



# PROMISING PRACTICES IN ENGAGING YOUTH IN PEACE AND SECURITY AND P/CVE

*Summary of key interventions and examples*

## The Challenge

While only a small percentage of the overall population, the rising number of youth that are targeted to join extremist groups demonstrates that current approaches to *preventing* or *countering* violent extremism (P/CVE) must be reevaluated. Rather than focusing on maximizing short term security efforts, evidence shows that long-term community-based development initiatives that address both the *push* and *pull* factors that cause certain youth to engage in violence, can increase youth voices and strengthen their participation in peacebuilding. The [2015 United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 \(SCR 2250\) on Youth, Peace and Security](#) and emerging literature emphasizes the need to switch the narrative to recognize youth as positive agents for peacebuilding and security rather than stigmatizing them as risks and threats. SCR 2250 encourages governments, international organizations, and civil society to actively engage youth populations as partners in both shaping peace and security processes and implementing promising practices related to comprehensive, community-based solutions so that they may have greater peace dividends.

## Defining the Approach

The definitions and interpretations of violent extremism as well as peacebuilding and security may differ by context. USAID follows the US government definition of [CVE](#) as “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. This includes both disrupting the tactics used by violent extremists to attract new recruits to violence and building specific alternatives, narratives, capabilities, and resiliencies in targeted communities and populations to reduce the risk of radicalization and recruitment to violence<sup>1</sup>.” Overall, USAID focuses much of its work on a “[development approach to countering violent extremism](#)” while other US government agencies tend to focus more on counter-insurgency and security focused measures.

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<sup>1</sup> [“Department of State & USA Joint Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism.” May 2016.](#)

## Understanding Local and Country Context and Drivers

Violent extremism has no borders, religion or ethnicity; yet areas of poverty and political instability are the breeding grounds for many of the push factors guiding youth towards extremist groups. P/CVE programming is made more complex because there is no typical youth demographic and motivations for joining extremist groups vary across regions. Research shows that the three key drivers pushing youth to engage in violent activities are *injustice, discrimination and violence*, however it is important to dig deeper to understand how these concepts manifest within different contexts<sup>2</sup>. Drivers are highly nuanced from community to community and region to region, meaning that a comprehensive analysis of the drivers is crucial for developing the appropriate violence prevention strategy.

### Examples of Push Factors

- **Youth in OECD countries:** The dominant drivers stem from socio-economic factors, such as: injustice, youth identity, corruption, early marriage, youth unemployment, confidence in the press, faith in democracy, drug crime and attitudes towards immigration.
- **Youth in non-OECD countries:** The push factors stem from history of armed conflict, grievances, ongoing conflict within the country, corruption and sense of injustice, lack of opportunity or services in under-governed areas, weak self-identity, and a weak governance and business environment<sup>3</sup>.

### Examples of Pull Factors

- May include peer and family recruitment, opportunity for resources and recognition, and ability to validate use of violence. (See recent [findings on perceptions by CSIS](#) and by [Facebook](#))

Understanding the diversity of pain points across youth populations and the localized context is critical for developing comprehensive solutions that properly address the myriad of problems young women and men face across the globe. The [United States Institute for Peace \(USIP\) notes](#): “Experts believe that radicalization is the result of a complex overlap of concurring and mutually reinforcing factors, unique to each context and, to a certain extent, each individual. The process of radicalization begins with changes in self-identification due to grievances, frequently driven by personal or group concerns regarding local issues as well as international events. A grievance is understood to create the sense of alienation or disenchantment that provides a cognitive opening for radicalization.”

## Steps to Effective Programming on Youth, Peace, Security and P/CVE

USAID’s report [Development Assistance and Counter Extremism: A Guide to Programming](#) identifies six steps to help practitioners identify drivers of youth extremism in order to determine the appropriate P/CVE, youth, peace and security strategy. When using this guide, it is critical to apply a **youth lens** to understand the role that local governance, institutions and other actors play in shaping the drivers of VE.

