



EX POST PAPER

Empowering young people to successfully participate in PCVE

'Listen to young people, really to what they say, not what you want them to say.'

Kofi Annan

Introduction

Successful participation and engagement of youth in the prevention and countering of violent extremism (PCVE) has a beneficial impact far beyond the scope of a given activity or organisation. In order to sustain such successful youth participation (SYP), young people should be empowered to contribute to the process in a valuable way. On an individual level, empowerment means gaining control of one's life by being skilled, knowledgeable and confident in one's ability to create community change. Young people's capacities should be strengthened on this level of empowerment, as SYP calls for knowledge, skills and personal development.

This ex post paper builds upon lessons learned from the RAN YOUNG meeting 'Empowering young people to successfully participate in P/CVE'. The RAN YOUNG Empowerment Table (Table 1, see Conclusion) offers an overview of the individual-level empowerment categories and elements required for SYP in PCVE. It addresses young people wishing to actively participate in PCVE, as well as first-line practitioners and policymakers wishing to organise successful and meaningful youth participation.

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the RAN Centre of Excellence, the European Commission or any other RAN YOUNG institution or participant.

'I firmly believe that young people are uniquely placed to contribute to counter-extremism efforts within their communities as role models, teachers, family members, friends and mentors, and I have no doubts as to their capacity to positively shape the world they will inherit.'

Kofi Annan

Youth empowerment as a precondition for successful youth participation (SYP)

Youth participation is a human right, and it constitutes a key priority on the UN youth agenda ⁽¹⁾. However, young people can only participate in and contribute successfully to the debate on radicalisation, when they are empowered. At present, 'young people in all parts of the world still face a serious array of development challenges, and their needs and aspirations are regularly overlooked' ⁽²⁾. On the one hand, youth empowerment calls for inclusive SYP and leadership within organisations and communities. On the other, young people should have the capacities and opportunities they need to act effectively. These two elements combined will produce engaged young citizens, willing and able to influence decision-making processes and act as positive agents of change, as they address local, national and international social issues in innovative ways ⁽³⁾.

SYP entails young people participating on equal terms with adults, or working independently, in organisations and at all stages of programming and policymaking: design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. But for this to happen, mechanisms must be put in place that grant young people an active role where their voice is heard and respected. Young people themselves, as well as the related programmes, policies, organisations, and society as a whole stand to benefit from young people's engagement that is truly meaningful. To be able to genuinely engage and play an informed and effective role in programmes and activities, young people should also be given scope for growth ⁽⁴⁾.

The RAN YOUNG meeting in Nice focused on one of the preconditions of SYP: capacity-strengthening of young people. Empowering young people by consolidating their capacities is vital if we are to ensure that they acquire the tools they need: to be able to reach out to others effectively, to be prepared to overcome

'A flower can only grow and flourish if certain preconditions are met. For example, plants need water and sun to grow and bloom. This also applies to Meaningful Youth Participation. MYP cannot be established without certain preconditions: 1) capacity strengthening (the water), and 2) an enabling environment (the sun).'

CHOICE

⁽¹⁾ See the United Nations (UN) fact sheet on youth participation (<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-participation.pdf>).

⁽²⁾ See the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace (<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/Youth-GPS.html>).

⁽³⁾ See p. 14 of <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/Youth-GPS/> online.

⁽⁴⁾ See the Choice for Youth and Sexuality Manual of 31 October 2017 (How to integrate meaningful youth participation in your organisation and programme).

'Annan always says: "You are never too young to lead and you are never too old to learn". Empowerment is not given to youth by someone else. Youth have to empower themselves. Take the seats, enter the room, take up space in civil society. We are powerful already; we are the largest generation in the world. We need to organise ourselves. Both locally and internationally. What we liked about Kofi Annan: when he asked us to speak about the problem, he wanted to listen to what we say as young people, not to repeat what everybody else is saying. I got empowered by the programme "Extremely together". Let bad things empower us instead of demotivate us. Tight international networks are one of the powers and opportunities. Keep on encouraging each other. Keep positive and full of hope! Let's build a movement!'

