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Abstract:

This article aims to analyze the role of UNESCO in preventing violent extremism, if and when, conducive to terrorism, particularly through the organization's cross-sectoral programs which were implemented after UNESCO's Executive Board in its 197th session in Paris in 2015. Following the dramatic increase of terrorist attacks around the world, the danger and threats of the underlying factors that lead individuals to commit acts of terrorism have proved to be well beyond counter-terrorism strategies, military action, and diplomacy. This particular scenario has paved the way for international organizations, such as UNESCO, to promote collaborative efforts aimed at providing member states with long-term, sustainable and efficient strategies to tackle violent extremism at its roots. It is important to highlight that the complex nature of violent extremism and its destructive impact on the International Community has sparked an unprecedented emphasis on the need to implement cohesive and functional educational programs through the use of soft power in schools and prisons. Finally, the goal of UNESCO's cross-sectoral programs is to prevent violent extremism, but ultimately, prevent the emergence of a new generation incited by hatred, fear, and community disengagement.

Keywords:

United Nations, UNESCO, violent extremism, radicalization, terrorism, Global Education Citizenship, member states, inclusive societies.

***NOTE:** The ideas contained in the Opinion Documents are the responsibility of their authors, without necessarily reflecting the thinking or the IEEE or the Ministry of Defense

Introduction

While terrorist attacks perpetrated by violent extremist groups dramatically increase, security and defense are not appropriate measures to counter violence anymore, but rather, counterproductive tools that fuel further violent and extremist beliefs. Within the last decade, the International Community has witnessed the reverse side-effects of less-inclusive education systems, failed diplomacy, short-sighted political and military action, which has resulted not just in a greater number of terrorist attacks, casualties, and destruction, but the emergence of a new generation incited by hatred, fear, and community disengagement. Even when countries have implemented stricter counter-terrorism and national security policies, these remain reactive and detrimental to the objective of not just combating, but preventing terrorism. The fruitless results of national security policies have driven international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), particularly the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to continue working tirelessly in preventive efforts to cut violent extremism at its roots with the aim to prevent terrorism.

Since its establishment in 1946 to now, UNESCO has been committed “to peace and security by promoting collaboration among nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms”¹. Unfortunately, even though the increasing number of terrorist groups has tainted UNESCO’s commitment to furthering peace, security, and ultimately the protection of human rights, it has also paved the way to continuous research and innovative development strategies to create and implement educational and cross-sectoral programs to address the drivers of violent extremism. Rather than the use of conventional hard power to mitigate risk, UNESCO’s programs aim to provide the member states with the necessary tools to collaborate, develop and implement cohesive and functional educational programs through the use of soft power. Despite the ambivalent relationship between education and violent extremism, evidence identified by research in the fields of education and peacebuilding, argues that multilateralism, schools

¹ UNESCO Executive Board, 197 EX/Decisions, November 23, 2015, para. 46. Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000235180.locale=en>. Consulted: 16.01.2019.

and community organizations can have a productive impact on empowering citizens, promoting awareness and inclusion, which in turn reduces the probability of engaging in violence that ultimately leads to committing terrorist acts².

Understanding violent extremism and the role of UNESCO

As with the concept of terrorism, there is not a single, universally agreed upon definition for violent extremism. However, for the purpose of this analysis, violent extremism is defined as “the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals”³. Radicalization is another highly debated concept; within the context of violent extremism, it can be defined as “the process by which a person adopts extreme views or practices to the point of legitimizing the use of violence”⁴. Nevertheless, in recent years, terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Al-Qaida, Boko Haram and domestic white supremacist groups in the U.S. have shaped our vision of what violent extremism looks like and how it can be easily spread domestically and globally. For instance, “violent extremists have been able to recruit over 30,000 foreign terrorist fighters from over 100 Member States to travel to the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq, as well as to Afghanistan, Libya and Yemen”⁵. Neither education, political, nor military action could have then stopped the foreign terrorist fighters from committing violent acts in the name of a violent extremist ideology. However, a good quality of education and the use of soft power can now influence those who have returned home and prevent them from spreading hatred, intolerance, and violence in their own communities.

