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SPECIAL OVERVIEW PAPER

RAN Youth & Education

RAN Activities on Youth Work and Education

Introduction

This specialised paper explores key themes of the RAN Youth and Education Working Group (RAN Y&E). These themes are topics related to:

- working with youth in and around schools and supporting teachers;
- working with youth and supporting youth workers;
- youth participation in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE).

The RAN Y&E is a working group for cross-collaboration for a “pedagogical climate” around youth. This climate encompasses parenting style(s), role of the environment in guiding children, and culture and beliefs surrounding children’s upbringing. Keeping with the adage “it takes a village to raise a child”, there is a clear need to work together with parents and societal organisations to establish a unified approach to the upbringing of youth (pedagogical climate). RAN Y&E looks into the role of youth workers and professionals within the school system to identify the best ways to achieve this.

Currently chaired by Dennis de Vries (The Peaceful Foundation, the Netherlands) and Jean-Philippe Fons (Marne department, France), the RAN Y&E Working Group constituency consists of youth workers, teachers and education staff. Established in 2020, the Y&E Working Group combines efforts of the previous Youth, Families and Communities Working Group (co-chaired by Werner Prinzjakowitsch and Kelly Simcock until July 2019 and Milla Perukangas from July 2019 on), the Education Working Group (co-chaired by Karin Herremans and Michele Hassen), and the Prevent Working Group (that was co-chaired by Kelly Simcock and Peter Krerko).

This paper elaborates on how the key themes have been addressed by RAN throughout its existence. It includes the meetings and activities, papers, practices, and key lessons learned and recommendations identified around the key themes. All recommendations are based on the papers connected to the relevant paragraph. More detailed explanations and background information on these recommendations can be found in the corresponding papers. In addition, it indicates gaps that need further exploration. The paper will first elaborate on RAN activities dedicated to working with youth as the target audience and subsequently as partners in the P/CVE approach. It will also focus on separate efforts undertaken to support teachers (and other educational staff) and youth workers.

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Working with youth

Young people constitute by far the highest percentage of individuals joining violent extremist groups ⁽¹⁾. Previously considered merely as the source of the radicalisation problem, since 2015, the RAN network realises that young people are also an underexplored resource in the fight against extremism. According to the United Nations' [action plan to prevent violent extremism](#) of 2015, young people are invaluable partners in the struggle against violent extremism ⁽²⁾. Sarah Sewall, United States Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, noted in her closing remarks at the Global Youth CVE Summit in 2015 ⁽³⁾: "It is time to stop thinking of youth as a problem to be solved and start thinking of youth as the problem solvers".

This means it is important to work both with vulnerable youth (to prevent them from radicalising) and with youth as partners in the multi-agency cooperation to include them in the solution. All first-line practitioners involved in the local P/CVE approach such as community police officers, prison staff, reintegration officers, psychologists and social workers work with vulnerable people, and therefore also with vulnerable youth. Teachers and youth workers are the professionals who work with the youth target group in its entirety. For this reason, their role is invaluable in preventing radicalisation at an early stage, and in partnering up with youth. This chapter will first discuss working with vulnerable youth who are in need of support. It will also show how to engage youth as part of the P/CVE approach.

Working with vulnerable youth

Young people from all backgrounds may become radicalised ⁽⁴⁾. However, there are factors that make some more vulnerable to radicalisation than others. Factors include struggling with identity, family issues, feelings of frustration, feelings of alienation and exclusion, experiencing a traumatic event, experiencing discrimination, and becoming distanced from their cultural or religious background. Any of these factors may render youth more susceptible to believing that extremists' claims are the answer to their problems. External factors can also play a role in their vulnerability, such as tension in the community or stressful events affecting the country that a child is coming from. In fact, it is a kaleidoscope of factors, which create infinite individual combinations that make young people vulnerable to radicalisation ⁽⁵⁾.

Working with isolated youth

When children and teenagers are isolated and out of reach for teachers and youth workers, it should raise a concern, also in regards to radicalisation. Isolated youngsters easily come into contact with one type of message, instead of multiple views and opinions they might take in when engaging with different people. During a [RAN meeting on drop-outs](#), one experienced exit worker used this formula to describe radicalisation: *time + emotional need + meeting radicalised people = opportunity for radicalisation*.

A logical strategy to avoid such a scenario is keeping youngsters in school and keeping them connected with society. However, simply being at school is not enough. Teachers frequently witness students in their classrooms who are physically there but whose hearts and minds have already dropped out of school and lost connection with the

⁽¹⁾ Euer, K., van Vossole, A., Groenen, A., & Van Bouchaute, K. (2014). *Strengthening Resilience against Violent Radicalisation (STRESAVIORA). Part I: Literature analysis*. Brussels: Federal Public Service Home Affairs. https://www.bounce-resiliencetools.eu/sites/default/files/content/download/files/stresaviora_research_report_part_3_0.pdf

⁽²⁾ United Nations. (2015). *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. Report of the Secretary-General*. United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, pp. 17-18. http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674

⁽³⁾ Sewall, S. (2015). *Closing Remarks at the Global Youth CVE Summit*. U.S. Department of State. <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/remarks/247817.htm>

⁽⁴⁾ See: <https://educateagainsthate.com/which-children-and-young-people-are-vulnerable-to-radicalisation/>

⁽⁵⁾ Ranstorp, M. (2016). *The Root Causes of Violent Extremism*, Issue Paper. Radicalisation Awareness Network. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_root-causes_jan2016_en.pdf

society. In this sense, teachers and youth workers can play a vital role in finding a way into those hearts and minds, and in providing another voice.

