

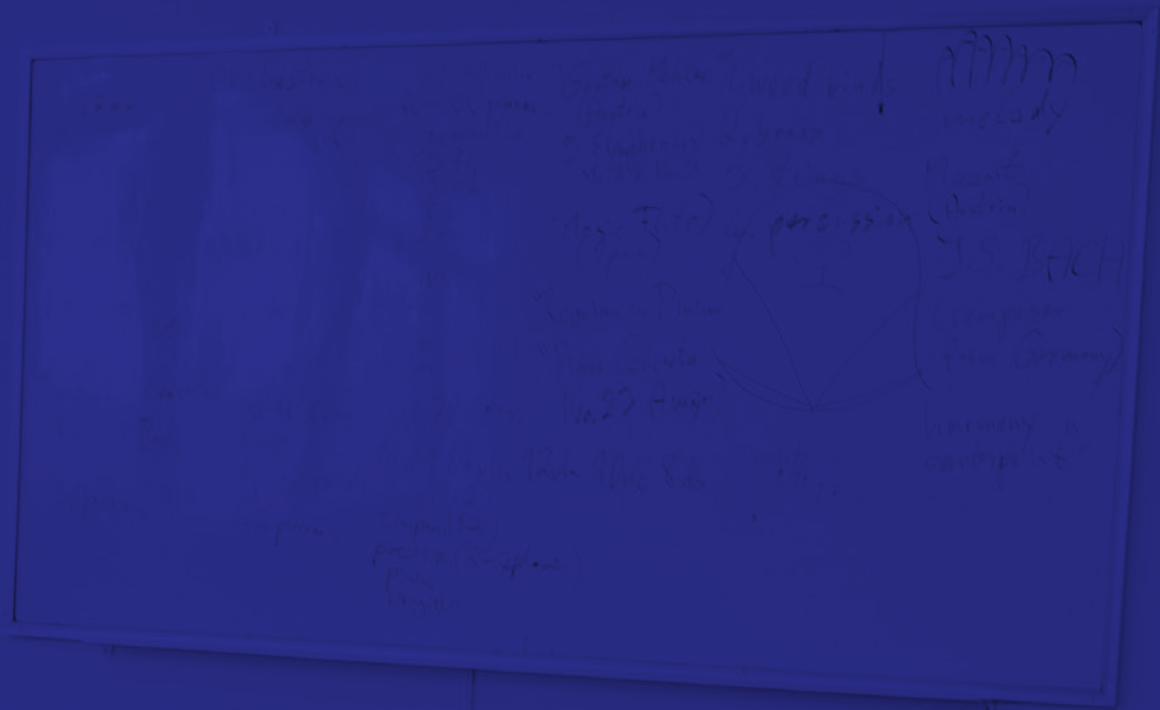
# Transforming schools into labs for democracy

A companion to preventing  
violent radicalisation through  
education



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violent radicalisation through  
education**



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# RAN POLICY PAPER

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# Introduction

In March 2015, nearly 100 teachers and other educators from EU Member States published a manifesto containing 24 recommendations for preventing radicalisation leading to violent extremism (see appendix containing the *Manifesto for Education – Empowering Educators and Schools* (RAN Prevent, 2015)). That same month, the Paris Declaration stressed: ‘The primary purpose of education is not only to develop knowledge, skills, competencies 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.’

In the same spirit, RAN decided to launch an Education working group (RAN EDU), inviting school professionals from across the continent to participate. They reached the consensus that schools are indeed important places in which to empower young people and to build resilience against radical ideologies leading to violence. What is more, schools and teachers are on the front line to help identify and safeguard youth at risk of radicalisation. They are essential partners in preventing and countering violent radicalisation at early stages.

Since then, the importance of education in prevention strategies has been widely recognised in political debates. Fortunately, many schools and teachers across Europe have tackled these challenges with increasing efficacy. Thanks to their knowledge and expertise, not only can we identify and address problems and challenges, but we can also offer guidelines to increase potential, draw on opportunities and even provide solutions.

## Context and aims

This companion reflects upon these developments and formulates recommendations to envision schools as ‘labs for democracy’ that would provide sustainable responses to radicalisation. 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.

This companion builds on the *Manifesto for Education*, and outlines major challenges and key recommendations formulated since 2015 in the contexts of the various meetings of the RAN EDU working group, in which more than 500 professionals participated. These meetings focused on a number of topics: why education matters (Prague, November 2015), empowering teachers (Gothenborg, February 2016), the role of school leaders (Antwerp, April 2016), involving young people (Vienna, June 2016), school partners (Madrid, December 2016), training programmes (Helsinki, March 2017), polarisation management (Stockholm, May 2017), returning to school after dropping out (Paris, Sept 2017), media literacy (Budapest, November 2017), higher education (Manchester, February 2018), victims (Amsterdam, April 2018), young children (Warsaw, June 2018), and the extreme right (Berlin, October 2018).

In addition, this companion draws on various documents developed by RAN working groups that provide useful observations on various aspects of radicalisation processes relevant to educational strategies of prevention.

