



Countering Violent Extremism and the Role of Education in Humanitarian Action

Background

Education is a universally recognised fundamental human right.¹ In conflict situations, education is not only a right, but also an important need for displaced children and youth. Education helps them survive, recover and regain a sense of stability. Moreover, children and youth play a key role in rebuilding their communities and societies. NRC has developed particular expertise in education programming.

The positive contribution of education in conflict situations could be threatened by the increasing attempts to link education in humanitarian operations with the agenda of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). For instance, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s Member States expressed "the importance of education as a tool to help prevent terrorism and violent extremism".² Building on that UNESCO published a Teacher's Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism through education. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security (2015) identifies clear links between youth,

education, peace and security and underscores the role of education in violence prevention and peacebuilding³. The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) recognises the important role of education in preventing violent extremism (PVE) and has compiled a catalogue of resources on education and PVE, which aims to make resources on PVE and education readily available to practitioners, academics, and all those working in the field of education in fragile and crisis-affected contexts.

Many of NRC's main donors have been increasingly active on CVE to varying degrees during the last decade. These include the European Union, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and particularly the UK and the US. Some have started to frame education as a tool for the prevention of violent extremism. For example, in their 2016 Joint Strategy on CVE, the United States Department of State and USAID affirmed they would "work with partner organisations and multilateral institutions to enhance programmes that provide educational and social service providers in key countries with tools to address drivers of violent extremism."

¹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26.; Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 28.

² UNESCO, Decisions Adopted by the Executive Board at its 197th Session, October 2015, decision 46.

³ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 Adopted by the Security Council at its 7573rd meeting, on 9 December 2015

Similarly, Switzerland in its 2016 Foreign Policy Action Plan on Preventing Violent Extremism refers to education and expresses support for the aforementioned UNESCO activities in the field of preventing violent extremism.

The efforts to link CVE and education rest on the assumption that education can help prevent violent extremism, which has yet to be empirically proven. In addition, it remains unclear how and at what stage a person becomes radicalised or adopts violent extremism. It is important to be aware of the intersection between CVE and education and the potential implication for principled humanitarian action and the universal right to education. Premising education programmes on a CVE agenda can distort programme priorities in favour of a political agenda rather than a needs- and rights-based agenda. Not only does this kind of programming violate the universal right to education, it can go against the principle of impartiality, which holds that humanitarian action must be based on needs alone.

Role of education

Education is emphasised in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁴ as having the potential to promote a culture of peace and non-violence. In conflict situations education is especially important as it provides protection, stability, essential knowledge and life skills and is key to building core common values for displaced children and youth. However, integration of conflict sensitivity in education policies and programmes is necessary to minimise their negative impacts and maximise positive impacts on conflict. NRC education programmes adhere to the Inter-Agency

Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards for Education. In line with these standards, education stakeholders need to consider disparities in vulnerabilities and capacities. Addressing them based on an analysis of each context is essential for an effective humanitarian response.

It is important to recognise, utilise and enhance the strengths and assets of children and youth through an intentionally positive and pro-social approach. Doing so will enable them to be agents of positive change in their communities. The Convention on the Rights of the Child⁵ stipulates that the “education of the child shall be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.” This positive perspective should be the underlying rationale for all education policies or programmes. Rather than focusing on the deficits of children and youth or grounding programmatic approaches in the presence of adversity, risk or challenge, it is necessary to build on the development potential and positive contribution of children and youth to their communities.

⁴ Sustainable Development Goal 4, target 7.

⁵ Article 29.

NRC Position

As outlined in NRC's organisational position on CVE (please refer to NRC's Countering Violent Extremism and Humanitarian Action Position Paper, June 2017, see [here](#)), NRC opposes any link of humanitarian assistance to CVE. Humanitarian assistance that is motivated by the CVE agenda first and foremost is a fundamental threat to principled humanitarian action.

- NRC will advocate for an impartial and positive approach to education policies and programming, building on the potential of all children and youth and focusing on the development of their skills and assets.
- NRC education programmes shall recognise, utilise and enhance the strengths and assets of children and youth.
- NRC's education programmes shall provide physically and emotionally safe spaces for children and youth and should foster high quality and supportive relationships with peers, adults and the wider community.
- Education policies and programming shall rely on a conflict sensitive approach, in line with NRC's Programme Policy
- NRC will not accept funding for education programmes under funding opportunities where the primary objective is to counter or prevent violent extremism, and/or where the terms of that funding risks compromising a rights- and needs-based approach or other rules as laid out in NRC's Project Cycle Management procedures.

NRC welcomes information sharing and discussion on CVE and principled humanitarian action.

Please get in touch with kate.mcgrane@nrc.no, Senior Humanitarian Policy Advisor, at NRC Geneva or annelies.ollieuz@nrc.no Education Advisor, if you have any questions, information to share, or dilemmas to discuss in relation to CVE.