Meetings and papers

- [RAN Y&E, 'Youth Isolation – How to get them out of it?', 26-27 November 2020](#)
- [RAN EDU, 'Drop-outs and going back to school', Paris, 28-29 September 2017](#)

Practices ⁽⁶⁾

- Gamechangers, Dutch Police (the Netherlands). This initiative emerged as a response to the first COVID-19 wave, in which large groups of youth moved off the streets and into their homes. As 86 % of the young people were found to have a gaming console, the project created 6 police teams who play online live popular games at least once a week, with the purpose to connect to young people in their digital world. Amongst the most popular are FIFA 20, Fortnite, Warzone and Call of Duty (only for 18+) ⁽⁷⁾.
- **[Drop out prevention network, The Central Helpdesk \(Belgium\)](#)**: Since 2003, this initiative works with a central helpdesk (CHD) to link youth within one week to a partner/project in the support and guidance network of Antwerp (coaching, time out, training) to avoid expulsion from school. In cases where a youth is already expelled, they work towards reintegration as quickly as possible. In 2013, the CHD started monitoring and following up on possibly radicalised youngsters/groups of youngsters in schools.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- **Adapting a school to the children's multicultural and socio-political world** is key in preventing students from dropping out of school and also guards against their possible vulnerability to radicalise. Both early school leaving and radicalisation are the results of underlying processes, such as perceived marginalisation and/or alienation. Failing to adapt the school can lead to the students losing faith in educational institutions.
- A necessary step in working with isolated youth includes **the creation of a collaborative roadmap** between stakeholders to reach out to isolated youngsters — for example, between the school environment and youth work organisations.
- Both teachers and youth workers must find ways **to create safe spaces for dialogue and interaction** with isolated young people vulnerable to radicalisation. Training must be offered to stakeholders on recognising early signs of radicalisation, creating a safe space for communication or intervention, and continuing to work proactively with young people.
- Youth workers can develop **schemes of engagement** on social media platforms to reach young people (12 or older) for one-to-one sessions or group communications. This might include building an online community for young people by young people to aid their development into active online role models.

What needs to be further explored?

- **Assess the impact of ongoing good practices** and resources tackling youth isolation and gather all these insights and practices into a practical guide for teachers and youth workers. Include innovative tools and resources to reach isolated young people, taking the regulations of each Member State into account.
- **Post-COVID-19 effects on young people** who have experienced isolation — particularly within the context of mental health — should be further investigated and addressed by RAN.

⁽⁶⁾ For more relevant practices, see the chapter related to digital youthwork.

⁽⁷⁾ Will be included in the RAN Collection 2021.

Working with child returnees

Children who are returning to Europe having either been born in or travelled to Daesh-held territories in Syria/Iraq as well as non-European children travelling from Daesh territory to Europe as a result of forced displacement deal with multiple traumas. In the first place, this is because of the violence they witnessed or participated in, but also due to the fact that their normal social, moral, emotional and cognitive development has been interrupted and corrupted by the experience of war. In addition, in the aftermath of the conflict these children are at risk of exposure to additional trauma due to the experience of (forced) migration and the resettlement process. Exposure to multiple and repeated traumas represents a significant risk to children's development and overall functioning and increases the risk of mental disorders in the future. This makes them potentially vulnerable to radicalisation later on, if proper long-term rehabilitation plans and care are absent and children are not properly socialised and reintegrated. When migrating or returning to Europe, schools can provide the children stability, which is a key factor in the reintegration process. Education plays a crucial role in making these children more resilient and restoring a sense of "normality" in their lives.

Meetings and papers

- [‘Study Visit: Returned Women and Children – Studying an Ongoing Experience on the Ground’, 10-11 December 2019](#)
- [RAN Policy & Practice Event, ‘Building resilience among young children raised in extremist environments – specifically child returnees’, Warsaw, 4 July 2018](#)
- [Issue Paper, ‘Child returnees from conflict zones’, November 2016](#)
- [RAN HLC Discussion Paper, 9 November 2016](#)

Practices

- **[Psychological treatment programme for youths at risk of radicalisation and violent extremism, Danish Institute Against Torture \(Denmark\)](#)**: The main aim of this programme is to provide psychological support to vulnerable and traumatised young people who are at risk of radicalisation and violent extremism. The second aim is to generate new knowledge for early intervention and prevention programmes.
- **[Family support Sarpsborg, Sarpsborg municipality \(Norway\)](#)**: The Sarpsborg municipality in Norway employs a holistic and systematic approach when supporting families to prevent or reverse radicalisation processes with affected family members and involved children. All municipal services, including education and youth work facilities, are required to prioritise this work.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- Prepare for **long-term, localised and stable mental health support of child** and adult returnees, who will likely be affected by post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and accompanying symptoms as well as by complex trauma.
- **Establish contact between teachers and mental health services.** The former might have a lack of knowledge on trauma effects, which might not be visible immediately upon arriving at the school. However, traumas could become visible later on; this could be at a later stage and should be diagnosed by healthcare professionals.
- **Create trauma awareness training for teachers and youth workers.**
- **Reversing radicalisation requires normalisation.** Children should be in school, learning to interact with peers and teachers in a way that supports a unified pedagogical climate around the children.
- Practitioners should explore the availability of **an alternative community for support, to help child returnees construct a new social identity.** This community includes older children who serve as positive role models and sport clubs, but engagement with the ethnic community is also needed, to restore a sense of stability and belonging. Possible involvement of the family (or, conversely, separation from the family) needs to be explored carefully, taking into account its role in the radicalisation or victimisation process, and should always prioritise the best interests of the child.

What needs to be further explored?

- How is it possible to prevent stigmatisation and isolation in the classroom? This could slow down the process of a child's reintegration.
- There is a need to further develop trauma awareness training.
- Assimilate lessons learned from working with child soldiers in other conflict zones.

Working with youth growing up in extremist families

Children growing up in a family with extremist influences are particularly vulnerable to becoming radicalised themselves. Indoctrination, an extremist social network and a lack of alternative relationships make these children extremely susceptible. The family's involvement and support are an important tool in P/CVE and exit work. In the case of protecting children being raised in extremist households, the family may actually be the root cause of the child's radicalisation. In such cases, it is highly unlikely the family will cooperate. So how can we protect these children?

Meetings and papers

- [RAN Y&E Conclusion Paper, 'Transgenerational Transmission of Extremist Ideologies – learning from adjacent fields: Cults and Gangs', online meeting, 4-5 June 2020](#)
- [RAN YF&C Academy, 'Children growing up in extremist families', Rome, 24-25 April 2019](#)
- [RAN YF&C, 'Vulnerable children who are brought up in an extremist environment', Stockholm, 21-22 June 2018](#)

