

# The role of education in Preventing Violent Extremism in Lebanon

## Research overview

This quote on the right from Sigrid Kaag – the Dutch Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation – indicates that creating stability has become a focal point for the Dutch government. According to Kaag, the creation of stability is vital in securing and creating safety. The policy document ‘Investing in Global Prospects’ (MFA 2018, 13) states that the “focus of development cooperation is shifting to the unstable regions of West Africa / Sahel, the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, to tackle root causes of poverty, migration, terror and climate change”. This focus of the Netherlands in Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (BHOS) is in line with a wider global shift, where terrorism and violent extremism have become regarded as significant threats to stability, peace and development. The objectives presented by the Ministry are thus in accordance with the wider global debate on PVE (Preventing Violent Extremism). A key part to securing stability and – in the wider debate – to preventing extremism from happening, is the provision of education, aiming to offer a ‘perspective’ on the future. By investing in education, employment and social cohesion, the Netherlands works on creating stability (MFA 2018).

The hypothesis is that offering education to children at risk will eventually lead to a more stable situation in the Middle East, which will also trickle down to Europe and the Netherlands (Ibid). Education is paramount from this perspective, since more than 3.5 million refugee children between 5 and 17 years old cannot attend schooling, and they are in danger of becoming “a lost generation” (MFA 2018, 44). In order to fulfil these goals, more than half of the €200 million that has been allocated to Lebanon between 2019-2022, is invested in educational and protection projects (MCSL 2019). Next to this, regionally €30 million a year is allocated to improve education and another €10 million a year is assigned to ‘preventing violent extremism’, both envisioned here as combatting root causes of instability (MFA 2018, 102). The increasing focus on education, loosely related to the notion of preventing violent extremism, triggered us to find out how these policies lead to educational interventions in practice. With this in mind, the research focus lies on the role of education within the wider PVE debate, and subsequently aims to answer the question: *what are the effects of educational interventions subsidized by the Dutch government on school-going children in Lebanon, in relation to preventing violent extremism?*

## METHODS

Using a multi-case study approach, data has been gathered during two weeks of fieldwork at seven different case studies throughout Lebanon.

The main methods used are semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, participant observation and policy/ documentary analysis, thereby making use of triangulation to overcome possible biases and increase the validity of the obtained data.



“Because, more stability there, also means more safety here”

*Sigrid Kaag (MFA 2020)*



**A KEY PART TO SECURING STABILITY AND – IN THE WIDER DEBATE – TO PREVENTING EXTREMISM FROM HAPPENING, IS THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION, AIMING TO OFFER A ‘PERSPECTIVE’ ON THE FUTURE.**

# Conclusion

Through the help from the Dutch Embassy in Beirut and our wider network, we managed to select five organisations that opened their doors for us: AVT-L, War Child, URDA, and as partner of UNICEF: Mouvement Social and LOST. During our time in the field, we were able to conduct in-depth interviews with over 20 children at seven different educational centres spread throughout the country. On top of that, we were happy to gather anonymous surveys, filled in by over 150 children from the different centres. After analysing the empirical data, five main conclusions could be drawn.



## PSS IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS

Upon analysing the data, the importance of psychosocial support has come forward as a crucial component in the existing educational interventions. It moreover shows that both psychosocial support, i.e. as part of life-skills classes, and more traditional forms of education (as language and math-skills) are important. More specifically, the combination of PSS and education provides the opportunity for students to both obtain a sense of purpose, envision a future, and to learn how to cope with (war-related) emotions or to generate calmness and sense of safety.

## THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THE EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS ARE PROVIDED ARE OF HUGE IMPORTANCE

As has become clear in the analysis, the context in which the educational interventions are provided is of crucial importance to consider. While in some contextual settings it is possible to discuss violent extremism, in others this is not. Same goes for the topic of religion.

## LACK OF A WIDELY SUPPORTED PVE-DEFINITION

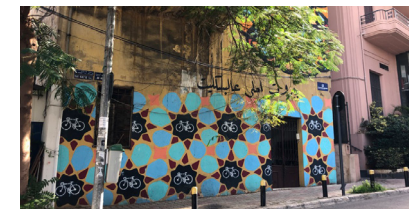
By trying to deduct how preventing violent extremism is operationalised in practice in Lebanon, it has become apparent that there is disunity when discussing the term PVE and the related projects. As the theory presents, there is not one accepted definition of PVE, which (therefore) has not been implemented into policy as such. Moreover, the literal use of 'PVE' is often not permitted by the various different organizations.

## THERE ARE DIFFERENCES IN THE UNDERSTANDING WHAT THE PSS-CURRICULUM SHOULD ENTAIL

During our research it became clear that there similarly are varying definitions of what a PSS-class should and does encompass. Different NGOs furthermore use different PSS-curricula, whereby there are for example alterations between War Child's and UNICEF's design. This does not immediately lead to less useful class-materials, but it might be fruitful to start an inter-organisational discussion on 'what works' to create more synchronised material.

## THE FRAGILE USE OF PVE WITHIN EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS

As mentioned before, there is a lack of clear definitions in the fields of PVE and PSS, and moreover, there is an unwillingness of NGOs to discuss PVE-related topics in the PSS and life-skills classes. Not daring to raise awareness on this subject might thus lead to other parties taking advantage of this gap in knowledge. This is especially important when considering the possibility that PSS-classes can be used as a part in the broader peace and conflict resolution process, whereby potential risks in children's ideologies and way of thinking can be intercepted before they come to fruition in a violent manner.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Intersectoral

- Professionals sector wide should aim for better communication between different actors (on different levels) on the ground and connect this to policy;
- Professionals should aim for a PVE-definition clarification. Discussing the use of PVE notions in projects should be the norm;
- Both the Dutch government and international NGO's should continue to support research to bridge the current gaps on PVE, education and PSS-related policies.

### Experts

- Should aim for a more widely accepted PVE-definition, which can be reached through conducting research on both a local and global level, and accordingly collaboratively establish and use this definition in the field and in policymaking;
- Should acknowledge it is important to conduct further research into the needs of the (refugee) children and learn from their experiences with PSS/MHPSS-classes, to where needed enhance these courses.

### (I)NGO's

- Should continue to provide PSS-classes, as part of educational interventions;
- Should focus on creating more synchronized PSS-curricula among the different NGO's in Lebanon, to better align them;
- Should continue to investigate/ incorporate the importance of the local context;
- Should continue to monitor problems regarding i.e. financial issues or other possible obstacles to education to their donors, to make sure 'the bus' does not stop coming. The ending of funding periods can be better aligned and communicated sector wide.

### Local NGO's/partner organisations

- Being closest to the beneficiaries (the children), they should continue to communicate concerns from discoveries on the ground;
- Should set and maintain a certain standard of professionalism regarding working with (often war-traumatized) children;
- Should continue to voice problems regarding i.e. financial issues or other possible obstacles to education to their donors, to make sure 'the bus' does not stop coming.

### The Dutch government

- Should keep a focus on the obstructions to education, and continue the discussion with international and local NGO's to limit these obstructions;
- Should support research and programs to find the best opportunities to overcome issues with illegal child labour;
- Should keep in contact with NGO's and local experts to provide policy that is well connected to the local situation(s);
- Should urge NGO's to keep researching and incorporating the local context in which the interventions are provided.