The lessons learned from these meetings and papers offer valuable insights for multiple audiences. Hence, this companion offers tips, reflections and recommendations in one document. It is written not only with teachers, school leaders and school partners in mind, but also policymakers and politicians. Its aim is twofold: to provide teachers and school leaders with key insights into existing expertise and experiences of practitioners

in the field of education; and to formulate key recommendations for policymakers to support schools and teachers in their work in the field of prevention.

This companion is a vade mecum for practitioners and policymakers, with the messages that 'we, the professionals with experience in the field, stand by your side' and that 'these guidelines will support you'. RAN EDU working group participants, in particular, believe that these insights will help in getting the process off the ground and may enhance the impact of related efforts.

The text is divided into three main chapters: The first covers challenges and opportunities of prevention in schools themselves; the second considers crucial institutional structures around the schools; and the third focuses on the political context and formulates recommendations to optimise its positive impact on the proposed activities. Every section presents the main insights (why? how?) drawn from the relevant working groups and RAN documents, and concludes with a boxed example describing an inspiring practice or recommending tips and offering practical advice.

## A sustainable approach

Since the publication of the *Manifesto*, the phenomenon of radicalisation has itself taken on new forms. What is more, the political contexts have changed considerably. Education has to respond to these changing contexts and expressions of radicalisation, and develop innovative approaches and tools to provide sustainable strategies of prevention of the increasingly complex phenomenon of polarisation that may exacerbate extremist ideologies that might lead to violence.

While the *Manifesto* was instrumental in initiating the process, deterring violent radicalisation is not a one-off event. Instead, prevention calls for a sustainable approach: continuously supporting and preparing schools and teachers to identify sources of polarisation and curb radicalisation that may lead to violent extremism.

Prevention requires comprehensive action. The attraction of (violent) extremism is not confined to its narratives and ideology; extremism also exploits social-emotional needs and challenges linked to broader questions of identity, belonging and lack of prospects. Exploiting the appeal of constructs of simple, rigid identities while offering experiences of community and solidarity, extremist ideologies and movements are particularly attractive to youngsters and young adults in the process of defining themselves and their place within their surroundings. Moreover, self-proclaimed avant-garde and counterculture extremist movements appeal to the characteristic adolescent quest to challenge both parents and society.

Schools can play an important role in building resilient contexts for vulnerable youngsters by nurturing the communicative, social and emotional skills needed to tackle the challenges of adolescence, and by providing the spaces in which to do so safely (RAN CoE, 2016b; RAN CoE, 2017a). This includes fostering self-confidence and self-esteem, and supporting students to work through their existential issues (Kruglanski et al., 2014; Pfeifer, 2017).

While teaching often remains confined to the transmission of knowledge and technical skills, enhancing social and communicative skills is key if we are to empower students to find their place among peers and in society, take a stance, interact and constructively engage with others. This also involves psychophysical dimensions that can be explored in formal educational settings through sports, or through art forms like music or theatre. Recognising one's potential as well as one's limits, being aware of one's emotions and knowing how to articulate them: these skills make engaging with others and handling

difficult social relations easier, thereby rendering the adoption of confrontational attitudes and recourse to violence less likely.

Teachers and schools are thus required to adapt and develop educational practices in order to respond to new preventive needs. They need to be trained and equipped with social-educational strategies so as to effectively identify and address possible cases of radicalisation in its different stages.

On a political level, substantial support is needed to ensure the presence of appropriate institutional and legal environments that allow for sustainable prevention of adopting violent-radical ideologies.

## Terminology

The terminology used in this area should be clarified: terms like 'radical', 'radicalisation', 'extreme ideas' and 'extremism' can cause confusion and sometimes spark debate if they are ambiguous.

Radicals and radical ideas per se do not give rise to concern. The term radicalism has been used since the nineteenth century to denote innovative or revolutionary ideas, and hence can also express a positive perspective or purpose rather than signal a prelude to violence. However, when radicalisation leads to hate crimes, breaches of basic rights and freedoms of others or even extremist violence and terror, then this is clearly cause for concern.

With regard to the diverse ideas propagated by extremist movements, we are aware of the significant differences in political and religious extremism in terms of context and ideology; however, they bear similarities in terms of their causes and strategies and the related approaches to prevent them.

Formal education includes all schools, whether private or public: primary schools, colleges, universities, etc. Therefore, in this document, the word 'schools' denotes all forms of schooling.

While many interventions target secondary schools, it should be noted that these issues may also be tackled in primary education: it is a safe and appropriate stage of intervention, and the task may be far easier if addressed earlier than at a later stage. It is therefore essential that approaches be designed taking into account not only the most critical phase (which often corresponds to secondary schools), but also, and most importantly, primary schools (Macaluso, 2016).