Bjorn Ihler, Extremely together

obstacles or challenges, and to be motivated to resolve one of the most pressing issues of our generation and our time.

The RAN YOUNG Empowerment Table (Table 1) featured in this paper sets out the capacity-strengthening elements young people need to have in place in order to actively and successfully engage in PCVE. Youth participation can take very different forms: for instance, adults may engage young people to support their own causes, or alternatively, young people may initiate shared decision-making processes and projects. This latter case might be

considered a form of SYP, where involving young people means generating impact, and where letting them contribute to PCVE with their own expertise means making them equal partners. The SYP outlook is the opposite of a 'ticking the box' type of mentality.

For the purposes of this paper, SYP refers to young people who set up their own PCVE initiatives with sustainable local impact. This concept of a concrete outcome proved very effective in the RAN YOUNG meeting in Nice, where participants discussed what capacities should be strengthened while envisaging the concrete outcomes.

Empowering young people to set up their own local PCVE initiatives

A major component of youth engagement that is often overlooked is youth empowerment. When youth are 'empowered', they have the skills, critical awareness and opportunities to positively impact their own lives as well as the lives of other individuals, organisations and communities. And in order to truly empower youth, our society has to be deliberate and purposeful about the way youth are incorporated into communities and organisations.

Youth empowerment means different things for different people. It may take the form of a small act of kindness or empathy which changes the life of a single youth, or of the voices of thousands of young people, calling out for change or progress, resonating throughout the world. It is increasingly vital and necessary that young people

'My empowerment came through other young people. Young people encouraged me to pursue my dreams and supported my ideas. We can empower each other. It doesn't have to be top down. Peer-to-peer empowerment is strong and created as snowball effect, a movement.'

Mimoun Berrissoun, Extremely together

are empowered in order to meet the challenges in PCVE. Young people must be well prepared to meet this most difficult of challenges, not only professionally, but also mentally, and more importantly, in a sustainable manner for their own lives.

Youth Empowered Solutions (YES!) distinguishes two levels of youth empowerment ⁽⁵⁾.

- **Individual level:** youth empowerment means exercising power over one's life by being skilled, critically aware and active in creating community change.
- **Organisational level:** youth empowerment is the implementation of a culture, vision and system that supports youth empowerment at individual level.

In this paper, the focus is on the first level of youth empowerment, with a focus on the capacity-building of young people.

'Receiving training and learning by doing is crucial. When I first started, and to this day, I lack(ed) knowledge about how to establish a successful action plan, how to approach my target group and how to face problems with the target group. This became a problem and paused my initiative as well as demotivated me, making me feel I was not the right person to take part in the project.'

RAN YOUNG participant

Strengthening the capacities of young people

RAN YOUNG has defined three categories of capacity-building, which form the basis of a PCVE youth empowerment programme.

Capacity-building and empowerment in such a programme entail:

- **knowledge** empowerment
- **personal** empowerment
- **skills** empowerment.

These categories of empowerment are presented in the sections that follow. Interpretation of each category may differ from person to person, and it is evident that all the categories are interconnected. RAN YOUNG's description of the categories is set out below and this will be used as a basis in future.

Knowledge empowerment

Knowledge is power. Before being able to contribute to PCVE, young people need to have a fundamental understanding (both theoretical and practical) of the subject ⁽⁶⁾. Knowledge and information are the first port of call when setting up a project. Many PCVE professionals acquire their knowledge through experience and by learning on the job. They are also aided by training programmes and education opportunities. This knowledge is consolidated to help them become informed actors who use this capacity to engage in action. Sharing information and experiences on successful initiatives empowers and motivates youth to join or create

⁽⁵⁾ Youth Empowered Solutions (YES!) is a national non-profit working to create just and thriving communities — and empowered youth are a crucial part of its staff. Some 52 % of the staff are high-school students who work part-time in decision-making capacities toward all critical functions of the organisation, including strategic planning, programme design, training, fundraising and hiring. By engaging youth in all aspects of the work, YES! and its partners become more equitable, creative, and powerful at creating community solutions (<http://www.youthempoweredolutions.org/the-yes-youth-empowerment-model-definition/>).