Practices

- **[CAPREV Center for Assistance and Support for People Affected by Violent Radicalism and Extremism \(Belgium\)](#)**: A multidisciplinary team that works with minors and adults (on a voluntary basis) on building a bond of trust, confidentiality and disengagement from violence. **ALBUM** is the name of a tool they are testing to work on transgenerational transmission between a parent and a child. This is being used to facilitate discussions about secrets, unspoken experiences and misunderstandings.
- **[Concordia Bloggers video games "I survived terrorism", Fernando Buesa Blanco Foundation \(Spain\)](#)**: This initiative is based on the sentence: "Dialogue is the best tool to resolve conflicts". The video game is based on the testimony of a young boy (Iker) who has suffered terrorism and his experience of life is a way to demonstrate that violence only generates pain. After playing the video game, the aim is to discuss the issues in class and with friends or families. Since these topics are sometimes considered taboo, the video game can help to break the stigma. A very important objective is that through the promotion of fundamental values, it contributes effectively to prevention of the use of violence.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- Potential interventions: attending school, **offering alternative relationships**, counselling, **trauma therapy**, removing the child from their family.
- Make sure to **be aware of and give attention to what the child has lost**, instead of gained, by being taken away from the extremist setting. This may include missing friends, family and a part of their identity.
- Support from other professionals: a **pedagogical coalition of educators, care professionals and parents** is highly recommended.
- Be supportive: share insights on the child's development and process; be truthful and empathise. Make an effort to relieve the child from shame, build a trusting relationship and create an environment of critical thinking.
- Identify and address the need(s) that may be exploited by recruiters. **Open the doors to the society** via peer-to-peer mentoring that might be effective during the pre-radicalisation stage.

What needs to be further explored?

- Challenges that require attention in order to design practical solutions for professionals working within the multi-agency network. They may face difficulties **gaining access to the family** and understanding their reality or in **discovering factors that may trigger stress** within the family. In this case, they may struggle to **share information with other services**.

Working with refugee children

Refugee children are often traumatised by the dreadful experiences in the conflict zones they fled before settling in their host country. In addition, they often experience more traumatic events during their journey and after arrival in their host country, such as the lack of sufficient parental guidance and family support, stigmatisation and social isolation, introduction to conflicting values and world views, or exposure to consequences of trauma. Current research indicates that children have the capacity for resilience if we provide them with an environment for positive development⁽⁸⁾. Schools are the first system that should provide a safe space to these children. Education can bring about unique qualities in increasing general well-being by providing a structured daily rhythm and safe place for refugee children. This can also guard against the risk of being vulnerable to potential (future) radicalisation.

Meetings and papers

- [RAN EDU, 'Safeguarding troubled refugee children in the classroom', Zagreb, 3-4 October 2019](#)

Practices

- Teaching traumatised children (the Netherlands):** Teaching traumatised children is a two-day training workshop for school teams. The training is based upon the Dutch book *Lesgeven aan getraumatiseerde kinderen* by L. Coppens, M. Schneijderberg and C. van Kregten. The workshop is delivered in eight modules and the aim is to train teachers and other school personnel to recognise trauma symptoms in children and help traumatised children to learn and strengthen their resilience. Applying a trauma-sensitive approach with children within the schools protects them from radicalisation.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- Collaboration between education and health professionals** is necessary to ensure effective long-term care of and support for traumatised children.
- Based on the current experiences of caregivers present at the Zagreb meeting, it would be useful to implement: a **care plan for refugee children**, a child assessment system and a multi-agency childcare system.
- Promoting the approach of trauma-sensitive schools** has the greatest potential to positively influence all students, regardless of trauma history. Students in trauma-sensitive schools cultivate lasting resilience, which leads to significant improvements in behaviour.
- The school only plays a partial role in the process of providing care for refugee children. To achieve high levels of resilience amongst pupils, **extracurricular activities should be included**. This requires the creation of a pedagogical coalition of educators, care professionals and parents.

Working with youth as a partner in P/CVE

Young people are consistently underused in P/CVE. As stated before, they are mainly seen as the problem instead of as part of the solution. However, many of them have the potential to challenge other young people who have taken the extremist path and to prevent peers from being attracted to radicalism and violent groups. In addition,

⁽⁸⁾ Benard, B. (2004). *Resiliency: What we have learned*. WestEd.

they generally have a better understanding of technology, communication and the target audience. They can play an important role in developing and evaluating campaigns and initiatives as well as in policymaking.

How to organise youth engagement

Young people can be engaged in P/CVE in several ways. For example, the RAN YOUNG Platform recently engaged them in the fight against online disinformation and organised a youth review panel, where they reviewed practices included in the RAN Collection. However, in general, there is a gap between frontline practitioners and youth. In 2018, RAN developed an approach on how to engage youth in P/CVE that tries to bridge this gap and to facilitate better coordination towards P/CVE goals: the Name, Map, Build, Lead (NMBL) approach. This approach offers a step-by-step guide on how best to engage young people in any P/CVE initiative.

Meetings and papers

- [RAN YOUNG Platform, 'Galvanising youth in combatting online disinformation', online meeting, 7-8 December 2020](#)
- [RAN YOUNG Platform, Guidelines for local authorities: How to organise a youth review panel', online meeting', 1-2 October 2020](#)
- [Issue Paper, 'A Nimble \(NMBL\) Approach to Youth Engagement in P/CVE, 2018'](#)
- [RAN YOUNG, 'Policy Recommendations', March 2018](#)
- [RAN, 'Involving young people - Main lessons learned', Vienna, 1-2 June 2016](#)

Practices

- **[Peer to Peer \(P2P\): Challenging Extremism and Facebook Global Digital Challenge programmes, EdVenture Partners \(United States\)](#)**: These programmes are global university youth initiatives and international competitions that use the power of student innovation to challenge prejudice, hate and extremism. A team of students, led by their professor and someone from EdVenture Partners, develop and produce a real campaign against disinformation and extremism, including measurable impact on their peers and community. At the end of the semester the best teams compete in regional and local competitions to win prizes.
- **[The Youth Civil Activism Network \(YouthCAN\) \(United Kingdom\)](#)**: YouthCAN encourages young people to engage in the prevention and countering of violent extremism and raise their voices as important messengers and decision-makers who can influence P/CVE policy. Through training, they strengthen the knowledge and skills of youth activists.
- **[Extremely Together \(Switzerland\)](#)**: The Extremely Together Roadshow consists of a series of peer-to-peer workshops aimed at training youth in schools as well as young leaders in local communities across Europe in countering violent extremism (CVE). The aims of the workshop include building critical thinking skills and equipping young people with the practical skills needed to identify, resist and reject violent extremist propaganda. These skills also serve to support young people in becoming active citizens, challenging negative stereotypes, and supporting peers who may be struggling with issues related to extremism or extremist recruitment.

Lessons learned and recommendations

Please find below four recommendations of the NMBL approach:

- **Name the problem.** When you want to engage youth in initiatives to counter violent extremism, it is important to **identify** how violent extremism is manifesting, what the drivers are, how youth are affected by it and what other dynamics are important in this particular situation.