# I. In the school

'Schools should promote belonging, and should not shy away from difficult topics.'<sup>(1)</sup>

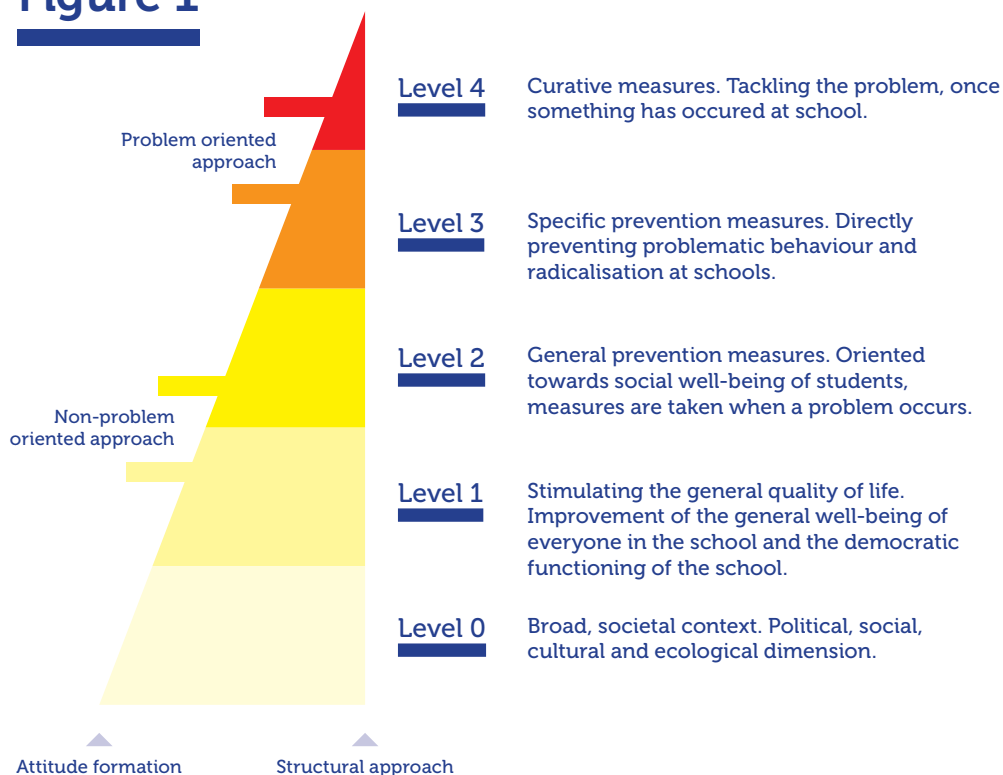
Prevention interventions are commonly divided into three categories: a) primary prevention targeting broader public audiences so as to strengthen resilience and raise awareness of the phenomenon of radicalisation, b) secondary prevention focused on persons at risk or exhibiting early signs of radicalisation, and c) tertiary prevention targeting radicalised persons and their immediate social surroundings so as to trigger disengagement, disantiation and deradicalisation<sup>(2)</sup>.

In all three categories, schools can play a valuable role. Secondary and tertiary prevention are the most relevant stages from a security perspective, and should involve external partners. Most schools, however,

will have to contend with the task of primary prevention, which is closely linked to the overall educational aims of preparing youngsters to play an active part in a democratic and pluralistic society. According to educators in RAN EDU, schools fulfil their main preventive role when they act as 'laboratories' for democracy: as distinct pedagogical environments where the significant polarising issues of our time can be addressed by teachers and explored by pupils, and where conflict is neither suppressed nor averted, but is drawn on and utilised as an opportunity for learning and social and political change.

The principal component of this lab is what the working groups commonly referred to as the (democratic) school ethos. Without a democratic school ethos, any further elements deemed important to tackle extremism will remain ineffective. In other words, the democratic school ethos is the 'oxygen' the school requires before it can serve as a laboratory for democracy.

**Figure 1**



<sup>(1)</sup> Kick-off on the relevance of a working group on education (Prague, November 2015).

<sup>(2)</sup> See GOI's action plan based on Johan Declerck's Prevention Pyramid ([https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/node/7403\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/node/7403_en)).

# Promoting democratic ethos: practices and values

## Why?

Extremist ideologies are based on the idea of unchallenged leadership and absolute authority. While right-wing extremism calls for ultimate rule of the leader and/or the nation, religious extremism ascribes sovereignty to the will of god alone. In both ideologies, the nation or the *ummah*, the global community of believers, are perceived as homogenous collectives, sharing timeless ideals, fate and visions. As a result, political and religious extremism rejects the idea of democracy, pluralism and representation of minority groups. Democracy, by contrast, does not deny conflicting interests, experiences and perspectives. In fact, controversies and conflicts are essential parts of pluralistic democratic societies. Democracy is not based on ultimate rule over a homogeneous collective, but on collectively shared values and principles to transparently and collectively (and often painstakingly) negotiate compromise.

## How?

A democratic school ethos relates to values and principles guiding daily institutional life and relations between students, teachers and their respective institution.

The original meaning of the word 'ethos' denotes 'home' as well as 'character'. To live together in one place, people need a set of values and the character to live by these values. A school ethos, then, is what 'characterises' the school in an ethical sense. For the teacher always holds an ethical relationship to her students. Her aim is to build a rapport with the students: they learn more from how they are taught than from what they are taught. Attitude

is more important than technique, and teachers can turn ethos on paper into ethos in practice. Ethos extends beyond the curriculum as it concerns the entire school, not only the classroom. Support from principals is therefore crucial. Moreover, one should ensure that parents understand the values and ethos of their child's school. (Suggit, 2018; Mclaughlin, 2005).