⁽⁶⁾ See the Oxford Dictionary definition of knowledge (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/knowledge>).

new projects or platforms. One's confidence typically increases as one amasses knowledge. Self-assurance and confidence in ones' own initiative, movement or decisions are strikes for success.

The following types of knowledge are considered to be crucial in PCVE and project development:

- an understanding of radicalisation/violent extremism/terrorism, both **theoretically** and from **first-hand knowledge**:
 - push and pull factors
 - protective factors
 - root causes
 - different ideologies
- an understanding of prevention work — **the prevention triangle**:
 - successful interventions for each level of prevention
- an understanding of youth empowerment, involvement and participation
- policies on PCVE and youth participation (local, national and international)
- project development:
 - how to establish a project plan and strategy
 - legal framework.

Two inspiring practices in terms of knowledge empowerment are presented below. Both **YouthCAN** and **#YouthWagingPeace** held knowledge-empowering workshops for the RAN YOUNG participants in Nice.

GOOD PRACTICE

YouthCAN — Kelsey Bjornsgaard

The Youth Civil Activism Network from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD)

A workshop on the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism

Kelsey Bjornsgaard is a programme manager at the ISD where she manages the organisation's youth empowerment project, the Youth Civil Activism Network (YouthCAN). She held a workshop on PVE for RAN YOUNG participants. Stressing the need to start with an examination of extremism rather than a focus on violence, she began the session with a definition of extremism. The ISD defines extremism as 'the advocacy of a system of belief that posits the superiority and dominance of one "in-group" over all "out-groups", propagating a dehumanising, "othering" mindset that is antithetical to the universal application of human rights'. She noted that there is no one, single accepted definition for extremism and that it can vary greatly across different contexts. These ideas are influenced by how one defines 'in-groups' (the people one is affiliated with) and 'out-groups' (the others). This process of defining in- and out-groups is a natural part of identity formation, but it can become **dangerous when the out-group is depicted as a threat** and an in-group encourages action based upon this perspective.

The ISD views extremism as a diverse concept, and distinguishes between many different types: left-wing, right-wing, nationalist, single issue or special interest, and religious extremism. At the moment, right-wing extremism is a particularly pressing issue, especially in Europe. Other alarming trends discussed in the workshop include **reciprocal radicalisation** or **cumulative extremism** (where antagonistic extremist groups fuel each other, i.e. they each escalate their rhetoric and actions in response to each other's activity), the internationalisation of extremist movements, populism and polarisation and the mainstreaming of extremism, especially of the far right (groups formerly on the fringe enter the mainstream, where they impact discourse and drive polarisation, appealing to people who would normally never associate with such groups).

Kelsey outlined three broad classes of PCVE approaches: primary, secondary and tertiary, all of which involve different activities suitable for different audiences. While all the types of programmes are important, she emphasised **the need for more preventative approaches**.

Finally, Kelsey stressed that anyone could be an extremist, regardless of social or economic class or education level. It is personal and situational conditions that support radicalisation: these include grievances or injustices (both real and perceived); a search for a sense of belonging or identity, answers or meaning, excitement and heroism, a sense of control; an opportunity for justice; simplistic explanations for the state of affairs; a sense of urgency; or the absence of critical thinking skills.

GOOD PRACTICE

#YouthWagingPeace — Raul Rios

UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP)

A workshop on the European strategy for youth

Raul Rios, one of the co-authors of the #YouthWagingPeace guide — a youth-led guide on the prevention of violent extremism — held a workshop for RAN YOUNG participants on the European strategy for youth and on how PCVE is effected through Europe's major actors: 'When you want to know what an organisation's priorities are, look at the funding. Where does their money go?'