- **Map the solution.** You need to decide who the main **focus** of the initiative is, what the main **goal** is, what skills you will empower young people with, and if it is a youth-driven or youth-supported initiative. When it comes to the last decision, it is important that you aim for a balance between highly engaged youth and their communities of support.
- **Build with the best tools.** To optimise youth engagement, it is important to aim for the following: **genuinely collaborate** with the young people involved, understand how they use technology and how it could target your audience effectively, be clear on when events will be held and how much time will be required, and choose a neutral, safe, easily accessible environment that is also conducive to being productive for your activities. It is also important to be transparent and professional when addressing sensitive information and to reward the time and effort of the young people.
- **Lead by example.** Conduct yourself in a way that a **role model** does and be an inspiring leader who communicates effectively, is transparent and invests genuinely in the relationship with young people.

What needs to be further explored?

- Methods to organise youth engagement in policy development processes.

Youth engagement through the development of local initiatives

RAN aims to empower young people who wish to play an active role in P/CVE. In 2019, the RAN YOUNG Empowerment Academy supported the development of local initiatives and organised sessions for young activists. During these sessions they improved their personal development, strengthened their knowledge on P/CVE, and developed the competences and skills needed to become a youth influencer and/or to create their own local initiative.

Meetings and papers

- [RAN YOUNG, 'Guidelines for young activists: how to set up a P/CVE initiative Paper 4', Berlin, 21-22 October 2019](#)
- [RAN YOUNG, 'Guidelines for young activists: how to set up a P/CVE initiative Paper 3', Madrid, 10-11 September 2019](#)
- [RAN YOUNG, 'Guidelines for young activists: how to set up a P/CVE initiative Paper 2', Bordeaux, 7-8 May 2019](#)
- [RAN YOUNG, 'Guidelines for young activists: how to set up a P/CVE initiative Paper 1', Amsterdam, 25-27 March 2019](#)

Practices

- **[180 Grad Wende: Deradicalisation & Multiplier trainings \(Germany\)](#)**: This social prevention initiative in Cologne, Germany, consists of a network of young people, multipliers and coaches engaged as street workers. They are trained in multiple fields, like moral courage and the prevention of drug addiction, and are able to tackle radicalisation at its roots. At the same time, they spread counter-narratives and serve as role models for the target group.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- When young activists are developing initiatives it is useful to look at the Nimble (NMBL) Approach to Youth Engagement in P/CVE (see paper and key rules mentioned in the previous specific topic). The first steps for young activists are to understand the **context** within which they are operating and to **map** the important aspects of proposed solutions.
- Take your time to develop a **detailed project plan** and make use of existing tools like the SMART tool and the SWOT analysis.

- **Teamwork and personal development** are fundamental when working in the field of P/CVE. Members of your team should cooperate effectively in order to attain goals, but you should also be able to look at yourself, know your strengths and shortcomings, and be willing to move and change.
- It is important that young activists are considered **professional** so others are willing to cooperate with them. This means they should be reliable, punctual, responsible, flexible, disciplined, and have strong communication skills and a continuous focus on their goals.

Education

Education is a universally recognised fundamental human right ⁽⁹⁾. In addition, it is also a need for displaced youth, as it provides protection, stability, essential knowledge and life skills and is key to building core common values. It is important to recognise, utilise and enhance the strengths and assets of children and youth through an intentionally positive and prosocial approach. Doing so will enable them to be agents of positive change in their communities ⁽¹⁰⁾. Education can help young people to develop interpersonal skills for dialogue, to face disagreement and to learn peaceful approaches to change. In addition, schools are the place where they can develop critical thinking skills, which they need to investigate claims and question the legitimacy and appeal of extremist beliefs. Moreover, it can help youth to develop resilience against extremist narratives and acquire the social-emotional skills they need to overcome their doubts and to constructively engage in society without resorting to violence ⁽¹¹⁾.

The role of education in the prevention of radicalisation

Schools are key institutions to strengthen resilience and prevent youngsters from being attracted to radical ideologies and organisations. Additionally, teachers are often amongst the first to note possible changes in behaviour that could indicate signs of radicalisation. This makes teachers important interlocutors for those affected (i.e. the individuals themselves, and their relatives and friends). Assuming this responsibility, teachers should engage with the crucial issues that can contribute to radicalisation processes and address the concerns and grievances that are exploited by radical religious and right-wing propaganda.

Meetings and papers

- [RAN EDU, 'Making a difference: the dissemination and implementation of RAN EDU lessons for PVE-E', Dublin, 21-22 February 2019](#)
- [RAN EDU, 'The role of primary education in preventing radicalisation: a realistic and optimistic perspective', Lisbon, 15-16 November 2018](#)
- [RAN EDU, 'Free speech, extremism and the prevention of radicalisation in higher education', Manchester, 8-9 February 2018](#)
- [Issue Paper, 'The role of education in preventing radicalisation, 12 December 2016'](#)
- [RAN EDU, 'School leaders and prevention of radicalisation', Antwerp, 19-20 April 2016](#)
- [RAN Education kick-off meeting, 25-26 November 2015](#)
- [RAN, 'Manifesto for Education – Empowering Educators and Schools', 2014](#)

⁽⁹⁾ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26; Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 28.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Norwegian Refugee Council. (2017). *Countering Violent Extremism and the Role of Education in Humanitarian Action*. Norwegian Refugee Council. <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/position-papers/170622-cve-and-the-role-of-education-in-humanitarian-action---fv.pdf>

⁽¹¹⁾ Unesco. (2016). *A Teacher's guide on the prevention of violent extremism*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000244676>

Practices

- **IC Thinking (United Kingdom)**: IC Thinking uses an evidence-based method of intervention science based on the psychometric research of integrative complexity (IC). The aim is to equip people of all ages to work collaboratively with many types of differences — viewpoints, life stances, cultural norms — instead of moving into destructive polarisations and violence.
- **Extreme Dialogue (United Kingdom)**: This initiative aims to build resilience to radicalisation amongst young people through a series of open-access educational resources and highly engaging short films. These films explore prejudice and identity, and they foster critical thinking and digital literacy skills. Extreme Dialogue encourages safe and constructive discussions around extremism and radicalisation in educational or community settings in Canada, Germany, Hungary and the United Kingdom.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- Younger children in *primary education* straddle the two worlds of school and community unlike any other age group, and, as such, any approach should be mindful of this context and include families and the wider community, where appropriate. The school needs to create the conditions where pupils are being exposed to democracy, so they can experience it to learn what it actually means. **Democracy** is not primarily about knowing the constitution. Rather, it is built on the **experience that one's interests matter** and that they are represented in public debate. Encouraging student participation in schools is a means to foster bonds to society as a whole, and to prevent frustration and alienation.
- *Higher education* provides a strong foundation for an expansion of the four Ps (pursue, prevent, protect and prepare) of CVE to include a fifth P. The additional 'P' **promotes a positive and constructive range of activities to boost the public domain** and the promotion of fundamental values.
- Clear procedures, effective support structures and **strong local networks are key to handling cases of radicalisation**. However, it takes time to build and sustain such networks. It is important to establish these structures prior to any cases of violent extremism, and to inform and train teachers on how to use them.

