped with seed funding, and supported by expert peer mentors, participants develop original, impactful and relevant projects designed to address and respond to the drivers of VERLT in their communities.

5. Partnerships between government actors and civil society can be strengthened and codified by:
  - a. clarifying and delineating roles and responsibilities among governmental and non-governmental/civil society stakeholders, with specific expectations and deliverables for all participating institutions and actors;
  - b. training front-line government officials to work in collaboration with non-governmental actors in P/CVERLT-relevant capacities;
  - c. recognizing the components of P/CVERLT programming that are best left to civil society actors, and ceding responsibility for such initiatives to these stakeholders without governmental interference or manipulation.
  
6. Government actors and well-established non-governmental actors should strive to engage, build capacity, and amplify the voices of smaller, lesser known, local civil society actors with demonstrated relevant expertise, credibility and efficacy, particularly those working in key geographic locations and with demographics of demonstrated vulnerability. Recognize that potentially effective, local, non-violent civil society partners may lack visibility and demonstrated experience in working alongside government, and indeed may disagree with aspects of official government positions on security and other issues, yet may still serve as productive partners. Government stakeholders should strive to locate and engage such actors/organizations as opposed to those that simply appear “government-friendly”.

7. The use of “securitized” language and P/CVERLT terminology may be problematic for some civil society actors and jeopardize their local credibility and physical security. Governments may therefore need to refine language to avoid alienating potential partners.
  
8. The development and sustainment of independent local and regional networks among civil society and other non-governmental P/CVERLT stakeholders can provide opportunities for growth and collaboration. To encourage such efforts:
  - a. develop local coalitions of P/CVERLT-focused civil society actors and organizations who work directly with communities and families;
  - b. include civil society actors from related disciplines such as: conflict transformation; peacebuilding; good governance; development; political participation; inter-faith and inter-communal dialogue; human rights, including women’s rights; youth activities; and other fields relevant to P/CVERLT;
  - c. involve professionals from other sectors such as mental health, law and social work as well as academics with practical expertise and foster meaningful and sustained exchange with civil society stakeholders and policymakers.

### **MONTENEGRO:** **Building a regional civil society network**

Communities first is a regional Western Balkans civil society platform for P/CVERLT led by a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Montenegro, Forum MNE. This three-year initiative, supported by the European Commission, includes civil society organizations (CSOs) from all the countries of the region and is focused on fostering regional co-operation among grassroots CSOs and community activists engaged in P/CVERLT. The aim of Communities first is to empower civil society actors, including youth, women and religious organizations, to increase their capacity, improve their efficiency and accountability, and become more effective influencers of relevant P/CVERLT policies. Activities include: mapping CSO-led P/CVERLT programmes in the region; developing an interactive web site for sharing good practices; holding capacity-building workshops and mentoring programmes; and creating and implementing small grant programmes.

9. Approach community-level initiatives as long-term, sustained and adaptive strategies rather than one-off projects. Relevant policymakers and donors can ensure effective use of funding by:
  - a. allowing for flexibility in funding timelines to account for time-consuming processes such as building visibility and trust, conducting research and assessments, and carrying out monitoring and evaluation—and be tolerant of short-term failures;
  - b. ensuring follow-up funding over the mid to long term for the sustainment and scaling up of projects with demonstrated success;
  - c. providing core funding in addition to project-based funding with the aim to empower civil society to define their own priorities, focus on core missions, and grow structurally to assure sustainability in the longer term;
  - d. ensuring that independent, data-driven research and analysis support P/CVERLT programmes, rather than intuitive conclusions about what “should” work;
  - e. involving local donor representatives in all stages of P/CVERLT programming to ensure communication between donors and implementers;
  - f. balancing needed government buy-in for donor-supported P/CVERLT initiatives with the priority to support interlocutors with the greatest credibility and influence in marginalized communities.
  