Considering the ambiguity of the concept of violent extremism, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) decided to provide the member states with a pragmatic approach highlighted in UNSC Resolution 2178 in 2014. The UNSC makes an explicit

² UNESCO Library. "Preventing Violent Extremism Through Education: A Guide for Policy-Makers." 2017, p. 9-13. Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247764/PDF/247764eng.pdf.multi>. Consulted: 17.01.2019.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵ UNESCO Library. "Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism." The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. December 24, 2015. Available at http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/L.41. Consulted: 18.01.2019.

connection between violent extremism and terrorism, and calls for the need of prevention stating that “violent extremism, which can be conducive to terrorism” can have detrimental consequences on member states’ domestic affairs⁶. The UNSC allows members to freely interpret and define violent extremism as their prerogative; however, to the extent that they are consistent with their obligations as UN member states and abide by international law—particularly human rights law⁷. In addition, they should address the importance of multilateralism and collective efforts within the International Community which includes but not limited to, “preventing radicalization, recruitment and mobilization of individuals into terrorist groups and becoming foreign terrorist fighters”⁸. The latter suggests cooperative work among states to complement each other’s national strategies and adopt new regional or sub-regional plans of action to prevent the emergence and spread of violent extremism internationally.

As former U.S. president Barack Obama once said, “ideologies are not defeated by guns, they are defeated by better ideas”⁹. Despite there not been a single solution to counter violent extremism, better ideas can be promoted through UNESCO’s educational programs as potential solutions to tackle the underlying factors that ultimately lead to terrorism. For this matter, some of the major decisions adopted by UNESCO’s Executive Board in its 197th session in Paris in 2015 continue to solidify the organization’s commitment to promote education as “a tool to help prevent terrorism and violent extremism,” and to recognize its catalytic role “in helping to ensure stability and sustainable peace, as well as to empower learners to be responsible citizens within their communities, countries, and globally”¹⁰. It is important to highlight that the success of UNESCO’s programs as a potential solution would also partly depend on the member states’ specific country situation and their willingness to adequately implement them in an efficient manner, while respecting and promoting UNESCO’s core values.

⁶ UNESCO Library. "Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism." The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. December 24, 2015, p.13-17. Available at http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/L.41. Consulted: 18.01.2019.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2/22.

⁹ OBAMA on ISIS Threat Video. July 2015. Available at https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2015/07/06/obama_on_isis_threat_ideologies_are_not_defeated_with_guns_they_are_defeated_by_better_ideas.html. Consulted: 17.01.2019.

¹⁰ UNESCO Executive Board, 197 EX/Decisions, November 23, 2015., par. 46. Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000235180.locale=en>. Consulted: 18.01.2019.

UNESCO's cross-sectoral programs to prevent violent extremism

UNESCO's cross-sectoral programs include multiple forms of soft power and have been designed to provide assistance to member states in an effort to prevent the spread of extremist beliefs and violence. The organization is also committed to the UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (24 December, 2015) with a focus on the following priorities: "(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"¹¹. The programs highlight the importance of prioritizing the targeted areas that have served as platforms to drive individuals to join terrorist groups in the past. Similarly, the UN's plan of action requires a great amount of community engagement and patience as the results might not be visible immediately, but in the near future.

It is important to emphasize that UNESCO's cross-sectoral programs intend to address the overall threats posed by radicalization and violent extremism, and also to recognize that violent extremism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group¹². Similarly, the programs focus on the specific factors involved in the radicalization process such as the 'push' and 'pull' factors. According to UNESCO's initiative on countering-terrorism, push factors which include marginalization, inequality, discrimination, feeling of being persecuted, poor education, and denial of basic rights have a higher probability to conduce individuals to violent extremism¹³. On the other hand, pull factors account for the logistics of well-organized terrorist groups which then offer a place to belong, a supportive network, shelter, and job opportunities that lure individuals to engage and commit terrorist acts¹⁴.

