

16/04/2021

## **CONCLUSION PAPER**

*RAN Digital Event - Youth Participation in P/CVE*

*2-3 March 2021*

# **Youth Participation in P/CVE for Local Authorities**

## **Key outcomes**

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Youth are a core part of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), both as benefactors and partners. As vulnerable targets for extremist recruitment, they are a key target for safeguarding programmes that build resilience to extremism. As extremist groups grow younger, they will be a primary demographic for rehabilitation and reintegration programmes.<sup>i</sup> Also as partners, youth bring unique insights, creativity and credibility to local P/CVE efforts. Effective youth work is imperative for P/CVE and local authorities are well placed to coordinate and deliver localised programmes and policies that safeguard and empower their young citizens.

In order to work more closely with this key demographic, RAN organised a workshop in collaboration with members of the RAN YOUNG platform for youth practitioners and local coordinators. The aim was to discuss the benefits of working with youth, as well as the challenges that they face and different approaches that can enhance their efforts.

Practitioners joined from across the EU representing different community actors, including local governments, civil society organisations, youth workers and police — all key stakeholders in both protecting and empowering youth on a local level. Through presentations, discussions and collaborative exercises, participants examined different mechanisms for engaging and involving young people, and they explored potential solutions to some common challenges that can hinder youth participation.

This two-day online workshop served as a platform for youth practitioners to share experiences and best practices, while learning new methods for youth engagement and exploring solutions to long-standing challenges. The workshop sought to inspire practitioners, both through example and collaborative working; this paper aims to do the same by sharing the outcomes of this meeting and offering some recommendations that may help inform youth work in P/CVE across the EU. During this meeting, the St. Philip's Centre shared the innovative ways in which the city of Leicester in the United Kingdom is reaching youth through the pandemic. RAN YOUNG and its young members shared methods that RAN has employed to empower youth throughout the last year and how the programme has been adapted for online delivery.

## Highlights of the discussion

### **Benefits: Involving young people in P/CVE is mutually beneficial for practitioners and young people, as well as for the community at large**

Youth participation in P/CVE is often discussed in terms of the benefits for young people. For some youth, the benefits are largely professional: they gain practical experience, build critical knowledge and skills, and can establish valuable relationships and networks. For youth who might be vulnerable to extremism or violence, being actively engaged in P/CVE work can help them build critical resilience while connecting with their community in a new way.

However, involving youth in P/CVE is also hugely beneficial for practitioners and the community as a whole. On a project level, youth involvement helps practitioners understand the unique challenges youth face in their municipality and develop key audience insights that can shape more impactful programming. Youth can bring fresh ideas to connect with audiences who are disengaged from formal education and translate complex and sensitive issues into messages that will resonate. Youth can also bring added credibility to a programme, but only if they are included as partners who can actively shape the message, not mere messengers. Furthermore, actively promoting youth participation and leadership ensures a community's future by investing in youth with the knowledge, capacity and experience needed to promote safer, more inclusive societies. And critically, involving young people is a way to build trust between youth and the government, including with institutions like the police.

### **Common challenges that youth practitioners face**

There are many challenges in engaging and involving youth in a meaningful way. To help better understand the breadth of these challenges and guide the workshop discussions, RAN YOUNG conducted a short survey with the 48 workshop applicants. It is a small sample, but it captures a wide geographical spread within the EU<sup>(1)</sup> and diverse range of stakeholders<sup>(2)</sup>. Based on the survey outcomes, RAN YOUNG highlighted three common challenges that youth practitioners and local coordinators face and gave participants the opportunity to discuss how they have experienced them in their own work, and the consequences.

#### *1) Building sustainable and trusting relationships between young people and local governments*

When there is a trust deficit between youth and authorities, it can be difficult to know where to begin. A lack of trust can pose a threat to the safety and well-being of the community. When youth do not feel like their government is for them, they are unlikely to get involved in important civic processes and could be more at-risk. Moreover, a trust deficit between youth and police can make youth less willing to cooperate in critical investigations or respect laws. However, trust must be built on both sides of this relationship. Young people need to understand not only their rights, but also their responsibilities as citizens and the role they play in developing and nurturing these critical relationships. It is a particularly tough challenge because it precludes its own solution: a trust deficit severely limits communication, making it difficult to even start critical conversations that could help build mutual confidence.

<sup>(1)</sup> With applicants from 15 different EU countries and non-EU countries like UK, Ukraine, US and Kenya.

<sup>(2)</sup> Such as local coordinators, youth workers, teachers, youth, security officers working with youth.