A strong school ethos fosters a truly democratic experience for all students – a democratic ethos (Dewey, 1916/2008). A democratic school ethos boosts resilience against polarising and extremist narratives by raising awareness of basic values, rights and freedoms in democratic societies, and by enabling youth to formulate, articulate and weigh individual interests and perspectives (RAN CoE, 2016b, 2017a). It offers safe and sound spaces where teachers invite students (especially those who are on the margins or who feel marginalised) to explore their ideas in inclusive settings (by sharing their views and problems, using their 'language').

In addition, 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 ethos facilitates a challenge to 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. As one of the working group participants noted, students should learn that 'in our society, conflict and compromise mark the rule, not the exception'.

# Nurturing diversity

## Why?

Rigid and exclusive identity constructs are attractive in times of social transformation and growing diversity; they promise orientation in times of change and offer security against marginalisation and exclusion.

Extremist ideologies exploit such identities, and promote narratives of 'us' versus 'them' based on ethnic origin or religious affiliation to justify their political claims. Promoting 'authenticity', 'purity' or 'ultimate truth' as alternatives to pluralism and individual choices, such narratives are key to radicalisation processes leading to devaluation and violence against others. While the issue of immigration has been central to right-wing extremist narratives for decades, Islam and Muslims have recently replaced 'foreigners' as the ultimate other in opposition to whom one's own community is constructed. Likewise, extremist ideologies often promote gender roles that are based on heteronormative understandings of femininity, masculinity and sexual orientation. Citing 'nature' or a 'divine order', these understandings exempt people from taking responsibility and making individual choices. Providing easy and rigid answers, they are particularly attractive to adolescents in their quest for orientation and identity.

## How?

Promoting diversity implies deconstructing notions of timeless homogeneous communities and fostering awareness of heterogeneity and pluralism in most historical societies and nations. Intercultural and diversity education and anti-bias approaches have long been used to counter stereotypes and foster acceptance of pluralism among peers, both in their immediate social environment and in society. These approaches advance

the introduction of immigration histories and related experiences into mainstream narratives and public debate (RAN EDU, 2015, 2016b; RAN CoE, 2016b, 2017a).

Many options for enhancing representation exist in the existing curriculum: for instance, teaching about immigration as a regular social phenomenon, exploring biographical work on diverse family histories, and comparing representations of diversity in contemporary literature, film and arts. This includes promoting acceptance of individual choices of gender roles and sexual orientation.

History classes offer another arena in which awareness of social and cultural pluralism and diversity can be raised. While global history approaches are common in academia, it is only over the past decade that similar concepts have been adopted in school textbooks and curricula. History is not confined to national borders; it can be taught through transnational perspectives to allow for multiperspectivity on the one hand, and entanglement and simultaneity of historical narratives and experiences on the other. Discussing history beyond and across national borders contributes to the deconstruction of exclusive identities of 'us' and 'them'.

# Tackling discrimination

## Why?

Grievances and feelings of exclusion and injustice are experienced by large segments of most modern societies. They can be prompted by modernisation processes (i.e. democratisation and digitalisation), or transformations of social relations and values and norms, or induced by globalisation and migration and their effects of increasing cultural and religious diversity. In addition, social margin-

For further inspiration, see, for instance: 'Living with Controversy: Teaching Controversial Issues Through Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights', in: RAN (2018), *Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism. Approaches and Practices*. Amsterdam: 27.

For further inspiration, see, for instance: 'Where Art and Education Meet' in: RAN (2018), *Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism. Approaches and Practices*. Amsterdam: 291 or 'Nuances. Teaching Materials for Classroom Diversity' (<http://www.zwischentoene.info/english.html>).

alisation and discrimination based on immigrant status or religion are crucial factors contributing to experiences of exclusion, insecurity and deprivation in important parts of society. This also affects youngsters and can give rise to conflicts in terms of identity and belonging. These same experiences might foster conflicts with and alienation from the environment: peers, parents, teachers, the state and society.

## How?

Teaching provides various opportunities to acknowledge and address discrimination and exclusion and to enable youngsters to address related experiences and emotions (RAN EDU, 2015; RAN CoE, 2016b, 2017a). In addition, schools can encourage students to constructively engage with these issues, and foster their skills and competencies to develop personal and political responses and visions. This also implies challenging narratives of victimisation and conspiracies behind social conflicts and phenomena of exclusion.

Moreover, teaching informs students of their legal rights to take action in the face of personal experiences with discrimination (i.e. anti-discrimination policies or support structures) and encourages active citizenship, so they can voice their stories and perspectives.

## Fostering media literacy

### Why?

The internet is a key feature of contemporary life. Online media, widely accessed for entertainment and leisure, also plays a central role in the transmission of information and the production of knowledge.

Online media also shapes attitudes and opinions: the internet cannot be reduced to a virtual reality experience. Recent research on phenomena such as hate speech, fake news and cyberbullying has highlighted the importance of online media for individual lives and politics: online debates are a reality. Phenomena such as fake news and hate speech are not confined to the fringes of society; in fact, they play a crucial role in extremist strategies to mobilise and recruit supporters and to influence individual and public opinion.