¹¹ "Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism." The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. December 24, 2015. Available at http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/L.41. Consulted: 18.01.2019.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 7/22.

¹³ UNESCO Library. "Preventing Violent Extremism Through Education: A Guide for Policy-Makers." 2017. p. 21. Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247764/PDF/247764eng.pdf.multi>. Consulted: 18.01.2019.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

In order to tackle violent extremism at its roots and taking into account violent extremist groups' particular modus operandi as well as recent developments in technology, UNESCO has designed programs to target every possible area of potential threat. UNESCO's cross-sectoral programs are as follows: Global Citizenship Education (GCED), Youth Participation, Media and Online Coalitions for Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE), and Educational Programs on Heritage and Creativity. For the purpose of this analysis, GCED will be our primary focus and its implementation at the national level in schools and community organizations.

Global citizenship education (GCED)

With the Global Citizenship Education program, UNESCO aims "to assist countries to deliver education programs that build young people's resilience to violent extremist messaging and foster a positive sense of identity and belonging"¹⁵. Through high-quality education, UNESCO directly counters the influence of the many aforementioned 'push' and 'pull' factors thus paving the way for schools, education systems, curriculum, and teachers to highly educate the new generation. With high-quality education, it refers to education that "strengthens character, opens people's minds, develops resilience, and builds empathy"¹⁶. In fact, high-quality education can be directly linked to critical thinking which can provide young people with the necessary skills to dialogue, think analytically and act accordingly. This enables students and individuals to challenge cultural and religious assumptions and social paradigms, as well as, broaden their horizons to engage in more meaningful relationships with others in their communities.

The GCED program also intends to promote the implementation of inclusive education policies and practices, with the objective to reinforce individuals' differences as opportunities for collective and enriching learning, particularly in multiethnic societies. Through its many detailed-written guides and action plans, which can be found on UNESCO's online library, schools and teachers are encouraged to recreate the education curriculum with the aim to illustrate the layers of diversity in the classroom and to update

¹⁵ UNESCO Executive Board, 197 EX/Decisions, November 23, 2015., par. 46.

¹⁶ UNESCO Library, "Youth Led Guide on Prevention of Violent Extremism Through Education." 2017. Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260547?posInSet=2&queryId=23d4d3d2-2e4b-4d84-907f-cc69a617778d>. Consulted: 19.01.2019.

the continuous changes in technological development and new emerging trends, always keeping it relevant for younger generations¹⁷. UNESCO's efforts to adapt the education systems to the realities of a globalized world hope to contribute, in the near future, to the successful transition from a conventional model of memorization, lack of social engagement, and resistance to diversity, to a more sophisticated version of education based on relevant and inclusive learning. This model of learning would include the necessary tools, experiences and opportunities for the students to assimilate and emerge themselves in ethnically diverse environments and to help them determine their own identity, their roles in society, their preferences, and ultimately, their future.

Youth participation

UNESCO's Youth Participation program was created in response to the UNSCR 2250 (2015), 9 December, on *Youth, Peace, and Security*, which recognizes the important role youth can play in the prevention and resolution of conflicts¹⁸. Similarly, the resolution highlights the 1.8 billion young women and men in the world between the ages of 18 and 29 that could be largely affected by armed conflicts, thus, in the worst-case scenario, putting them at risk of potential radicalization and violent extremism¹⁹. Moreover, the large number of young women and men also represent an opportunity to contend with violent extremist groups as the increasing use of technology in their hands attempts to attract and incite new members, particularly the youth, to commit terrorist acts and spread the organization's ideals.

Media and online coalitions for preventing violent extremism (PVE)

With the Media and Online Coalitions Program, UNESCO aims to "mobilize stakeholders, particularly youth, policy-makers, researchers and media actors, to take effective actions, both online and offline, to prevent and respond to violent extremism and radicalization on

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30-32.