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<sup>2</sup> [“Youth & Consequences: Unemployment, Injustice and Violence.” Mercy Corps.](#)

<sup>3</sup> [“Global Terrorism Index: 2015.” Institute for Economics and Peace.](#)

1. Determine the characteristics of the VE phenomenon in the specific setting being analyzed.
2. Assess whether prevention or mitigation is the main task and whether recruitment, community support, or an enabling environment that permits VE groups to operate are the most pressing concerns.
3. Identify which populations, geographical areas, and/or institutions are particularly vulnerable and why.
4. Ascertain those social processes and group dynamics that are critical to facilitating or undermining recruitment and/or community support.
5. Determine the political, socioeconomic and cultural drivers (especially those affecting youth) at work and assess their salience after reviewing the analysis in Steps One through Four.
6. Prioritize drivers, locations, and determine development assistance and strategic communications interventions. This may entail a further step of a Threat Assessment Matrix template (featured in the report) for the practitioner to identify the type of drivers.

## Promising Practices: Programmatic Models and Interventions

Even though each context requires a unique evaluation, there are still lessons to be learned from successful programs across the globe. The following is a list of promising and evidence-based best practices to prevent youth from engaging in extremist activities and build resilience through positive participation. These practices are coupled with an example of a program that exemplifies each approach. Each practice and approach have been organized into four categories following the format of [the Youth Action Agenda to Prevent Violent Extremism and Promote Peace](#). It must be noted that the most effective programs use a combination of these measures.

PREVENT VIOLENCE AND RECRUITMENT INTO VIOLENT GROUPS		PROMISING & EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICES
<b>National Development Planning &amp; Youth Policy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporating youth into national development planning strategies and developing national youth policies are broad scaled mechanisms that act as a critical element for laying the groundwork for all initiatives that encourage peacebuilding through youth empowerment.</li> <li>• Engaging youth to design policy at the local and national level and carrying out corresponding action plans is key to creating both a sense of agency and voice that deters extremism and empowers social inclusion.</li> </ul>	<a href="#">2011-2016 South Sudan Development Plan</a> and <a href="#">2009-2014 South Africa National Youth Policy</a> both exemplify youth-oriented and youth-influenced national development policies to empower youth and prevent their entry into extremist groups. The youth-led <a href="#">Youth Against Violence Movement</a> in Central America carried out hundreds of community youth consultations in developing national and regional policy recommendations.
<b>Youth Leadership Trainings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investing in training youth leaders of marginalized communities with an emphasis on peacebuilding practices is shown to create positive youth role</li> </ul>	<a href="#">The Kosovo Young Leaders Program</a> worked with diverse youth communities through a phased approach that features 1) job entrepreneurship, 2) civic engagement

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	<p>models that are prepared to mitigate conflict in their communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supporting long term leadership initiatives that are youth-led, connected to youth organizations and create practical learning experiences for youth are the most effective.</li> <li>Training programs work best when linked to follow-up action opportunities.</li> </ul>	<p>training, and 3) conflict prevention. These phases were followed by engaging Albanian and Serbian youth leaders to implement joint projects. Thus far, 2,483 participants have received trainings, 27 community projects have been developed and both adults and youth reported increased understanding of issues around youth ethnic groups.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Young African Leaders Initiative</a> is another example of a multi-tiered approach to building capacity and network support across the continent and has reached over 300,000 young people.</p>
<b>Training Youth Community Leaders in Conflict Prevention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhancing youth's conflict mitigation skills as well as pride for their community and culture has been shown to increase social cohesion and address issues of community conflict and well-being.</li> <li>Promising practice components have included models where youth from conflicting groups are trained together as facilitators.</li> </ul>	<p>The <a href="#">Youth Against Terrorism</a> program is a Tunisian youth nonprofit advocacy organization focused on building a society immune from violence, radicalization and terrorism. Their work has improved community-policing and training of police in community relations. Additionally, they have revised curricula manuals at the 1st and 2nd level to increase focus on critical thinking and peaceful tenets of Islam.</p>
<b>Youth Civic Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building opportunities for youth to develop a sense of purpose and meaning and through civic engagement increases their sense of self-efficacy leading to resilience.</li> </ul>	<p>The <a href="#">Somalia Youth Leadership Initiative</a> study found that although the provision of secondary education through the SYLI program reduced the likelihood of youth participating in violence by 16%, it increased support for political violence by 11%. However, the combination of both secondary formal education and civic engagement reduced the likelihood of youth both participating in (by 13%) and supporting (by 20%) political violence.</p>