10. Emphasize local capacity building for quantitative and qualitative research regarding regional and demographic trends on violent extremist activity. Link civil society to academic researchers and other relevant partners when advantageous, and encourage the development of platforms and networks to facilitate the dissemination of research findings.



## **SERBIA:** **Supporting local research**

The OSCE Mission to Serbia is supporting independent academic research on topics related to VERLT in Serbia in order to contribute to the literature, support evidence-based programming and policy-making, and strengthen the number of researchers working on this topic. An open call for proposals was issued to attract a broad range of research ideas, and the quality of the submissions demonstrated that researchers, in particular Serbian researchers who are deeply familiar with the environment in the country, have a strong, nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the nature of extremism in the country. Nine research initiatives were supported and a structured peer review process ensured that every author received rigorous feedback.

- 11.** In engaging civil society actors and organizations, policymakers must recognize the critical role of youth as positive agents of change. They should strive to emphasize and mainstream their inclusion, particularly those from marginalized communities, in P/CVERLT-relevant decision-making at all levels whenever possible. In partnership with civil society actors and organizations, policymakers should build the capacity of, and amplify the efforts of, youth-focused initiatives. In particular, programmes that promote empowerment and skills related to leadership, communication and entrepreneurship should be supported. Ensure small grant funding, in collaboration with the corporate sector where possible, to youth-led P/CVERLT community initiatives, particularly those that target marginalized groups and communities.
- 12.** Implement youth-focused projects and initiatives through CSOs, and when appropriate, through private-public sector partnerships, which aim to:
  - a. provide youth with safe and uncontrolled spaces in which to proactively raise concerns, discuss and debate issues related to violent extremism and other social and political issues, even if of a controversial nature;
  - b. encourage the civic and democratic engagement of youth to provide positive channels for addressing grievances, and establish youth councils and similar mechanisms to ensure that such voices are heard at all levels;

- c. provide structural support to youth, particularly those facing discrimination within marginalized communities, such as employment opportunities and counselling, access to health and social services, and psychosocial support and counselling;
- d. promote involvement in sports, arts, and other leisure-time alternatives that bolster a sense of community and social inclusion;
- e. foster trust at the grassroots level between decision-makers and young women and men, particularly those from underrepresented groups, through intergenerational dialogue and confidence-building activities and training, both in curricular and after-school programmes. Educators, as well as religious and community leaders, can play an instrumental role in facilitating such initiatives.

### **BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA: Supporting youth programming and the arts**

In 2018, the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina led an initiative and contest for youth that leveraged the dramatic arts as an effective communication medium for sensitizing audiences to the problem of violent extremism. Approximately 30 university students were selected to participate in two workshops held in Sarajevo and Banja Luka. Under the guidance of dramatic art professors, during and after the workshops, the students drafted scripts and developed plays exploring different journeys down the path of radicalization into violent extremism. The students' creative process was also informed by research on the subjects of hate crimes and bias-motivated incidents, and the psychological aspects of radicalization into violent extremism, etc. Four student teams from the Universities of Sarajevo and Banja Luka, as well as the Sarajevo School of Science and Technology won the contest and performed their winning plays in front of an audience during an event hosted by the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina in early 2018.

- 13.** Include educational authorities at all levels in dialogue on P/CVERLT, and bolster their capacity to plan and implement relevant programming in collaboration with civil society stakeholders. Resulting initiatives may include:

- a. reform of school curricula to reflect best practices on integrating of new minority/migrant communities, aimed at reducing perceptions of marginalization and discrimination;
  - b. empowerment of youth to disseminate positive alternative and counter-narrative messaging initiatives and craft new ones that help deflect, discredit and dismiss ideas about violent extremism;
  - c. implementation of Internet safety education and media literacy programmes to teach students to recognize and reject violent extremist narratives while promoting narratives founded on human rights, tolerance and democratic values.
- 14.** Policymakers should also recognize the role of women and girls as key stakeholders and positive agents of change in P/CVERLT programming, and emphasize the inclusion of women (and women-focused CSOs) in all stages and levels of P/CVERLT decision-making. In partnership with CSOs, policymakers should:
- a. build the capacity and support local ownership of women-led and -focused CSOs, such as those working in the field of women's rights, to engage in context-tailored prevention efforts and responses to violent extremism. Ensure that such groups have access to resources and physical security, and that their voices are heard in policymaking circles at all levels;
  - b. ensure that P/CVERLT policies and programmes consider and address gender dynamics in VERLT, and aim to prevent and address the direct and indirect impacts of violent extremism and terrorism on women and girls. Women and girls occupy unique roles in violent extremism, and policymakers should invest in local-level research to better understand relevant community dynamics;
  - c. support training for women, particularly within socially acceptable and safe spaces that empower participants, to recognize and respond to VERLT from the unique and powerful vantage points of mothers, wives and community figures. Women may possess the capacity for early warning yet lack the necessary tools or support to act upon it;
  - d. involve men and boys in gender mainstreaming efforts. As sources of influence in communities and families, men can help shape cultural narratives, notions of masculinities, and counter-narratives to violent extremist ideology, and are critical partners in family-based programming;
  - e. ensure that counter/alternative narrative programmes are gender-mainstreamed, especially through inclusion of women and women-centric CSOs in the development and delivery of relevant messaging initiatives, and specifically address the role of women as stakeholders in combating violent extremism.

### The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Implementing women-focused programmes

The “MotherSchools” model was designed and advanced by the on-governmental organizations (NGO) Women without Borders as an innovative and constructive approach to building the capacity of mothers to understand, recognize and mitigate early signs of vulnerability to radicalization in their children. The model has been successfully implemented in more than ten countries over the past decade, and in 2017, was rolled out with local partners in Skopje. The programme not only builds participants’ self-confidence and improves parenting skills, but also creates a safe and supportive space for women to openly discuss and address sensitive issues.

15. Influential and prominent community and religious leaders have deep understanding of, and intimate access to, their communities. Policymakers, in collaboration with other civil society actors and organizations, should strive to engage such figures as critical partners in the prevention of violent extremism. They should:
  - a. build awareness of P/CVERLT among religious and community leaders (particularly female spiritual advisers, who may possess unique access to women in vulnerable communities), encouraging them to provide guidance to communities and families in fostering resilience against VERLT;
  - b. empower religious and community leaders to provide platforms (such as exchanges for young theologians) for intra- and inter-faith dialogue that promote tolerance and inter-communal understanding, and to resolve differences where they exist. Promote dialogue and collaboration among local inter-faith networks, discuss issues related to P/CVERLT, and promote inclusion of all faiths;
  - c. where possible, encourage relevant religious and community leaders to promote trust building and co-operation between families and local authorities. This co-operation should be framed on the basis of community safety so as to avoid “instrumentalizing” relationships with community leaders, and by extension, potentially alienating their communities;
  - d. leverage relevant governmental and civil society partners to offer religious leaders training on conflict resolution and communication strategies to counter hate speech and violent extremist ideologies, and address community/individual-level disagreements;

- e. encourage religious leaders to convey non-violent narratives to debunk violent extremist ones, particularly in collaboration with civil society-led P/CVERLT media campaigns;
- f. include religious and other relevant community leaders in government-community trust-building initiatives, such as periodic roundtable discussions, to foster collaboration, information sharing and capacity development.