## 2) *Communicating effectively with youth, both online and offline*

It is one thing to send out messages on channels that young people frequent, but it can be a serious challenge to actively and meaningfully communicate. Online and offline communication pose different challenges — offline, it may be difficult to get the right people in the room, but there is more opportunity to engage them as a captive audience as long as the methods of engagement are interesting and relevant. Online, on the other hand, there are far more opportunities to reach a specific audience, but it is more difficult to ensure they engage with the message. In both cases, as one practitioner noted:

## 3) *Engaging and motivating youth beyond the usual suspects*

To be effective, youth engagement should be representative. “Youth” is not a singular category with singular experience, needs, motivations or perceptions. In order to serve the whole community and engage more meaningfully with at-risk groups, programmes must make an effort to go beyond the youth who seek out such opportunities and include those who are sceptical, unaware or think that they are not qualified to take part. Neglecting these groups not only impacts project success; it can also worsen perceived inequalities that heighten vulnerability to extremism. Some young people are hard to reach and many do not want to participate, but this is a cue to think more creatively, not give up.

### Examples of engaging youth

There are many ways to structure a P/CVE programme and different methods for involving young people. Choose a method that will enable you to achieve your objectives by reaching your target audience and engaging them meaningfully.

The city of **Leicester in the United Kingdom** has made young people a priority. In 2018, RAN already organised a [study visit](#) on youth participation to Leicester where they are making young people a core part of their local government through their Young People’s Council. In this meeting, the city of Leicester shared the methods they have employed to engage youth and how they adapted these methods during the pandemic. Leicester runs a variety of programmes for youth, including their Young Leaders Programme and Young People’s Council that give youth the chance to drive change. They work in partnership with the charitable arm of Leicester City Football Club to enhance their reach with different groups, and with civil society organisations to embed programmes in the community to make them more approachable and “a little less beholden to bureaucracy”. In each case, a programme is tailored to a specific area and will incorporate young people in leadership roles. COVID has forced them to change up their approach to keep youth engaged virtually, and Leicester rose to the challenge with the innovation to not just move their programmes online, but to adapt them to capitalise on technology. An E-Sports programme offers a platform for them to engage youth through FIFA Online and their Real Talk project has gone virtual through the app Zappar, where youth can join interactive workshops through their mobile (see picture).



Also, the **RAN YOUNG platform** presented the methods they have used over the last year to engage a new cohort of activists throughout the pandemic. Each method was designed for active engagement that created space for youth to lead the process, while instilling new knowledge and skills through practice.

- **A call for participants to recruit youth:** three recommendations are to have a clear target audience (age, profile, experience), disseminate in creative ways and clearly indicate what the young people get out of it.
- Kelsey Bjornsgaard — Senior Manager at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue — offered tips on how to give young people key information about P/CVE, introduce key terms and methods, and ensure a group has a shared level of understanding. This [knowledge session](#) can be watched online.
- Charlotte Bauer and Vivian Lada - RAN YOUNG participants - shared their experiences about RAN's Youth Review Panel. It is a method for capturing youth input on a project or programme and conducting a structured review. For more information on **involving young people in reviewing local projects**, see this [Conclusion Paper](#).
- Ottavia Galuzzi and Francesca Finelli - RAN YOUNG participants - shared their experiences with RAN's Youth Disinformation Working Session. During this meeting, they deepened their understanding about disinformation online by analysing the challenge through examples and practical implications while planning innovative solutions for different audiences. For more information on **involving youth online**, see this [Conclusion Paper](#).

## Recommendations

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By engaging practitioners from across the community, the workshop brought together a range of experiences and perspectives on youth participation and challenged them to take on some of the barriers facing youth inclusion in P/CVE. The session produced some actionable recommendations for practitioners.

### Approach young people as partners, not beneficiaries

Young people can benefit P/CVE work in many ways, but to truly reap these benefits youth have to be partners, not merely messengers. Involve youth at every stage of the P/CVE programmes and create space for them to lead and have ownership. Give special care to ensure they see that their input is valued and can lead to real change. In addition to strengthening a programme, this kind of involvement can build critical skills and instil good habits and faith in institutions that will help them have a positive and sustainable influence on other youth and the community.

### Speak the language of young people and adapt your communication to resonate

This does not just mean their mother tongue. Consider the ways in which young people communicate with each other and the words, tone and content to which they will be most responsive <sup>(3)</sup>. This does not necessarily mean adopting a demographic's slang, but often, complex topics that may be taken for granted — like civic processes and duties — need to be translated for younger audiences in order to resonate. Consider how they understand and experience these issues so you can make it personal for them. Also consider working with alternative messengers and influencers, but make sure you give them the freedom to adapt the messages, rather than just relaying them. Also consider how you can embed important messages in more interesting content; sometimes it is better to deliver a message indirectly, especially for an audience who does not believe the issue is relevant or interesting.