A shared pedagogical climate

The neighbourhood is the central place where youth can develop towards being active citizens of our democratic societies. Many different actors in the neighbourhood, such as teachers and youth workers, play a role in creating places for practicing democracy. It is helpful if schools and partners in the neighbourhood (including youth workers) work together. If this is done correctly, we can strengthen social capital and counteract processes of radicalisation and polarisation. In practice, however, we see that this collaboration between school and youth work does not always achieve the intended results.

Meetings and papers

- [RAN, 'Education and youth work: towards an effective collaboration', 8-9 April 2021](#)

Practices

- **The Peaceable school and neighbourhood (the Netherlands)**: The Peaceable School is a whole-school approach for primary schools that aims to cultivate a democratic community where children's voices are heard, and where children and teachers learn to resolve conflict constructively. Students are involved and learn to adopt responsibility for the good of their community's social environment.

- **JES vzw (Belgium):** This is an initiative targeting children and young people in Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent. JES starts from a positive view of urbanity that children and young people should feel at home in their city. Through several activities and projects, JES supports young people in searching for their place in the city and for their own competences. JES gives them a nudge, so they feel empowered and can grow as individuals, as members of a group and as full residents of the city ⁽¹²⁾.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- It is important for **young people to feel they are part of society in order to prevent radicalisation and extremism**. When young people feel connected to the different social circles in their environment, it becomes easier to bridge the gap to what they consider to be different people or groups, and thus accept inclusiveness.
- It is considered important to investigate how a collaboration between different stakeholders should be structured. An important first step is to **"map" the neighbourhood** or district and to identify the parties or stakeholders working with young people in this area. It was considered good practice to investigate which platforms already exist and how you can be part of them.
- The Peaceable School as well as JES stressed the importance of **a shared (pedagogical) vision** in order to facilitate collaboration. They both discuss with other actors in the neighbourhood what their vision is and how they can learn from each other. This shared perspective could be strengthened by organising activities in the neighbourhood.
- Finally, it is key to think about safeguarding a **sustainable cooperation** up front: How is it possible to ensure that this is not a one-off project, but that we will still be doing this in 5 years?

Schools as labs of democracy

The 2015 Paris Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education ⁽¹³⁾ stated: "The primary purpose of education is not only to develop knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes and to embed fundamental values, but also to help young people - in close cooperation with parents and families - to become active, responsible, open-minded members of society."

This entails reconsidering certain teaching methods and modifying curricula. It also includes improving institutional structures to strengthen teachers and schools as facilitators who will build and strengthen democratic values amongst students and empower them as active citizens. A democratic school ethos encourages the promotion of freedom of opinion, minority rights, equality before the law, and the right to life and physical integrity as key principles of democracy. By promoting representation and participation as well as strengthening communalities and shared values, such an ethos facilitates in challenging extremist narratives of authoritarian rule, homogeneity, and ethnic or religious supremacy. Part of this involves addressing controversial and conflicting interests. Polarisation cannot be challenged by disregarding sensitive issues and conflicts; instead, teaching can provide safe spaces to address such issues and to encourage students to express concerns, while seeking mutually accepted principles that facilitate compromise.

Meetings and papers

- [RAN, 'Transforming schools into labs for democracy. A companion to preventing violent radicalisation through education', October 2018](#)
- [RAN EDU & RAN RVT, 'Building resilience in the classroom using testimonials from victims and formers', Madrid, 24-25 May 2018](#)
- [Issue Paper, 'Protective and promotive factors building resilience against violent radicalisation', April 2018](#)

⁽¹²⁾ Will be included in the RAN Collection 2021.

⁽¹³⁾ See: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/news/2015/documents/citizenship-education-declaration_en.pdf

- [RAN EDU, 'The school needs partners', Madrid, 1 December 2016](#)

Practices

- **The Tolerance project (Sweden):** Instead of focusing on teaching students what is right and wrong, this pedagogical model aims to give students both historical and philosophical tools to ask themselves the right questions. The focus is on the creation of a safe environment for students to express their ideas, even the controversial ones, and enter into dialogue with the teachers and with other students. The teacher's role is to educate rather than to engage in debate with the students in the group.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- Labs of democracy should **nurture diversity, tackle discrimination, foster media literacy, foster religious literacy** and include peer-to-peer learning experiences. It is key for schools to train their staff, build networks and cooperation, establish clear procedures and develop depolarisation skills.
- While an individual's education level is not a causal factor for radicalisation, **the democratic quality of education can definitely make a difference**. Young people who are taught to handle conflict in a peaceful way, and who feel their voices are heard on key issues for them, will be less likely to embrace socially harmful propaganda.
- Speech matters — it is important to promote inclusive language on a political level. **Education is dependent on political efforts to counter social marginalisation and exclusion**.
- Political strategies are needed to transfer the experiences of successful ad hoc initiatives and methods to promote democratic participation, and implement them **as standard methods and routines** in curricula and education systems countrywide.
- Resilience building can be accomplished in a classroom setting, where pupils can learn a great deal from victims' and formers' testimonials. Both victim organisations and schools are appropriate actors to support this means of resilience building in young people together, and to **promote non-violent solutions to conflicts**, to help youngsters resist the rhetoric of agents of radicalisation. In this context, victims and their organisations can offer unique support to school programmes.

Supporting teachers and schools

Education is central to preventing young people from being attracted to violent extremist ideologies, organisations and movements, whether extreme Islamist, far-right or other ideologies aiming to undermine cohesive, inclusive societies. To play an effective role, teachers need to be supported, empowered and equipped to prevent and deal with radicalisation in educational settings.