### How?

Prevention strategies have long relied on government-linked or semi-official counter-narratives designed to challenge extremist propaganda online. Yet recent research highlights the importance of authentic and credible voices in challenging extremist propaganda and providing alternative perspectives (Frischlich, Rieger, Morten & Bente, 2017).

Increasing media literacy involves raising awareness and understanding not only of the strategies and motives of extremist propaganda, but also of the technical functions and algorithms that contribute to the visibility of related content (RAN CoE, 2015a, 2017a). On a cognitive level, media education also allows the deconstruction of extremist narratives (i.e. conspiracy theories or hoaxes) and their popularity on certain platforms. It develops crucial skills and competencies for the use of (social) media and the production of personal content. Media education in schools, whether a stand-alone subject or as a cross-curricular goal, also offers the opportunity to enhance participation and empower youngsters to formulate and voice their individual interests and alternative perspectives.

For further inspiration, see, for instance: 'Expedition Friend & Foe', in: RAN (2018), *Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism. Approaches and Practices*. Amsterdam: 271.



# Building religious literacy

## Why?

Experts on radicalisation agree that a lack of understanding of diverse religions and the various ways they can be practised renders students vulnerable to indoctrination and recruitment, and fosters polarised and exclusive patterns of identity. Likewise, lack of awareness of the diversity of religious traditions within one's own religion also commonly results in rigidly held approaches to religion. Claiming absolute truth in questions of faith and rejecting alternative interpretations, let alone other religions altogether, is a key trait of religious-extremist ideologies. At the same time, such basic and uncompromising perspectives are particularly attractive to youngsters, as they provide ready-made answers to daily questions and address common concerns simply. By absolving them of the need to reflect and balance values and possibly conflicting interests (i.e. between an autonomous choice of lifestyle and religious norms), rigid interpretations of religious traditions alleviate the burdens of self-responsibility.

## How?

Religion plays an important part in prevention work. Yet the question is to what extent and in which form religion will feature in school.

Interreligious education exposes students to various forms of religion and philosophical schools, and encourages dialogue on diverse traditions, values and rituals and their respective importance for individuals and communities (RAN CoE, 2016b, 2017a).

This is less about teaching on religions per se, and more about exposure to different forms of religion and changing perspectives, and engaging

in conversations on diversity, shared values and miscellaneous experiences and beliefs. Students need to be prepared to participate as citizens in a pluralistic society in order to handle ambiguities and conflicting perspectives and interests. In fact, the challenge of pluralism and culturally and religiously diverse societies does not lie in levelling differences and harmonising perspectives, but rather in fostering shared values and collectively accepted procedures in order to find common ground.

The enhancement of religious literacy is not confined to faith-oriented classes or interreligious settings: it can be supported in other contexts as well. While religious communities and families are primary spaces for students to address religious interests, schools are important places for students to voice their concerns and questions in neutral and moderated settings. In fact, questions about 'appropriate' behaviours or lifestyles, about 'right' and 'wrong' or the 'meaning of life' are crucial to most adolescents, irrespective of religious affiliation and religiosity. As lifeworld-related concerns, these questions can be translated into general discussions on ethics and the balancing of interests, values and norms.

## Peers as facilitators and experts

A democratic school ethos is not built in a day; producing a 'laboratory for democracy' requires innovative, outside-the-box thought and actions. This includes drawing on peer-education strategies to reach students, and engaging external actors to challenge radical ideologies that may find an audience in the classroom.

Processes of radicalisation often involve group dynamics among peers; most people who have been radi-

For further inspiration, see, for instance: 'Jamal al-Khatib – My Path', in: RAN (2018), *Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism. Approaches and Practices*. Amsterdam: 437, or 'Les Promeneurs du Net': 267.

For further inspiration, see, for instance: 'How do we want to live? Peer-workshops on Islam, anti-Muslim racism, Islamism and democracy', in: RAN (2018), *Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism. Approaches and Practices*. Amsterdam: 335.

calised are part of small groups of youngsters and young adults sharing interests, concerns and experiences. Most individuals who adopt extremist ideologies were encouraged and attracted via social interaction and role models. The role of peers in inspiring and engaging youngsters has been widely acknowledged in education. In fact, young people themselves are experts in many fields, and learning among peers can be stimulating for all involved.