¹⁸ UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2250 (2015) *

Available at [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2250\(2015\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2250(2015)). Consulted: 19.01.2019.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

the Internet”²⁰. Considering the impactful and harmful role of media and technology, this program intends to promote awareness and understanding of the process of radicalization online, particularly targeting the youth, while generating alternative avenues to contain and ultimately eliminate violent extremism fueled by online content and online hate speech. The program’s ultimate objective is to build the capacity of stakeholders to develop quick and innovative responses to the violent extremism phenomenon, while also “promoting tolerance, the protection of freedom of expression and privacy rights within the online International Community”²¹.

Educational programs on heritage and creativity

UNESCO’s program on heritage and creativity seeks to promote and celebrate cultural diversity by engaging the youth “in the protection of all forms of heritage and the promotion of culture to foster more fair, inclusive and peaceful societies”²². The program intends to achieve its objective through two specific campaigns: the #Unite4Heritage campaign and the Educational Campaign on Heritage and Creativity. The #Unite4Heritage campaign was launched in March 2015 as a call for action to halt the violent attacks on cultural heritage sites, particularly in parts of the Arab world²³. A particular aspect of these campaigns was to sensitize the youth to respect and promote the values of their heritage and diversity through the use of social media and events in their communities and across the world. With this program, UNESCO attempts to offer “an alternative to strengthen vulnerable individuals’ identities and sense of belonging while offering a solution based upon the ideals of cultural diversity, tolerance and intercultural dialogue with the rest of the world”²⁴.

²⁰ UNESCO Library. "Media & Online Coalitions for PVE." November 08, 2016. Available at <https://en.unesco.org/preventing-violent-extremism/media-online-coalitions>. Consulted: 19.01.2019.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² UNESCO Library. "Celebrating Cultural Diversity." November 09, 2016. Available at <https://en.unesco.org/preventing-violent-extremism/clt-diversity>. Consulted: 19.01.2019.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

International implementation of UNESCO's cross-sectoral programs

UNESCO's cross-sectoral programs are widely available for all current 193 UN member states;²⁵ however, the extent to which members implement the aforementioned programs heavily depends on the country's current political, economic, social, and geographical situation in addition to particular policy needs. It is important to note that even though most of UNESCO's cross-sectoral programs tend to have a general approach applicable to all member states, the organization also provides additional content or slight adaptation of the programs, especially GCED, to target particular needs in different members' regions; this is largely the case for Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Arab States.

After conducting deeper research into the platforms used to assess the desired progress and results of the programs, Results-Based Management (RBM) and Programme Implementation Report (PRI), it was fascinating, nevertheless, predictable that most of the countries implementing the cross-sectoral programs to counter violent extremism included those currently in conflict situations. Similarly, UNESCO's efforts to address the global phenomenon of violent extremism, for the most part, per the literature reviewed, directly targets those less-developed nations that have colonial history, ethnic and racial division, as well as religious stigmas which could perhaps make them more vulnerable to violent extremism²⁶. For instance, most of UNESCO's programs narrative, including the promotion and implementation of GCED, mainly include countries such as, Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Colombia, Congo, Yemen, and few others²⁷. Even though, the need to fully implement these programs in the countries mentioned above is hard to contest, it is important to highlight that all member states, even those more-developed nations, should also be held accountable for implementing education programs to counter and prevent violent extremism.

²⁵ UNITED NATIONS Website. Member States. Available at <https://www.un.org/en/member-states/>. Consulted: 20.01.2019.

²⁶ UNESCO Library. Report on the Implementation of the Information for All Programme (IFAP) (2016-2017). Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000258707/PDF/258707eng.pdf.multi>. Consulted: 20.01.2019.

²⁷ MOUL, Tina Robiolle. "Promotion and Implementation of Global Citizenship Education" UNESCO Library. 2017, p. 6-11. Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000252771/PDF/252771eng.pdf.multi>. Consulted: 20.01.2019.