Participants positioned themselves in the place of these large bodies, to understand, from their perspectives, how they function.

The European Union (EU). The European Commission, which is the executive body of the EU, works on PCVE through the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME). Its main role is to assist EU Member States. The Commission has provided support to governmental and non-governmental actors in developing EU-wide cooperation and actions to strengthen individual and community resilience against extremism and radicalisation.

The Council of Europe (CoE). The CoE promotes democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It is an independent entity from the EU. They have a youth department and a long history of working with young people in different youth programmes (like Erasmus!) to empower and engage them. However, their focus is not directly on PCVE.

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The OSCE addresses a wide range of security-related concerns, including arms control, policing strategies and counter-terrorism. The OSCE works from a security perspective.

Who is who: EU, CoE, OSCE

‘Personally, I think skills empowerment is the key for youth to engage in PCVE. The more skills you have, the more motivated and confident you feel to take part in PCVE and to confront the problems it might have derived from.’

RAN YOUNG participant

Personal empowerment

For SYP in PCVE, young people need a foundation of the right **action** mindset. Personal empowerment entails growth as a person, and burgeoning confidence when performing a job, or for example, engaging in PCVE. Developing self-reflection and problem-solving skills makes confrontation of difficult issues easier. It is essential that young people **develop confidence** in themselves and their actions, because this fosters **the right mindset for them to pursue their visions, dreams, hopes and goals.**

This type of empowerment is focused on strengthening the overall well-being of the young actors.

Personal empowerment requires the capacity ⁽⁷⁾ to:

- understand and manage emotions
- set and achieve positive goals
- make responsible decisions
- develop and maintain **positive relationships**
- increase confidence
- learn self-reflection and self-care
- build cultural awareness
- explore **motivation, ambition and drive.**

⁽⁷⁾ See the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE) research brief on social emotional learning (<https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/scope-pub-social-emotional-learning-research-brief.pdf>).

The inspiring practice **Extremely Together**, described below, held a personal empowering workshop with RAN YOUNG participants in Nice.

GOOD PRACTICE

Extremely Together

A Kofi Annan Foundation Initiative — Mimoun Berrissoun

A workshop on win-win situations

Mimoun Berrissoun, one of the young leaders from Extremely Together, initiated a workshop on creating 'win-win situations'. Young people might often find themselves frustrated because of the current state of affairs. However, frustration is not always the best starting point for holding a conversation. Handling conflict situations depends on the power relations of the two (or more) parties, on how close the relationship is between you and the other party, and on the starting point for each of the parties. These variables are different for each person, and for this reason, you might not be able to relate to others' experiences.

The best way to resolve a social conflict is to negotiate a win-win situation, in which (creative) agreements are drawn up that satisfy both groups. Such a situation benefits all parties involved, especially in the long run.

Mimoun provided tips and tricks on how to achieve such a situation:

- Be critical about your own thinking: Am I right? What does the other party have to gain?
- Base your actions on human rights and basic values.
- Try to keep the bigger picture in mind, and remain flexible.
- Take action and speak before violent extremism arises.
- In negotiations, it is always about the intention: ensure yours is a good one.
- Couch the discussion in terms of needs and goals, and avoid using threats.

Skills empowerment

This refers to the process of consolidating the skills of young people, to allow them to make decisions effectively, interact with their peers positively and act as community advocates ⁽⁸⁾. These practical skills must be honed if they are to become agents for change in their communities. When young people have access to skill empowerment, they are more likely to engage in greater projects and contribute to society.

RAN YOUNG believes that young people can be motivated and feel confident in their ability to bring about change when they have worked on developing **the following skills** and competences:

⁽⁸⁾ See the YES! Youth Empowerment Model definition (<http://www.youthempowerededsolutions.org/the-yes-youth-empowerment-model-definition/>).