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<b>Youth-led Organizations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing technical support and capacity building to youth-led organizations creates authentic young leaders that are prepared to encourage peacebuilding, counteract conflict and advocate for youth oriented projects.</li> </ul>	<a href="#">PRONI Institute of Social Education/FSB: Balkans</a> established year-long courses on youth leadership, conflict transformation, and voluntary community youth work with students. This program was conducted in coordination with developing peer groups at 40 youth-led youth centers that had nearly 15,000 members. In addition to running the centers, the youth ran their own youth bank that was used to support youth voluntary projects.
<b>Employability, Entrepreneurship &amp; Life Skills Program</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Structured programs that teach vocational and soft skills to ensure that youth have the self-awareness and aptitudes to seek meaningful employment in combination with job placement are shown to be critical elements for P/CVE programming.</li> <li>Recent research by <a href="#">YouthPower Learning</a> found that the five most important soft/life skills positively impacting outcomes in violence prevention programs are: social, empathy, self-control, self-concept, and higher order thinking skills.</li> </ul>	USAID's <a href="#">Somali Youth Livelihood Programs</a> (SYLP) focused on livelihoods, skills training and economic opportunities for youth. The program served over 10,000 youth, 87% of whom completed the program and 78% were placed in jobs. Stakeholders agreed that the program prevented youth from entering destabilizing activities. In South-East Asia <a href="#">the COMET project</a> enabled teachers to better prepare youth for employment by studying the labor gaps in the STEM+AT fields and training universities/vocational centers in these areas.
<b>Focus on Mental Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bodies of neuroscience research now demonstrate that youth undergo brain development up until the age of 25<sup>4</sup>.</li> <li>Supporting at-risk youth to be conscious of their biases and decision-making processes, as well as to learn impulse control through cognitive behavioral therapy has been found to help decrease impulsivity and decision making difficulties amongst troubled youth.</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Sustainable Transformation of Youth in Liberia program (STYL)</a> was a short-term Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) program targeting high-risk young men in Liberia to reduce destructive behaviors, such as criminality and substance abuse. Evaluation by <a href="#">MIT's Poverty Action Lab</a> found that those who received therapy were 55% less likely to carry a weapon in the short term and recipients reported a long-term reduction in impulsivity. <a href="#">CBT</a> is one of the most effective therapies in youth violence prevention.

<sup>4</sup> [“The Adolescent Brain.” AECF.](#)

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Gender Focused Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a need to focus on the pull factors created by early and forced marriage and long term deficits of girls lacking equal access to education.</li> <li>• Violent extremist and terrorist groups often target women and girls for gender-based violence, including abductions, forced marriages, sexual violence, forced pregnancies, attacks on women human rights defenders and leaders, attacks on girls' access to education, and restrictions on their freedom of movement.</li> </ul>	<p>Since 2011, the <a href="#">UK's counter terrorism strategy</a> has included a gender focus. Examples of their prevention efforts include the Birmingham City Council that funds projects such as "Big Sister" which highlights "successful Muslim females in order to make local role models more accessible to thousands of Muslim girls in Birmingham". They have also created a "Women and Youth PVE Awareness Project" in their Bangladeshi community.</p>