On one hand, some member states, including countries currently in conflict, have taken the initiative to implement the programs aimed at enhancing their societies, education systems and curriculum, to the extent to which the organization's budget, logistical preparation, and in-country program management has allowed them. For instance, some of the major implementations through the GCED program include the introduction of *Terrorism, Religious and Ethnic Intolerance Issues* in the syllabi and textbooks of schools in Bangladesh; this is positive, given that Bangladesh has witnessed an increasing number of domestic terrorism due to religious and ethnic intolerance²⁸. Similarly, a pilot to introduce GCED tools was run in Cambodia, Colombia, Mongolia, and Uganda and concluded that all four countries successfully achieved the revision of their syllabi and teacher training programs to incorporate the core values of the GCED program²⁹. On the other hand, few European countries, including those who have been largely affected by domestic terrorism, such as Belgium, have introduced in 2016 a requirement for teachers to have a specialization called 'Teacher of Philosophy and Citizenship' in order to teach a class called "Philosophy and Citizenship" which aims to promote within students the philosophy of 'how to think rather than what to think' to foster further integration and diversity in the classroom³⁰.

It is important to highlight that within the research conducted into the platforms, there was no available data found on programs' implementation for a great number of member states, particularly those 'more-developed nations'. A potential argument to explain this can be linked to members' exceptional right to define and interpret violent extremism as they deem necessary and, if needed, to implement UNESCO's programs accordingly. However, questions arise, if this prerogative is taken too far, when member states' domestic and national situation clearly suggests the need for reform beyond counter-

²⁸ UNESCO Library. "Terrorism, Religious and Ethnic Intolerance Issues in the Syllabuses and Textbooks of Bengali and English Medium and Madrasah Education in Bangladesh an Appraisal." GCED Clearinghouse. 2014. Available at <https://www.GCEDclearinghouse.org/resources/terrorism-religious-and-ethnic-intolerance-issues-syllabuses-and-textbooks-bengali-and>. Consulted: 20.01.2019.

²⁹ UNESCO Library. "Global Citizenship Education Tools and Piloting Experiences of Four Countries: Cambodia, Colombia, Mongolia and Uganda." 2018. Available at <https://www.GCEDclearinghouse.org/sites/default/files/resources/180164eng.pdf>. Consulted: 20.01.2019.

³⁰ UNESCO Library. "Citizenship Education at School in Europe 2017" 2017. Available at <https://www.GCEDclearinghouse.org/sites/default/files/resources/180152eng.pdf>. Consulted: 20.01.2019.

terrorism strategies and national security policies. The implementation of UNESCO's cross sectoral programs, particular GCED, is not just in efforts to preserve member states' commitment to the organization and its core values, but ultimately, the attempt to prevent the spread of violent extremism that is conducive to both domestic and international terrorism.

In the case of terminology as a prerogative, for instance, in the U.S., Islamist extremists are more highly criticized and politicized in comparison to far-right extremists despite the fact that the latter greatly outnumbered plots and attacks committed by international terrorist groups³¹. Nonetheless, U.S. law always seem hesitant to define domestic terrorist attacks, particularly those by far-right groups, as acts of terrorism³². This particular U.S. stance on terrorism, in addition to biased domestic media coverage, fuel misconceptions regarding terrorism and its direct link with Islam. Drawing from the author's educational background in the U.S., the discussion of UNESCO in U.S.'s public education system perceives it as an element of an European organization that constitutes a fragment of 'soft diplomacy,' and suggests that its programs mainly target those under-developed and less-privileged nations. This view unfortunately disregards the work of UNESCO and its potential value to U.S. civic society and global citizenship approach; a more engaged approach that could be beneficial as the country's internal situation silently calls for more inclusive and tolerant education policies. For the U.S., data available on the progress and results of UNESCO's programs is quite limited considering its shaky commitment to the organization. In the past, the U.S. withdrew from the organization for about 18 years and did so again in 2018, and has failed to meet its financial commitments to the organization since 2011³³. In fact, the actions taken by the U.S. and recent unfolding events on U.S soil can perhaps prove that the lack of legitimacy in its commitment to UNESCO's programs, paired with absent gun-control reforms, contribute to the domestic situation of emerging extreme right movements.