Meetings and papers

- [RAN EDU, 'Education and radicalisation prevention: Different ways governments can support schools and teachers in preventing/countering violent extremism', 6 May 2019](#)
- [RAN EDU's Guide on training programmes 'Effective and confident teachers and other school staff', Helsinki, 1-2 March 2017](#)
- [RAN EDU, 'Empowering and supporting teachers', Gothenburg, 24-25 February 2016](#)
- [RAN, 'Manifesto for Education – Empowering Educators and Schools', 2014](#)

Practices

- **[TERRA UCARE Lesson material for high schools \(the Netherlands\)](#)**: The TERRA II project team at University College Roosevelt (UCR) know that in an increasingly multicultural society, the development of citizenship skills and sensitivity to others are vital. They developed the UCARE curriculum to increase high school students' social and citizenship competences. They also provide young people with an alternative skill set to violent behaviours.
- **[Bounce resilience tools \(Belgium\)](#)**: BOUNCE is a package of three interconnected and complementary tools (BOUNCE Young, BOUNCE Along and BOUNCE Up) targeting youngsters and their social environment. The tools were developed as early prevention for (vulnerable) youngsters, to strengthen resilience against violent radical influences and to raise awareness of these issues in their social environment.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- Schools and teachers need support in four main areas: **finance, training, knowledge and moral support**.
- **Teachers' unions** can make a big difference in helping to create the conditions for schools and teachers to be able to deliver their contributions. In the policy arena, and in the public opinion, teachers' unions are the critical representant of the interests of teachers.
- Governments should **invest in teachers**. Teachers are required to address many of the issues that society and parents are not always able to cope with. This is why they need more time and more training to be able to assume this comprehensive role. It is necessary to build teachers' capacity so they can effectively work on factors that form the breeding ground of radicalisation and signal possible concerns.
- **Materials and approaches** to increase the protective factors against radicalisation should be made available to teachers and schools. These include citizenship and democracy programmes, as well as critical thinking and media literacy tools.
- Schools with a record of excellence in prevention share the following: a) they give **training sessions to staff and establish structures for on-the-job learning experiences**, b) they have long-term ties with other institutions, c) they can rely on established procedures, and d) they are prepared to deal with other, new problems as they arise.

Dealing with extremist ideologies and narratives in the classroom

The rapidly evolving media and information landscape is increasingly creating challenges for teachers in the classroom. Pupils are targeted by extremist groups through propaganda, while fake news and conspiracy theories challenge the curriculum. Experts agree on the need to challenge (violent) extremism by fostering media literacy and raising awareness of the online content and online strategies of extremist propaganda. While some countries consider issues related to spirituality, life philosophy and religion to be personal matters, not addressing students' grievances, sense of injustice, extreme ideas or behaviours and not adequately dealing with sensitive questions in the classroom could present a risk. Indeed, if such conversations do not take place, students could be looking for answers from other sources that preach narratives aimed at recruiting them to extremist groups. These could be groups constructed on far-right extremist ideologies, Islamist extremist ideologies or conspiracy ideologies relating to the COVID-19 situation.

Meetings and papers

- [RAN Short Handbook Conclusion Paper, 'COVID-19 Narratives that Polarise', 2020](#)
- [Ex Post Paper, 'RAN EDU meeting on dealing with religion-inspired extremist ideologies in school', Antwerp, 14-15 November 2019](#)
- [Ex Post Paper, 'RAN EDU Academy: Far-right extremism in the classroom', Berlin, 13-14 June 2019](#)

- [RAN EDU, 'Dealing with fake news, conspiracy theories and propaganda in the classroom', Budapest, 29-30 November 2017](#)
- [Ex Post Paper, RAN POL and EDU meeting on 'Polarisation Management', Stockholm, 10-11 May 2017](#)

Practices

- **[Narrative group work in schools, Cultures Interactive \(Germany\)](#)**: While many other educational activities prioritise information, rational thinking, discussion and arguments, narrative groups shift the focus to telling of and listening to individual issues and subjective observations. This helps participants to explore and reflect on the underlying personal experiences and biographical factors that underlie their opinions and behaviour — and thus strengthen democratic values and prevent/counter attitudes of intolerance, group hatred and (right-wing) extremism.
- **[RealTalk \(United Kingdom\)](#)**: RealTalk aims to raise awareness of far-right extremism and build resilience to radicalisation amongst young people. Using augmented reality technology, a series of interactive workshops aims to challenge stereotypes, particularly around Islam, create open and safe spaces for challenging conversations, enhance critical thinking skills, help participants spot the signs of fake news and propaganda, and highlight the current local, national and international threats of far-right extremism.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- **The reaction quadrant** has been developed as a training tool to discuss how one can respond to controversial remarks. Each quadrant represents a possible reaction to controversial pupil statements.
- The teacher should be trusted by the students to be able to guide them in the process of becoming democratic citizens; therefore, a **good student–teacher relationship is of great importance**.
- **Teachers should be trained** in how to deal with controversial topics and extremist narratives. They should act as facilitators rather than experts on controversial topics in the classroom. Teachers should also adopt an attitude that is open, non-judgmental, interested, devoted, inquisitive and critical.
- **Never ignore** extremist ideologies echoed in the classroom.
- Be close to pupils and ask: What kind of **school environment can we cultivate for children** that will enable them to express their views, grievances and desires in a safe setting and with confidence?
- Participate in conversations with students on controversial issues that concern them. **Focus on commonalities** rather than on differences through topics such as fear, anxiety, uncertainty and life changes.

What needs to be further explored?

- A long-term, structural and evidence-based programme on dealing with extremist narratives (far-right extremist and Islamist extremist narratives, conspiracy theories) needs to be made available for schools. To make a real impact, this should also include meetings on dissemination strategies to help schools in creating tailor-made programmes, as well as meetings with exit and social workers to take the surroundings outside the schoolyard into account.

The role of non-formal education schools

Young people are part of various non-formal learning environments such as sports clubs, thematic or religious youth organisations, or even “informal groups”, and non-formal learning processes when these groups try to influence their members in a certain direction. Non-formal schooling can serve as a protective factor and contribute to community, critical thinking and identity building. It can add value to a personal life and spark cultural and religious development. For example, it can offer additional tutoring that could not be afforded otherwise and spark a sense of self, identity and belonging, as well as boost self-esteem. As such, non-formal schooling can have beneficial outcomes, also in terms of P/CVE. However, non-formal schooling may become problematic in cases where a gap

exists or arises with formal schools regarding content, didactics and values. To conclude, non-formal education schools have a positive effect on preventing radicalisation when promoting protective factors, but they could feed the breeding ground of radicalisation when promoting antidemocratic values in the schools.