Peer-education approaches are also used in prevention work, involving youngsters and young adults to initiate debates on sensitive topics such as identity, religiosity or discrimination (RAN EDU, 2015; RAN CoE, 2016b, 2017a). Sharing common experiences (e.g. regarding age, religion or immigration background) of others can be helpful for creating non-hierarchical learning environments and lowering barriers among students, opening up discussions on controversial and personal topics, encouraging expression of authentic views and opinions, and

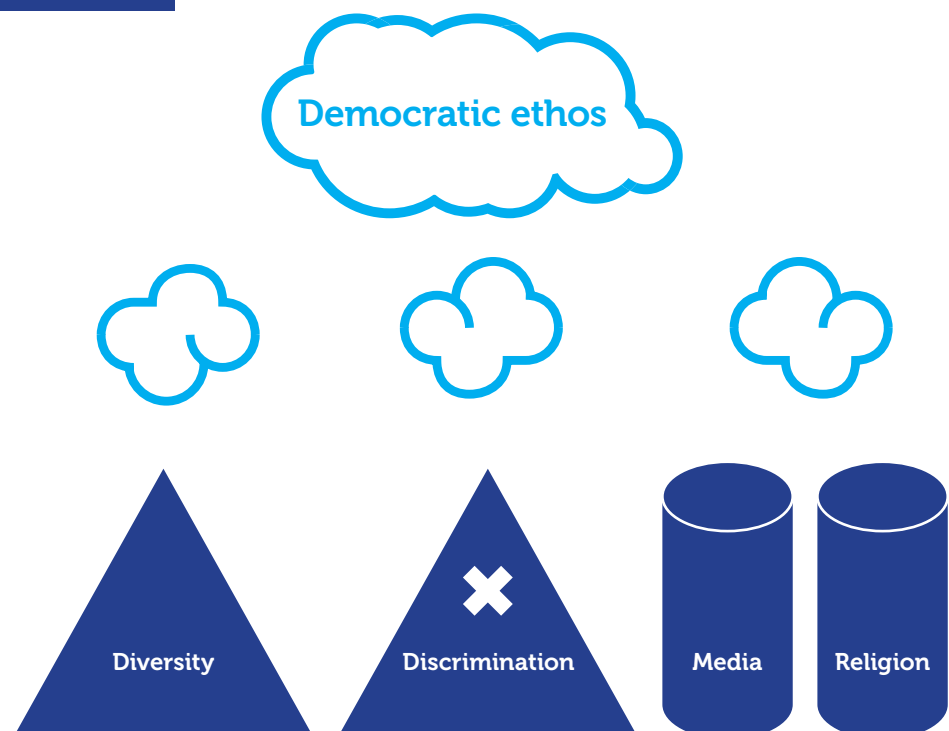
promoting the acceptance of changing perspectives. As potential role models, peers can also encourage youngsters to think beyond perceived boundaries and envision alternative routes for themselves.

In addition, peer education can also offer practical advantages: who knows better how to use social media and how to write alternative stories for people their own age? For instance, students should be an active part of the solution when it comes to providing alternatives to extremist messages disseminated via social media. With their knowledge and understanding of social media and their creativity, they should be in the driving seat.

The elements listed above comprise the first required components for schools to be transformed into laboratories for democracy (see Figure 1). The following sections will set out the remaining elements (of support and policies) necessary to complete this picture.

For further inspiration, see, for instance: 'Peer to peer: Challenging Extremism (P2P)', in: *RAN (2018), Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism. Approaches and Practices.* Amsterdam: 411.

**Figure 2**



## II. Empowering teachers and schools

'All countries in Europe face the same issues. Talking to other teachers and [seeing] their commitment makes me feel a lot less alone.'<sup>(3)</sup>

Schools are expected to play a crucial role in promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination. The didactic and pedagogical challenges lay in engaging with students in a way that relates to their experiences, perceptions and world views.

Schools with a record of excellence in prevention share the following elements: a) staff are given training sessions and gain experience in on-the-job learning practice; b) they have long-term ties with other institutions in professional networks; c) they can rely on established procedures to handle (supposed) cases of radicalisation; and d) they are prepared to deal with other, new problems as they arise.

### Training staff

The RAN guide *Effective and Confident Teachers and Other School Staff* (RAN EDU, 2017) provides a detailed summary of training needs, and outlines different options for training modules and programmes for teachers at various stages of their careers. By and large, learning and reflecting on the school ethos and fundamental values should be an ongoing process. This notwithstanding, staff in all schools need to receive basic training in the prevention of radicalisation as an important part of their continuous teacher training.

Effective training sessions do not shy away from uncomfortable observations: namely, that prevention is not limited to strengthening students, but also includes challenging attitudes and possible biases of teachers, as well as existing institutional barriers to participation and representation. Training sessions can only be effective if teachers are invited to self-reflect on their professional, personal and political identities and attitudes, in a safe environment.

Training that equips teachers to better deal with the issues presented in Chapter 2 are an investment in the power of teachers. This training will make teachers effective leaders in the school community, and in that capacity, they are crucial in early prevention and in coping with tense situations and difficult conversations.

While several valuable guides and guidelines on how to deal with radicalisation in education exist (see Box 1 below), many teachers feel cut off, alone and incapable of implementing these ideas in their daily practice. The need to exchange and discuss experiences is of particular importance in newly emerging fields that few teachers are trained in. The rapidly evolving media and information landscape is generating both challenges and opportunities for educators. Teachers must contend with new technologies, but also with new phenomena such as fake news, hoaxes and conspiracy theories distributed in social media. Given the use of digital messaging by radical violent actors, training teachers in media literacy is crucial if we are to prevent and challenge radicalisation processes at all stages.

<sup>(3)</sup> RAN EDU meeting on training programmes (Helsinki, March 2017).