- **presentation:** personal and professional
 - storytelling
 - argumentation
 - the ability to differentiate yourself
- communication
 - dialogue techniques
 - ability to listen
 - diplomacy
 - influence tactics
- **networking** and building relationships with different stakeholders
- **leadership** ⁽⁹⁾
- project management
 - budgeting
 - planning
 - funding
- decision-making
- **critical, analytical and strategical thinking**
- **creating change.**

The inspiring practice **Extremely Together**, described below, held a skills empowering workshop with RAN YOUNG participants in Nice.

GOOD PRACTICE

Extremely Together

A Kofi Annan Foundation Initiative — Bjorn Ihler

A workshop on creating a movement of change

Bjorn Ihler, one of the young leaders from Extremely Together, held a workshop on creating a 'movement of change'. Movements have great power; they can overthrow regimes and create momentous world changes. The question is, How do we organise this?

The first step in creating a movement is to determine what we want to change: **What is our engaging call?** Extremists always have a strong unifying message. This allows them to clearly communicate their vision. A vision should be formulated using positive terms: we need to express what it is that we stand for, and not only what we oppose.

⁽⁹⁾ See pp. 4-5 of the YouthPower Learning publication on engaging young people in PCVE (https://static.globalinnovationexchange.org/s3fs-public/asset/document/Promising%20Practices%20in%20Engaging%20Youth%20in%20Peace%20Security_print_combined.pdf?2ZqOoW5C8mDmkuS2Zn8dzjGFK.xFhI3).

Second, locate our allies and enemies. Allies are collaborators, groups of people that would typically support our engaging call. Enemies are the groups of people who would typically oppose our vision. The aim of this step is to **identify the neutral middle ground**, and ensure our efforts are targeted at this halfway point: this is where we can gain supporters.

Finally, **the actions of impact must be defined**. What actions will we connect to our ideas?

Tips:

- build upon emotions
- make sure the actions are identifiable
- make it personal
- tragedy triggers
- use music, art and social media to increase the appeal
- focus on overall narratives
- think about the next steps; plan for success!

Key messages





- Individual-level youth empowerment is key for SYP.
- When setting up a youth empowerment programme, use young people's input as an evidence base.
- A youth empowerment programme should cover three types of youth empowerment:
 1. knowledge
 2. personal
 3. skills.
- Youth empowerment on the individual level aims to increase the confidence of young people to take action, by providing them with the right tools, connections, knowledge and opportunities.

Conclusion: The RAN YOUNG Empowerment Table

When setting up a PVE youth empowerment programme aiming to strengthen capacities, it is self-evident that young people must be included in its development. When identifying which capacities are needed, let young people determine what they need. Use this as the evidence base of the programme.

The RAN YOUNG Empowerment Table, created by RAN YOUNG in September 2018 in Nice, is shown below.

Table 1 RAN YOUNG Empowerment Table (September 2018, Nice)

 RAN YOUNG Empowerment Table		
Knowledge empowerment	Personal empowerment	Skills empowerment
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of radicalisation, violent extremism/terrorism both theoretically and first-hand-knowledge <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Push & pull factors - Protective factors - Root causes - Different ideologies • Understanding of prevention work: the prevention triangle <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Successful interventions in each level of prevention • Understanding of youth empowerment, involvement and participation • Policies on P/CVE and youth participation (local, national, international) • Project development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How to establish a project plan & strategy - Legal framework 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand and manage emotions • Set and achieve positive goals • Make responsible decisions • Develop and maintain positive relationships • Increase confidence • Learn self-reflection & self-care • Build cultural awareness • Explore motivation, ambition & drive 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation: personal and professional <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Storytelling - Argumentation - The ability to differentiate yourself • Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dialogue techniques - Ability to listen - Diplomacy - Influence tactics • How to find funding possibilities? • Networking and building relationships with different stakeholders • Leadership • Project management • Decision making • Critical, analytical and strategical thinking • Creating change