Meetings and papers

- [RAN Y&E and RAN LOCAL, 'Dealing with the Co-existence of Formal and Non-formal Education', online meeting, 4-5 November 2020](#)
- [Issue Paper, 'Annex to RAN's Manifesto for Education: The role of non-formal education in P/CVE', November 2018](#)

Practices

- **The ALEF project (Belgium):** This Brussels-based initiative is an Arabic weekend school for children aged 6-12 years. It provides an alternative to Quran schools. The project was founded in reaction to the small availability of Arabic lessons in Europe. The idea is to help widen a communication gap between children, who are less in touch with the Arabic part of their identity, and their parents. The curriculum takes inspiration from general global curricula on language and identity lessons. It also incorporates elements such as critical thinking, antiracialising and developing an intercultural open mindset ⁽¹⁴⁾.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- Local authorities are advised to **collaborate/communicate with non-formal schools** to make sure the positive potential of non-formal schools for youngsters is fully used.
- When there is no contact or collaboration between local authorities and non-formal schools, the cultural distance and mutual distrust grows. Under these particular conditions, non-formal schooling can become a **breeding ground for radicalisation**. For example, radical right-wing and radical Salafi communities are increasingly promoting home education. This offers the parents the opportunity to influence children with harmful ideologies.
- At formal schools, it is important to ensure there is an ongoing dialogue with communities and other grassroots actors such as representatives of religious communities, social workers, local authorities and so on to strengthen the pedagogical climate. One way of doing this is to **invite non-formal teachers to give guest lectures**, for example about religion, identity and culture. This increases trust and prevents starting a dialogue only when there is a problem at stake.
- As a school, try to visit and meet the non-formal school to see what their values and motivations are, and build a relationship. Find the right person within your school to do this and who can address possible sensitive issues in a genuine way.

What needs to be further explored?

- A dilemma that remains to be further explored is whether collaboration with non-formal schooling is desirable in practice. To which extent is collaboration in the interest of the child, the school and society? Where should this collaboration start or end? Where should you draw the line in case non-formal schooling is problematic?
- A future RAN meeting could explore suitable assessment tools that can be used to enquire when a cooperation with a non-formal school is feasible. This meeting could further investigate whether a non-formal school offers added value for cooperation, which is often not clear.
- Topics for future meetings include: information on facilitating multicultural, plurilingual school climates and having a more in-depth look at which services local authorities can offer non-formal settings to foster a better working relationship, and how to deal with foreign (political) influence through non-formal schooling.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Will be included in the RAN Collection 2021.

- There is necessity for a manifesto, similar to the RAN Education Manifesto, on the specific topic of formal and non-formal schooling.

Youth work

Youth work is the collective term for a wide range of voluntary activities undertaken for young people and by young people, and which have a strong socialising and empowering potential. Youth work appears in various ways throughout Europe. In some countries, it is highly professionalised. In other countries, it is a form of voluntary work or considered a form of social welfare. These activities generally take place in young people's free time and cover a diverse range of themes such as street work, sports, culture and so on. Due to the bottom-up nature of youth work, where active youth participation in the organisation of activities is the basis of the method, it can also be very beneficial for young people who are not so successful in the formal education system ⁽¹⁵⁾. After all, the most defining aspect of youth work is the objective to contribute to the personal and social development of the targeted youth, and to create opportunities for them to shape their own future ⁽¹⁶⁾. This is an opportunity for youth workers to create critical thinking and resilience towards extremist ideas ⁽¹⁷⁾.

The role of youth work in the prevention of radicalisation

Young people deserve special attention in the prevention of radicalisation because they can be more susceptible to extremist ideas. Yet, the most vulnerable young people are often the most difficult to reach. Youth workers have a unique opportunity to mitigate these risks by functioning as role models, influencing young people positively, detecting signs of radicalisation and offering alternatives. However, youth work should not be constantly instrumentalised too explicitly for P/CVE. After all, the core essence of youth work — to empower young people positively — is the key to preventing radicalisation.

Meetings and papers

- [RAN YF&C, 'The role of youth work in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism', Vienna, 6-7 December 2017](#)

Practices

- **[VAJA Bremen \(Germany\)](#)**: The aim is to reach out to young people in their own comfort zone, at specific meeting places or on the street. In addition to street work, they also carry out project-based activities and foster community engagement and individual empowerment. They try to counter radicalisation processes of youngsters by counselling parents, relatives or other persons belonging to their social circle. They do this in the context of fundamentalist Islamism and with right-wing youth groups.

⁽¹⁵⁾ European Commission. (2015). *Quality Youth Work. A common framework for the further development of youth work*. European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture. https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/youth/library/reports/quality-youth-work_en.pdf

⁽¹⁶⁾ Council of Europe. (n.d.). *Youth work essentials*. Council of Europe. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-portfolio/youth-work-essentials>

⁽¹⁷⁾ Verdegaal, M., & Haanstra, W. (2017). *The role of youth work in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism*, Ex Post Paper. Radicalisation Awareness Network. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-yf-and-c/docs/ran_yf_c_role_youth_work_prevention_radicalisation_violent_extremism_06-07_12_2017_en.pdf

- **Youth4Youth (Denmark)**: This is a network run by volunteers reaching out to young people in socially vulnerable residential areas. By combining forces and working together as a community, Youth4Youth volunteers serve as role models and generate positive change amongst young people. They believe the community itself can create opportunities for young people in personal growth, building relationships and making better life choices.
- **The Samobor Social Welfare Centre (Croatia)**: Staff at this centre work with children and young people at risk and with socially unacceptable behaviours. They aim to “redirect” young people’s ways of thinking, moving them away from a detrimental course towards one that contributes to their growth and personal development. Work is focused on upgrading young people’s social skills and making them aware of the consequences of unacceptable behaviour.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- **Youth work should be open for all young people**, without preconditions. This will make young people feel welcome, even if they feel excluded from society. Participation should be voluntary without pressure.
- Have solid knowledge about issues that are important for young people. In P/CVE-related discussions, youth workers might feel they do not know enough about a certain religion or ideology. Being an expert is not always needed, but **having a certain level of knowledge is a prerequisite for credibility**.
- **Judge behaviour, not the person**. In a professional relationship on a volunteer basis, it is important to have mutual appreciation of those involved. In the case of misbehaviour, therefore, the behaviour should be the focus of criticism, not the person. If criticism is aimed at the individual, they might feel attacked, bringing about the risk of alienation.
- Create an open, safe and constructive environment for discussion. **Accept the young people as they are** with all their opinions, but stay in control. By offering a safe space to discuss their opinions, they will not be forced to discuss them with only like-minded people or where extremists can interfere.