## Box 1 — Resources

Guide Pédagogique 'Et si j'avais tort?' ('What If I Was Wrong?' Educator's Guide) (Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence (CPRMV), 2017, Quebec). Available at <http://etsijavaistort.org/guide-pedagogique/>

#YouthWagingPeace. Youth-Led Guide on Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education (Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP), 2017, New Delhi). Available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0026/002605/260547e.pdf>

Young people and extremism: a resource pack for youth workers (Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities (SALTO) Cultural Diversity Resource Center/British Council, 2016). Available at <https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3550/Young%20people%20and%20extremism%20resource%20pack%20for%20youth%20workers.pdf?>

Young people and extremism: a resource pack for youth workers – Additional material (Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities (SALTO) Cultural Diversity Resource Center/British Council, 2017). Available at <https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-3567/SALTO%20Cultural%20Diversity%20Youth%20and%20Extremism-Additional%20Materials.pdf>

A Teacher's Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism (UNESCO, 2016, Paris). Available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002446/244676e.pdf>

Preventing violent extremism through education. A guide for policy-makers (UNESCO, 2017, Paris). Available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002477/247764e.pdf>

The instructor's handbook for the civic and social competences curriculum for adolescents (Universal Curriculum against Radicalization in Europe (UCARE), 2016). Available at [http://www.ucr.nl/academic-program/Research/Terra%20II/\\_layouts/mobile/dispform.aspx?List=f5226bee-0a3d-4197-9bec-86cd89607d19&View=6230705b-9651-42c0-b57e-f02208469d31&ID=5](http://www.ucr.nl/academic-program/Research/Terra%20II/_layouts/mobile/dispform.aspx?List=f5226bee-0a3d-4197-9bec-86cd89607d19&View=6230705b-9651-42c0-b57e-f02208469d31&ID=5) (note: registration to access this is free).

### Building networks and cooperation

It takes a village to support a school. Actors who can support schools must be identified, to tap into this wealth of resources and partners. Schools in need are helped best by liaising with such 'friends' and drawing on support from outside the school.

There are multiple strategic ways to support schools seeking partners who can meet school needs and to make their efforts part of a comprehensive local prevention strategy. In the literature on social cohesion, a well-known distinction is made between bonding, bridging, and linking (Putnam, 2000). All three elements are important for groups wishing to enhance their

opportunities in society. This categorisation is also helpful in discussions of networking challenges for teachers and schools.

First, participants in RAN meetings emphasise the value of peer exchange and learning (bonding). Learning from other teachers can provide the inspiration one might be lacking or the reassurance one is looking for. Therefore, the kind of support that teachers need to fulfil their role in preventing violent radicalisation is peer support, first and foremost. If this support is not available within the school itself, involving other schools is crucial. Schools can help each other directly, pointing one another in the direction of solutions they have each found. This can be facilitated by govern-

ments or organised through events, networks and online platforms (e.g. eTwinning).

Second, schools should be encouraged to connect with professionals of similar or different sectors by investing in partnerships with bodies such as youth institutions, sports clubs, and in particular, information houses and counselling services on exit and desisting work.

However, investing in (inter)professional partnerships alone is not enough. Schools will benefit equally from partnerships with non-professional actors. Bridging the distance between professional and non-professional actors is likely to produce favourable results. Given the family's primary role in educating their children, it is important for schools and families to work together in partnerships. In terms of preventing radicalisation, this entails bridging with parents' expectations, interests and concerns.

Third, it is vital to engage in linking, i.e. developing relations with structures of power. Schools should establish strong links with local government institutions and be aware of their position in relation to authorities. Most partners that can help schools prevent radicalisation exist at local level, in the school's direct environment or in proximity to the school. Local authorities and existing local networks of professionals and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) often have a stronger and wider network, or they may just have a complementary network. Exploring these local 'hubs' and asking around can help schools locate partners they can engage with.

## Establishing procedures

Responding to cases of radicalisation calls for clear procedures that offer guidance for those involved in interventions. While many educational authorities and schools have developed

(emergency) procedures for handling cases of sexual abuse, crime and violence (e.g. school shootings), they often lack similar rules and regulations to address radicalisation in schools. Moreover, legal and organisational contexts differ from one Member State to another, and even across different regions in a single Member State; there are no procedures that can be applied universally.

Yet schools must invest in efforts to formulate procedures that provide clear answers to the following questions: Who is in charge of assessing possible cases of radicalisation? Who is to be informed and involved, both inside and outside the school hierarchy, and by whom? What measures are to be taken at specific stages of radicalisation?

Again, schools should be encouraged to draw on external expertise and support, and to think beyond the walls of the schoolyard. In the past, schools and teachers were often reluctant to network and partner with other institutions (for various reasons, e.g. fear that their school's reputation would be harmed, fear for their own reputation as teachers dealing with 'problematic' students, or they considered themselves best placed to intervene). It is vital that these reservations be put to one side to allow proper preparation for the eventuality of radicalisation, prior to the moment that actual problems arise.

In this regard, procedures should also provide guidance and regulations on handling cases of radicalised students who are due to leave the institution (e.g. upon degree completion or as drop-outs). Schools should proactively inform and involve other institutions that might follow up on such cases.

