

Summary of main findings from the discussions

Just as the pathway to violent extremism is a complex and individual journey, there is no single set of solutions for the prevention of violent extremism. Educational strategies vary a great deal according to context – i.e. conflict situation, demographics, citizenship model, private/public education.

Several priority areas of action nonetheless emerged from the two-day Conference, underlining the point that prevention takes time, requires vision, a long term and sustained commitment to change, and strong leadership at every level of the education system until results can be seen.

The priority areas of action identified by the Conference Participants can be grouped in 4 categories: educational content, teachers, places of learning and partnerships.

1. Educational Content

Participants emphasized the importance of removing hateful content from educational materials, which fuel violence. Whether they are propagated online or through textbooks, heinous messages need to be challenged, and universally shared values should be promoted in their place.

Educational programmes should also not hesitate to address the controversial and “burning bridge” issues that divide people, weigh on children and encourage simplistic views of the world and others. The objective of addressing such issues is to encourage learners’ openness to other perspectives, and not let anger, stereotypes and prejudice settle in.

2. Teachers

Many sessions underlined the critical role of teachers in the prevention of violent extremism. As educators, change agents and mediators, teachers can help ensure that the broader community and schools work with a common goal.

To allow them to fulfil their role, teachers need to be motivated and equipped with appropriate teaching and learning tools. This includes developing their ability to nurture among learners a range of cognitive and non-cognitive skills – such as critical thinking, multi-perspectivity, moral courage, and responsible online behaviour – though pre and in service training.

Teachers also need to be encouraged to be respectful of, and attentive to, the personal challenges of learners as they struggle with issues of identity and meaning. This dimension should not be overlooked in order to provide learners with the appropriate and timely guidance, which can help “interrupt” processes of radicalisation.

Finally, teachers should be provided with the appropriate psycho-social support to face and overcome the impacts of attacks from, and threats of, violent extremist groups, which impede their capacity to play a constructive role in prevention.

3. Places of learning

Because schools can unfortunately also be places where violence is learned, education personnel need to implement and enforce inclusive educational policies that allow girls and boys alike to feel safe, empowered and confident that they belong to the learning community.

Formal and non-formal places of learning should be spaces where respectful and open dialogue between learners, as well as between education personnel and learners, is encouraged.

When there are reported cases of violence, discrimination, bullying, or other forms of incivilities, which can create a hostile climate, schools and school personnel in particular need to be encouraged to dialogue with learners and to help find solutions.

Schools should be encouraged to take appropriate, measured and effective action in order to help resolve cases in a respectful manner. This is key to building a relationship of trust between the education personnel and learners.

4. Partnerships

Participants underscored the educational value of building effective partnerships with other education stakeholders and sectors, such as youth groups, law enforcement officers committed to prevention work, social workers, the media, faith-based organizations and families.

Some of the most innovative prevention work is currently being delivered and implemented by actors outside of the formal education sector. These approaches deserve to be better known and considered when developing educational prevention activities.