### Consider what motivates youth and tailor programmes that meet not only their needs, but also what they would like to gain

Do not assume that young people see the value of participating. It is up to the practitioner to communicate that value clearly, and to ensure that there is real value that goes beyond the chance to be involved. Take the time to understand what young people want and what motivates them to participate. This is especially important for engaging youth who do not traditionally volunteer or seek involvement, because their voice is important, and they need to understand why. Also consider how youth perceive themselves and let them formulate their own problem

<sup>3</sup> More on this: C&N EFFECTICE NARRATIVES: UPDATING THE GAMMA+ MODEL

definition. Make an effort to seek out youth who have never participated before and may avoid doing so, because they feel they are not qualified or that it is not relevant for them.

*The benefit of involving youth for local government is obvious; it is less obvious for youth. We need to question what young people are getting from this and make sure we are offering the real benefit. (4)*

### **Offer fair compensation to young people for their time and all the benefits they bring**

Young people should be compensated for the value and effort they bring to a project. It will help engage more youth and promote a feeling of being valued. Furthermore, compensating youth (for example, with money or, more creative compensations) can help break down some of the barriers that could restrict involvement from key demographics. Time is a commodity and volunteering one's time is a luxury that some youth cannot afford.

### **Go beyond the "usual suspects"**

Take care that the young people you work with are representative of the community that you are targeting. Programmes should take special care to involve youth who may have particular insights or access to beneficiary communities that are harder to reach for governments or community-based organisations (CBOs). Be willing to do things that might be uncomfortable (one-to-one sessions, going to people's doorsteps, being out on the street). In order for these engagements to be successful, youth need to have the space to define the challenge as they experience it and bring solutions that will connect with key groups and impact their lives.

### **Consider creative methods for making programmes more engaging and information more palatable**

In addition to speaking youths' language, consider ways to make the information more engaging by utilising creative content and interesting mediums. Look to popular culture and technology for inspiration, but most importantly look to the youth themselves. Learn to navigate the virtual world, where young people's lives take place more and more. Use popular platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Discord, podcasts or interactive apps that may be more relevant with some audiences than Facebook, for example.

## **Inspiring youth practices**

1. The [St. Philip's Centre](#) (City of Leicester) has several successful youth participation initiatives such as Young Leaders, Young People's Council, Leicester in the Community, and Real Talk. They were able to overcome challenges related to COVID-19 through the use of the interactive app Zappar.
2. [Young Cities](#): A sister programme of the Strong Cities Network managed by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, it works with relevant stakeholders across the community to build local capacity to prevent and counter extremism. Young Cities works in nine cities globally and offers capacity building for youth as well as local government. It also runs a grant scheme to create more opportunities for youth leadership and to strengthen the relationship between these two critical actors.
3. [Odd Arts](#) is a theatre-based empowerment programme from Manchester aimed at violence reduction, improving mental health and healthy relationships.
4. The [Youth Council](#) in the City of Sarpsborg (Norway) has discussed the theme of radicalisation and extremism annually since 2014 and has provided input to the local action plan against hate crimes and violent extremism.

(4) Quote from a participant during the RAN meeting 'Youth Participation in P/CVE', 2-3 March 2021.

## Follow-up

A possible topic for follow-up meetings on youth participation is the differentiation between reaching young people of different age groups. Are there different methods to reach and engage the different age groups? How would these methods and projects differ? This topic was mentioned during the meeting by both local authorities and youth workers.

## Further reading

1. Bjornsgaard, K. (2020). [Galvanising youth in combatting online disinformation](#), Conclusion Paper. Radicalisation Awareness Network, 7-8 December.
2. Bjornsgaard, K. (2020). [Guidelines for local authorities: How to organise a youth review panel](#), Conclusion Paper. Radicalisation Awareness Network, 1-2 October.
3. Keijzer, F., & Woltman, P. (2018). [Youth participation in the city of Leicester](#), Ex Post Paper. Leicester: RAN Centre of Excellence, 5-6 June.
4. Radicalisation Awareness Network. (2020, August 11). [RAN YOUNG webinar: Radicalisation and prevention](#) [Video]. YouTube.

<sup>i</sup> **Extremist groups across the spectrum have targeted young recruits. This has been documented in many different research reports, including:** Rekawek, K., Szucs, V., Babíková, M., & Hamel, E. (2019). [European Jihad: Future of the Past?](#) GLOBSEC.; Morrow, E. A., & Meadowcraft, J. (2018). [The rise and fall of the English Defence League: Self-governance, marginal members and the far right](#). *Political Studies*, 67(3), 539-556.