Digital youth work

For the current generation of young people, the so-called digital natives, there is no such thing as a “digital world” separate from real life. The digital environment is inherently part of their lives, as are the friendships and communities they develop online. Also, news and media are increasingly being consumed through the internet rather than traditional outlets. These developments have consequences for P/CVE, as extremist recruiters fervently make use of online anonymity and limited regulation to spread their ideas. Youth work practitioners thus have an important role to play online, and they need to be able to navigate this digital space effectively.

Meetings and papers

- [RAN YF&C & RAN C&N, ‘How to do digital youth work in a P/CVE context: Revising the current elements’, online meeting, 19 March 2020](#)
- [RAN YF&C, ‘Doing digital youth work in a P/CVE context’, Copenhagen, 29 November 2019](#)

Practices

- **Eurotopia (Sweden)**: This project between Sweden, Belgium and Italy aims to create counter-narratives against far-right and Islamist extremist propaganda on social media. They do this by challenging the definitions of who the heroes and villains are in the narratives of extremist propaganda and share their videos through Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.
- **Streetwork@online (Germany)**: This project seeks to establish dialogue with young people online, in order to strengthen their capacity for critical reflection and support them in their search for identity. They do this by reaching out to young people through various social media groups and chats and by publishing positive and inspiring video content.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- Make sure youth workers understand **the importance of digital youth work**. Since some might be sceptical or hesitant, it's important to emphasise that it is not very different from general youth work. Daily online contact and even presence provide a unique opportunity that is not always evident offline.
- **Approach youth in an online P/CVE context in the same way as offline**. Youth workers possess the skills to have a positive influence on young people and stimulate critical thinking. The issues to tackle online are largely similar to those offline: social isolation, identity issues and building up trust.
- **Understand the audience**, in terms of language and social rules, as well as the platforms they use. This is needed to get real engagement and get your messages across credibly.
- It is not always possible for youth workers to be actively present on all social media their audience uses. What kind of social media is used amongst youth also differs per country. Therefore, it can be useful to ask around and to **look up information and statistics on which platforms are used mostly in your country**.
- Have a clear idea of **the goal, vision, guidelines and tasks of your online engagement**. The online youth workers in the team should be aware of their role and how to intervene.

Youth work through sports

Sports and P/CVE have a rather ambiguous relationship. On the one hand, extremist recruiters have been navigating through, for example, networks of hooliganism or martial arts. On the other hand, sports provide a unique, low-barrier opportunity to engage young people towards positive attitudes and life skills making them resilient to extremist ideas. Youth workers fervently make use of sports in their prevention work, and they do this in various ways. For example, young people's confidence can be boosted by doing physical activity, and the time they spend training is also time they are not spending on the street or engaging in illicit activities. Moreover, youth workers often bring together young people (from different backgrounds) so they can get to know each other, find similarities, develop friendships that lead to positive identity development and a sense of belonging, and eventually reduce risks of radicalisation.

Meetings and papers

- [RAN YF&C, 'The role of sports and leisure activities in preventing and countering violent extremism', Lisbon, 6-7 March 2019](#)

Practices

- **Open Fun Football Schools (Denmark and Croatia)**: This project aims to bring together thousands of children, parents, coaches, teachers and other community members in an effort to promote peaceful religious and ethnic coexistence, gender equality, tolerance and social cohesion. The programme is addressed to families, children and youth exposed to long-term violence in post-conflict areas.
- **Spiel dich frei! (Germany)**: The organisation RheinFlancke was founded to fight discrimination and racism and to provide equal opportunities to young people lacking access to education and opportunities to participate fully in society. Spiel dich frei! is an innovative combination of sports, political education, theatre plays and music, aiming to prevent the radicalisation of young people in schools and open youth work.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- **Use sports as a tool in projects** about general positive self-development for young people, rather than labelling them as an anti-radicalisation activity.
- Do not only focus on sports for just the physical aspect, but also provide space for moral aspects, mentoring, critical thinking and other elements of youth work.

- Develop and provide training courses and embed sound procedures to equip youth workers and trainers with the right skills to identify and help youngsters who are at risk of radicalisation.
- Train coaches and youth workers to be able to develop a relationship of trust with the young people and who can function as a role model.

Discussing controversial topics

Discussing taboos and controversial topics with young people is challenging. However, it is important that they are confronted with different perspectives. This can encourage them to assess their own and other people's opinions critically. These skills are important when building resilience to radicalisation. Therefore, young people should be provided with a safe space to discuss these taboos and topics. Examples of these topics are domestic violence, religion, alcohol abuse, sexuality, discrimination and foreign policy.

Meetings and papers

- [RAN YF&C, 'Discussing Taboos and Controversial Issues - Practical guidelines for youth workers', 2018](#)
- [RAN Short Handbook Conclusion Paper, 'COVID-19 Narratives that Polarise', 2020](#)

Practices

- **Dialogue in Citizenship Education, Diversion (the Netherlands):** When students express highly contentious views, teachers can be confronted with complex societal issues and tensions in the classroom. Diversion has developed a methodology that offers a step-by-step plan, guidelines and exercises that help teachers discuss sensitive topics in the classroom.
- **RadicalWeb, Save the Children (Finland):** RadicalWeb trains practitioners who work with young people on the issue of violent radicalisation and extremism. The goal of the training is to increase understanding on the topic and offer tools to address difficult issues and concerns with young people.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- Before discussing controversial topics and taboos with young people, it is important to **explore these issues and discuss them** with colleagues. However, it is not necessary to be an expert on the topic. The role of **facilitating** students in engaging in the debate is also very important.
- **Be aware of topics that could be offensive** to young people. The practitioner discussing the topic should be, to some extent, familiar with the young person and should not discuss too much too soon. In this regard, it is also important for the youngster to not feel forced into a discussion.
- If dealing with embarrassment when discussing a taboo topic, it is advisable to find **other ways** to explore the topic and provide material that can help young people formulate their questions or comments. For example, discuss a topic with youngsters by reading a book together, instead of forcing them to express themselves in their own words.
- In case of (possible) tensions within the group when discussing a topic, keep in mind that **not everything can or should be discussed in public**. To prevent tensions, it is also important to establish codes of conduct or rules for how the youngsters should behave in case of disagreement.