³¹ UNESCO Library. "Youth Led Guide on Prevention of Violent Extremism Through Education." 2017. Chapter 3. Far-Right Violent Extremism in the U.S., p. 74-75. Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260547?posInSet=2&queryId=23d4d3d2-2e4b-4d84-907f-cc69a617778d>. Consulted: 20.01.2019.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Statement by Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, on the occasion of the Withdrawal by the United States of America from UNESCO. 12 October 2017. Available at <https://en.unesco.org/news/statement-irina-bokova-director-general-unesco-occasion-withdrawal-united-states-america-unesco>. Consulted: 19.01.2019.

Potential implementation in prisons

As previously mentioned, the emergence of the cross-sectoral programs, particularly GCED, is gradually growing and materializing through the evolution of more global societies, education systems and inclusive school curriculum. Nevertheless, while great results could and would be achieved through educational programs and a great amount of commitment from the member states, UNESCO should also promote the implementation of an adapted version of the GCED program in prisons. Education in prison is a human right as established by UNESCO's 1960 Convention Against Discrimination in Education, which "prohibits any exclusion or restriction of access to education on the basis of socially-ascribed or perceived differences, including prisoners"³⁴. However, as seen throughout history and recent events, the socially constructed nature of prisons' internal systems, and the sense of exclusion and segregation from society, as supported by research³⁵, can cause more social and psychological harm thus interfering with the aimed objectives of disengagement from violent activity, rehabilitation and social integration³⁶. Similarly, as reported by the UNESCO office in Dakar, "the prison overcrowding rates in the Sahel are among the highest in the world, exceeding 230%"³⁷. The report also sheds light on the detention conditions that "raise a number of security and human rights concerns, as well as a concern often leading to radicalization through violent extremists' networks in prisons, which radicalize other prisoners"³⁸. Prisons, in addition to overcrowding, are avenues that

³⁴ UNESCO Library. "National Consultation on the Situation of Prisons in Senegal." May 2017. Available at <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Dakar/pdf/UNESCOPrisonEDConsultationSenegalEN110917FnIREV.pdf>. Consulted: 19.01.2019.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ UNESCO Library. UNODC Sahel Programme 2013-2017 // Progress Report January 2016. Available at https://www.unodc.org/documents/westandcentralafrica/Sahel_Programme_Progress_Report_January_2_016.pdf. Consulted: 19.01.2019.

³⁷ UNESCO Library. "National Consultation on the Situation of Prisons in Senegal." May 2017. Available at <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Dakar/pdf/UNESCOPrisonEDConsultationSenegalEN110917FnIREV.pdf>. Consulted: 19.01.2019.

³⁸ UNESCO Library. "National Consultation on the Situation of Prisons in Senegal." May 2017. Available at <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Dakar/pdf/UNESCOPrisonEDConsultationSenegalEN110917FnIREV.pdf>. Consulted: 19.01.2019.

violent extremist groups increasingly exploit given their sometimes difficult-to-reach structure and social stigma.

Through the research process, only one UNESCO initiative was found regarding the implementation of GCED in prisons; this initiative was in Senegal in 2017, allegedly because of Senegal's inhumane prison conditions and the lack of programs to rehabilitate, teach skills and reintegrate prisoners into society.³⁹ Even though some European jails offer overall better conditions to its inmates and some rehabilitation programs as it is the case for France, the U.K., and Spain⁴⁰, it is unknown the actual impact of these programs particularly for those already radicalized individuals or those vulnerable non-extremist prisoners yet. Moreover, per an article written in the Spanish newspaper, *El Mundo*, in the next few years around 500 violent extremists will be released from European jails; this raises concerns in society as to whether these individuals have been 'rehabilitated' or have become more radicalized than before⁴¹. This is particularly alarming for the case of Hassan El Haski, an alleged member of the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM) and mastermind behind the March 11 terrorist attacks in Madrid, who remains loyal to his jihadist cause⁴². During his court hearings and interviews, El Haski, who has been in a Spanish prison for over 14 years, is still as radicalized as before, if not more; he continuously states his eagerness for revenge which hopefully has not encouraged radicalization of other individuals in the prison⁴³.

