



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Executive Board

Hundred and ninety-ninth session

199 EX/4.INF.4
PARIS, 1 April 2016
English and French only

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

UNESCO'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

SUMMARY

This document provides a summary of recent efforts by UNESCO to step up its action to prevent violent extremism, in the context of the United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action on Violent Extremism, launched in January 2016. Building on its mandate and existing activities, UNESCO has adopted an intersectoral approach, paying particular attention to the needs of young people particularly at risk of radicalization.



Background

1. Recognizing that “violent extremism is an affront to the purposes and principles of the United Nations, undermining peace and security, human rights and sustainable development”,¹ the United Nations Secretary-General launched a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (PVE) in January 2016. A number of priority areas of the Plan are of direct relevance to UNESCO’s work, notably: (i) education, skills development and employment facilitation; (ii) empowerment of youth; (iii) strategic communications, the Internet and social media; and (iv) gender equality and empowering women.

2. In its decision 197 EX/Decision 46 (“UNESCO’s role in promoting education as a tool to prevent violent extremism”), the Executive Board encouraged the Director-General to enhance UNESCO’s leading role in promoting and implementing education as an essential tool to help prevent violent extremism, enhance coordination across sectors on related initiatives, and identify opportunities for collaboration within the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

3. In this context, UNESCO’s action to prevent violent extremism has been rapidly expanding over the past months. Whereas a full report on UNESCO’s work to prevent violent extremism will be provided to the Executive Board at its 200th session, the present document provides a brief overview of activities the Organization has undertaken since the last meeting of the Executive Board.

UNESCO’s approach to preventing violent extremism

4. Building on an inter-sectoral approach outlined in UNESCO’s Integrated Framework of Action “Empowering Youth to Build Peace”, launched on the occasion of the “Internet and Youth radicalization” Conference in June 2015, UNESCO seeks to equip young people with knowledge, skills and values that empower them to live peaceful, constructive and productive lives; to engage as responsible global citizens; and to be resilient to any form of abuse or manipulation, including radicalization and violent extremism. UNESCO’s existing programmes on quality education including Global Citizenship education (GCED), technical and vocational education, media literacy, Holocaust education, youth engagement and participation, as well as cultural competencies, are of particular relevance in this context.

5. In this sense, UNESCO’s focus in PVE on youth also seeks to contribute to the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, which puts emphasis on the constructive role of youth in violence prevention, peace building and social cohesion.

6. In order to ensure synergy and complementarity with overall United Nations PVE action, UNESCO is working in close consultation with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) in developing and implementing its activities. As co-chair of the “Conditions Conducive” CTITF working group focusing on preventive aspects of the United Nations’ counter-terrorism agenda, UNESCO is particularly well placed to guide current efforts to step up PVE action across the United Nations system. UNESCO also recently joined the CTITF working group on Foreign Terrorist Fighters, given the recent focus of this group on preventive action.

Preventing violent extremism through education

7. In line with the Executive Board decision 197 EX/Decision 46, UNESCO seeks to assist national efforts to develop comprehensive education sector responses to violent extremism. UNESCO is (i) developing guides for teachers and for education policy-makers on PVE, (ii) will

¹ Paragraph 1, Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, ref. A/70/674, 24 December 2015.

launch the guides at a Global Conference on PVE through Education, and (iii) will follow-up with capacity-building for teachers and policy-makers at country level.

8. During the 38th session of UNESCO's General Conference, a high-level side event with education ministers on "Education to Prevent Violent Extremism" was organized jointly with the Permanent Mission of the United States to UNESCO. The objective was to raise awareness and mobilize education stakeholders and partners on the challenge of preventing violent extremism through education, in follow up to the adoption of resolution 197 EX/46. The event gathered 200 participants, including some 30 ministers of education, and was followed by technical debates with prominent organizations involved in the field.

9. The guide for teachers and educators on "Preventing Violent Extremist and Radicalization" that UNESCO is preparing will provide teachers and educators with a basic understanding of violent extremism and the role of education in combatting it, as well as with practical guidance on how to address violent extremism and challenge the prevailing narratives conveyed by extremist ideologies in a classroom setting. The guide is foreseen to be published in April 2016.

10. In preparation of the technical guidance document for policy-makers, UNESCO convened international experts in education and in the prevention of violent extremism on 21 and 22 March 2016 for an expert consultation meeting. The technical guidance will complement teacher guide and support the work of policy-makers within ministries of education to prioritize, plan and implement effective and appropriate education-related actions that can address violent extremism. The experts meeting focused on concrete action areas for addressing violent extremism through education, ensuring that the guide provides realistic and pragmatic support to policy-makers. The guide will be designed as a policy tool adaptable for education sectors in different national contexts. The document will be published in September 2016.

11. A group of "UNESCO Friends of Preventing Violent Extremism" was established, at the initiative of the Permanent Mission of the United States to UNESCO. Thirty-four Member States² joined the group at its first meeting on 6 February 2016, and were briefed by the Secretariat on related UNESCO priorities and activities.

Promoting the positive role of the media in preventing violent extremism

12. A conference on "Youth and the Internet: Fighting Radicalization and Extremism", was held on 16 and 17 June 2015 at UNESCO Headquarters. The conference brought together researchers, policy-makers, youth NGOs, experts and practitioners from a range of institutional types and disciplines, to share experiences on policy interventions, projects and processes for reducing the use of Internet as a tool for youth extremism and radicalism. A network of conference experts was established to support advocacy and knowledge sharing, and the knowledge produced will be operationalized through projects that link policy, practice and research in the priority areas of media information literacy, information ethics and global citizenship.

13. In addition, a recent UNESCO publication "Countering Online Hate Speech" was developed in cooperation with the Programme in Comparative Media Law and Policy at the University of Oxford. It provides a global overview of the dynamics characterizing hate speech online and some of the measures that have been adopted to counteract and mitigate it, highlighting good practices that have emerged at the local and global levels. While the study offers a comprehensive analysis of the international, regional and national normative frameworks developed to address hate speech online, and their repercussions for freedom of expression, it places particular emphasis on social and non-regulatory mechanisms that can help to counter the production, dissemination and impact of hateful messages online.

² Algeria, Australia, Austria, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, The Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, The European Union, Finland, France, The Gambia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Republic of Korea, Kuwait, Latvia, Morocco, The Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Philippines, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and United States.

Celebrating cultural diversity through alternative narratives on social media

14. In March 2015, UNESCO launched the #unite4heritage campaign, engaging young people in developing a positive alternative narrative to sectarian propaganda against cultural heritage and diversity. UNESCO-created online posts have been viewed almost 9 million times, catalysing a global discussion of more than 35,000 campaign-related tweets and 10,000 photos on Instagram. During the busiest periods, millions of people have been exposed to the campaign every week.

15. The #unite4heritage campaign fits firmly into the wider UNESCO action to prevent violent extremism, through its objectives of engaging in dialogue with young people around the importance of values underpinning respect for cultural heritage and diversity. In 2016, the #unite4heritage campaign continues building upon these narratives and is expanding its reach through a renewed focus on partnerships and outreach worldwide.