FACILITATE YOUTH DISENGAGEMENT FROM VIOLENT GROUPS		PROMISING & EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICE
<b>Driver Analysis and Shortlisting Program Components</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To avoid a one size fits all approach, a scan of the drivers of violent extremism should be conducted through localized research that takes into account the structural motivators, individual incentives and enabling factors.</li> <li>The drivers should then be matched with proven P/CVE responses. For example, the individual incentive driver of “revenge” could be addressed by messaging initiatives, support for moderate religious leaders, civic and peace education or psychosocial support<sup>5</sup>.</li> </ul>	The 2014-15 EU-funded <a href="#">Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism (STRIVE) program</a> in Nairobi identified “at-risk” youth for mentorship through a series of workshops and interviews to understand their different drivers and if these could be addressed through a mentorship program.
<b>Community-led Disengagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiatives to disengage youth from violent extremist activities are found to be most effective when led by other youth, former violent extremists, religious leaders and parents who have their own experiences<sup>6</sup>.</li> </ul>	The <a href="#">Elman Center for Peace and Human Rights</a> in Somalia partnered with the Minister of Internal Security to comprehensively disengage, rehabilitate, and reintegrate imprisoned children and youth (ex-combatants, extremists, or military defectors). Since the launch of the program 3500 youth have registered as alumni.
<b>Engaging Families of Youth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaging families, particularly mothers, is recognized to play an important role in P/CVE</li> <li>Recommendations include strengthening family based social networks, encouraging families to work with authorities, empowering mothers as prevention protagonists and supporting family development of VE prevention.</li> </ul>	In Germany, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugee Affairs is recognized for its successful public-private initiative with a network of NGOs to manage a hotline for families of youth engaging in VE. Families could call in to voice their concerns and receive family counseling to de-radicalize youth. Since 2012, they have received over 1500 calls and counseled over 420 families demonstrating that they are reaching their target. <a href="#">(See page 133 on Family Counseling, Radicalization and CT).</a>

<sup>5</sup> [Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction. RUSI.](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Youth Action Agenda to Prevent Violent Extremism and Promote Peace](#)



PRODUCE AND AMPLIFY NEW NARRATIVES		PROMISING & EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICE
<b>Engage Youth in Governance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensuring representation of youth in policy-making processes through the creation of youth councils is critical to creating a political outlet for youth sentiments as well as to serve as a branch for advocacy.</li> </ul>	Search for Common Ground's <a href="#">"Empowering Young Changemakers in Tunisia"</a> supports the creation and capacity building of youth leadership councils to give them tools to work within the political processes to advocate for their communities. Their <a href="#">mid-evaluation</a> shows progress in collaboration between youth and government officials.
<b>Youth-Oriented Communications Strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Media gives youth an opportunity to share knowledge and overcome exclusion.</li> <li>Engaging youth to use media as a means to support policies and programs and as a vehicle for peacebuilding<sup>7</sup>. Other key lessons from recent USAID supported projects include: the strength of positive messaging over counter messaging especially through radio and online platforms that are most utilized by youth in key areas.</li> </ul>	The US Institute for Peace initiative <a href="#">Salam Shabab (Peace Youth)</a> is an Iraqi reality youth-run TV series that has Iraqi teens compete to be peace building ambassadors. Winning international awards, Salam Shabab has been found successful at providing youth with a platform to express themselves and engage in peacebuilding. <a href="#">Peer to Peer (P2P)</a> , has mobilized university students around the world to develop and execute campaigns and social media strategies against extremism that are credible and authentic to their peers.
<b>Sustained Dialogue Initiatives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Programs that facilitate inter-group contact between youth in conflict, combined with long term sustained dialogue initiatives are found to significantly decrease the likelihood of participants joining extremist groups and create positive shifts in attitude towards the other.</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Seeds of Peace Summer Camps</a> brings together Palestinian and Israeli youth leaders to engage in long term dialogue discussions in safe and nurturing environments. A study by the University of Chicago finds that participants have greater positive attitudes towards one another after programming, and no participants joined extremist groups at a later point.
<b>Reshaping Youth Identities through Opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research shows that it is critical to understand how the formation of identity, particularly social identity, relates to violent behavior.</li> <li>Changing the narrative on youth in their society can help to provide opportunities for youth to be productive members of society, thus decreasing the likelihood of radicalization</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Mercy Corp's Rift Valley Local Empowerment for Peace (LEAP) project</a> worked to promote stability in Kenya through engaging youth through economic opportunities and strengthening local mechanisms for conflict resolution. Their mid-term evaluation found that youth who engage in collective action are seen as more trustworthy by adults and then are provided with more opportunities to be productive.

<sup>7</sup> [Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding: A Practice Note \(2016\)](#)



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<b>Spaces for Expressiveness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating both physical and virtual environments for at-risk youth to express their opinions and have their voices recognized empowers youth to be agents of change in their communities<sup>8</sup>.</li> <li>• Youth centers create communal environments for trainings, dialogue, educational and civic engagement activities.</li> </ul>	UNICEF's <a href="#">17 Youth Centers in Kyrgyzstan</a> were found to positively change negative attitudes and stereotypes of youth's capacity to be changemakers. Nearly 80% of youth from high conflict areas who participated in this project were connected to employment.