According to estimates, in Spain, "about 10% of Jihadists" have been fully or partly radicalized in prison since the first jihadist was sentenced in a Spanish prison in 1996 to cases of jihadist terrorism in 2018⁴⁴, which lead us to question if, once these individuals

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ EUROPEAN Commission. Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) and Member States. Available at https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-and-member-states_en. Consulted: 20.01.2019.

⁴¹ ESCRIVA, Angeles. "La Quinta Columna De 500 'yihadistas' Que Amenazan a Europa." *El Mundo*, December, 2018. Available at <https://www.elmundo.es/cronica/2018/12/24/5c1e3511fc6c834a758b45bc.html>. Consulted: 16.01.2019.

⁴² *Ibid*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ REINARES, GARCÍA-CALVO & VICENTE. "Yihadismo y prisiones: un análisis del caso español". Real Instituto Elcano, November 14th, 2018. Available at http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_es/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/ari123-2018-reinares-garciacalvo-vicente-yihadismo-prisiones-analisis-caso-espanol. Consulted: 20.01.2019.

were released, engaged in violent extremism and ultimately committed acts of terrorism. The radicalization of individuals in prisons that will soon be freed is worrisome, given that once they reintegrate into society, they have the potential to target those vulnerable segments of the population, hence creating a new wave of violent extremism that can result in terrorist acts. Building our arguments on radicalization taking place in prisons, rehabilitation programs should go beyond religion and theological studies and implement the many components within the GCED program, focusing particularly on the aspects of inclusion, identity, and a palpable sense of belonging. The program can provide the necessary tools and resources to foster a more tolerant and inclusive society within prisons therefore providing inmates the opportunity to feel like citizens of society, not just members of tolerant religious groups. This inclusive approach could potentially impact prisoners like Hassan El Haski, to disengage from violent extremism and hopefully ensure a smooth transition towards integration upon release.

Concluding remarks

Realistically, UNESCO's cross-sectoral programs, particularly GCED, address most, if not, all the various 'push' and 'pull' factors which can be conducive to radicalization and violent extremism that would ultimately lead to terrorism. For instance, the GCED program provides unique tools for the youth to critically question their susceptibility and vulnerability to the lure of terrorists, who might offer them a sense of belonging; however, by providing them with high-quality of education, a strong sense of identity and citizenship is already formed. It is not contemporary knowledge that as rational human beings, regardless of education, social class, race, and religion, we feel the fundamental need 'to belong' to a specific social group whether for a good or bad cause. For this matter, the full implementation of a GCED program, particularly in multiethnic societies, such as those of contemporary European cities with great numbers of second-generation citizens and also prisons, would promote a universal value founded upon inclusivity thus setting a precedent for a common and more tolerant culture.

The overall success of UNESCO's cross-sectoral programs implemented either individually or collectively would provide member states with a great number of opportunities to enhance their cohesion with the International Community and create a stronger sense of global citizenship. Nevertheless, some challenges have come to light in the process of implementation, especially when members do not uphold their commitment to UNESCO's mission, to strengthen international peace, promote inclusiveness, and enhance national and international security. To achieve greater success together, member states must be held accountable for assessing and acknowledging the works of UNESCO as crucial to the development of their particular national foreign policy while halting to indulge the rise of populism that celebrates narrow social and political identity and vilifies minorities and migrants. The rise of populism, rather than contributing to the organization's mission and values, deteriorates and harms multilateralism and collective efforts therefore increasing the threats and vulnerabilities for the rise of violent extremism. We remain confident that the slow, but sure process of implementing the cross-sectoral programs across the world along with the participation of all international actors, would bring tangible and ever-lasting results, and ultimately eradicate the threats of violent extremism that are conducive to terrorism.

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