### **KOSOVO<sup>81</sup>: Engaging religious leaders and youth in inter-faith dialogue**

In November 2017, the OSCE Mission in Kosovo took 50 Kosovo Albanian high school students from the municipality of Kaçanik (or Kačanik) on a tour of significant religious sites in the historic city of Prizren. Home to some of the best-preserved cultural monuments belonging to different civilizations and religions, Prizren is a living metaphor for religious diversity and harmony. Together with a group of 25 young people from ethnically diverse communities in Prizren, the youth from Kaçanik joined a discussion with representatives of the Islamic Community, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, Halveti Sufi, the Jewish Community and the Protestant Church, as well as the Deputy Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports and the Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo. Most of the programme's participants from Kaçanik had never visited places of worship belonging to other religions or interacted with a religious leader other than their own. This conversation gave them a valuable opportunity to learn more about their neighbours and people in their communities, and expand their understanding of the country's cultural and religious heritage. Other projects that have focused on promoting inter-faith dialogue and respect for diversity over the years, a key area of work for the OSCE in the Balkans, include study trips to historic and religious sites, an inter-faith youth camp and a junior basketball tournament.

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81 All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text should be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.

16. The private sector – including corporate and private donors, as well as large and small businesses – can also serve as constructive stakeholders in P/CVERLT programming. To leverage their comparative advantages, policymakers should:
  - a. encourage corporate/private investment in, and collaboration with, civil society and community-led P/CVERLT efforts where appropriate. Corporate social responsibility projects, branding and marketing expertise, and private philanthropy can be effectively and quickly mobilized to support P/CVERLT initiatives that may otherwise face bureaucratic hurdles when dealing with government sponsors;
  - b. adopt a multi-stakeholder a whole-of-society approach to online and offline counter messaging, particularly leveraging the information communication technologies sector in collaboration with, and informed by, other relevant civil society actors.
  
17. The media can be invited and encouraged to further P/CVERLT aims by amplifying community voices and responsibly reporting on terrorist-related events. To leverage their capabilities, policymakers should:
  - a. encourage and support professional media and social media platforms to maintain a responsible and constructive role in P/CVERLT, in consultation with communities (and particularly their most effective and influential messengers) and governmental/non-governmental stakeholders;
  - b. empower media, through television, radio and online efforts, to disseminate positive, community-led messaging, as well as support and increase the visibility of local P/CVERLT initiatives;
  - c. engage with the media and provide training to journalists as necessary to encourage objective reporting on violent extremism-related events; promote tolerance and respect for all cultures; and ensure visible reporting on stories of positive engagement with youth and community-led initiatives.

## The OSCE #UnitedCVE campaign: Harnessing social media to promote alternatives to VERLT

The OSCE launched the strategic communications campaign #UnitedCVE in 2015 to help foster an online community of young people, practitioners, policymakers and researchers to challenge intolerance and violent extremism, and amplify prevention and awareness efforts. As part of the campaign, over 40 short videos of local P/CVERLT practices in the OSCE area were showcased, especially highlighting youth-led projects and initiatives. The campaign has reached over 44 million people across mainstream social media platforms including Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.







# 6. Conclusion



Understanding the valuable role of civil society in preventing and countering VERLT is an important first step towards developing holistic and comprehensive strategies to address the security threat posed by violent extremism. This guidebook was designed to help advance these ideas and provide concrete suggestions and examples on how to establish productive working relationships between government actors and civil society, and develop impactful, community-based P/CVERLT programmes. It is critical that civil society be given the legal space, political support, financial resources and practical guidance to succeed in their work, and that their role be seen as intrinsic to the promotion of peace and security. P/CVERLT programmes are long-term and complex endeavours; their success depends to a large degree on the continued promotion of good practices and sharing of learning and resources across contexts. The guidebook aims to contribute to this discourse and underscores the OSCE's commitment to supporting the role that civil society can – and does – play in making communities safer and more resilient.



# Select OSCE Resources

Chairmanship's Perception Paper: Recommendations from the 2017 OSCE-wide Counter-Terrorism Conference on 'Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism' (May 2017)

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Ministerial Council Declaration on Reinforcing OSCE Counter-Terrorism Efforts in the Wake of Recent Terrorist Attacks (MC.DOC/3/15)

Ministerial Council Declaration on the OSCE Role in Countering the Phenomenon of Foreign Terrorist Fighters in the Context of the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014) (MC.DOC/5/14)

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