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<sup>8</sup> [De Vos, Manola \(2015\) "6 Ways to Successfully engage youths in peacebuilding." Devex.](#)

ESTABLISH MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS		PROMISING & EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICE
<b>Enhance Cooperation with Religious Leaders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaging religious leaders and institutions are found to be extremely important entry points for championing peacemaking and conflict resolution<sup>9</sup>.</li> <li>Training religious' leaders to work with youth can support counter radicalization</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Garissa Youth Program (G-Youth)</a> is a program for Somali youth in Northern Kenya that teaches skills training and civic engagement. In their evaluation, engagement with religious leaders was noted as one of the driving factors for the program's success.
<b>Sports for Development and Peace</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using sports as a vehicle to teach peace and conflict resolution and leadership skills is a relatively recent but promising approach to engaging vulnerable youth.</li> <li>Intentional and behavior-based messaging and skills development woven into the broader sports (or cultural) activities has been shown to be key to successful programs.</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Peace Players International's</a> demonstrates that youth who play together can learn to live together. Their Leadership Development program trains youth in conflict resolution, life skills and coaching. A recent study found that their youth who are trained as coaches are have reduced levels of prejudice and greater likelihood exhibiting conflict mitigating behaviors. <a href="#">(Source: UN Practice Report, 49)</a>
<b>Intergenerational dialogue</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incorporating intergenerational dialogues into leadership programs helps to give young people positive role models to learn and share with before turning towards violence and crime. These models also can address issues of youth voice, grievance, and variance in narratives.</li> </ul>	The <a href="#">"Becoming a Man"</a> program run by Youth Guidance and World Sport Chicago ran a comprehensive program in Chicago's public schools that included interactions with pro-social adults in combination with afterschool programming, social policy intervention and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). <a href="#">Evaluation</a> of the model found that this programming led to a short term decrease in crime related activities and a large impact on educational outcomes such as graduation.

<sup>9</sup> [\(2015\) "Comparative Study of Youth Resilience."](#)

## Manuals and Resources

### Guides & Toolkits

1. [UN Resolution 2250: Youth Toolkit](#)
2. [Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding](#)
3. [Development Assistance and Counter Extremism: A Guide to Programming](#)
4. [Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding: A Practice Note](#)
5. [2015 Amman Youth Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security](#)
6. [UN Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security](#)
7. [Youth Action Agenda to Prevent Violent Extremism and Promote Peace](#)
8. [Six Ways to Successfully Engage Youth in Peacebuilding](#)
9. [What We Know about "What Works" in Youth Civic Engagement and Voice, Youth Organizations, Youth Leadership, and Civic Education DRAFT](#)
10. [USAID Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism](#)
11. [Preventing violent extremism through promoting inclusive development, tolerance and respect for diversity](#)
12. [Homeland Security Institute's Recruitment and Radicalization of School Aged Youth by International Terrorist Groups](#)
13. [Surveying CVE Metrics in Prevention, Disengagement and Deradicalization Programs](#)
14. [Understanding Youth Radicalization - a Psycho-social approach](#)
15. [USAID State of the Field Report: Examining the Evidence in Youth Education in Crisis and Conflict](#)

### Databases

1. [Global Innovation Exchange: Resources](#)
2. [United States Institute for Peace-Resolve Network](#)
3. [Hedaya Center](#)
4. [Devex-Youth Will](#)
5. [UNDP-Youth 4 Peace](#)
6. [Youth Power Global Innovation Exchange](#)
7. [J-Pal Poverty Action Lab](#)
8. [United States Institute for Peace](#)
9. [Global Center on Cooperative Security](#)
10. [Search for a Common Ground: ILT Toolkits](#)
11. [Search for a Common Ground: In Conflict we Change Our Response](#)
12. [Network for Youth in Transition](#)
13. [Youth and P/CVE Facebook Group](#)
14. [D/ME for Peace](#)