## Developing depolarisation skills

We wish to empower youngsters to use their voices — even if they choose

to share extreme ideas — in order to have open conversations about (controversial) topics that interest them. But where should we draw the line? When does the teacher or school principal become too restrictive, taking on more of a policing role?

The following four rules of thumb for depolarisation have been followed successfully in this context.

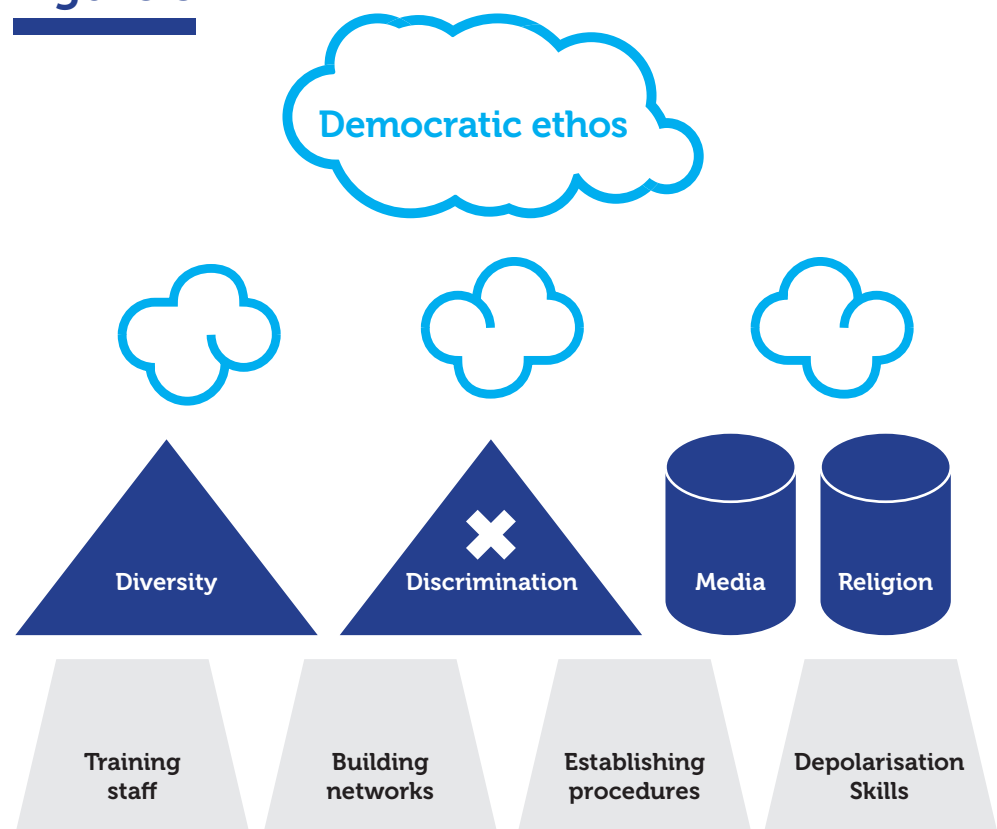
- Do no harm; understand the dynamics of polarisation. Whatever your profession, it is wise to invest in understanding the unique nature of polarisation, to ensure that your actions and communications do not unintentionally serve polarisation and its agents. This is why training on the rules, roles and game-changers is important. Don't be belatedly surprised. Be prepared!
- Raise awareness and establish response procedures to the first signs of potentially problematic polarisation. Through internal assessments, checking with partners

or institutional data, try to identify polarisation at a stage when it is still easy to manage.

- Effective polarisation management calls for multi-agency cooperation. Because polarisation is a societal process, many actors in society can influence it in either a positive or a negative way. All relevant actors must be involved in coordinating information and actions — especially when polarisation reaches a concerning level.
- Be aware of the vulnerability of teachers with personal backgrounds in some way connected to the situation. Colleagues with polarisation-related past experiences could be confronted with questions or even accusations about their position. This could make them vulnerable.

The support schools need to effectively prevent radicalisation can now be added to our figure of the lab (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3**



# III. Thinking ahead: policy recommendations in the face of emerging challenges

As noted in the introduction, RAN EDU's journey began following the Paris Declaration, which emphasised the role schools can play in countering extremism. Based on the collective expertise and experiences of members of the RAN EDU working group, this chapter formulates some critical policy recommendations and offers advice in the spirit of the working group's actions in this area that began three years earlier, with the Manifesto and the Paris Declaration.

Tackling polarisation and preventing extremism through education is an ongoing process in open societies. While it is true that many policies are formulated in the aftermath of horrible events of political or religious violence, prevention does not respond to breaking news; rather, it aims at achieving long-term and sustainable change. Governments have acknowledged the key role of teachers and schools for successful implementation of prevention strategies, and have made considerable efforts to strengthen their position (European Commission, EACEA, & Eurydice, 2016). However, various challenges remain, limiting the impact and sustainability of educational strategies to build resilience and prevent radicalisation. These challenges lie in the broader social and political contexts of prevention work, but are also linked to legal frameworks and policies of local and national governments. Political action is required on various levels.

## **Towards comprehensive politics of inclusive democracy**

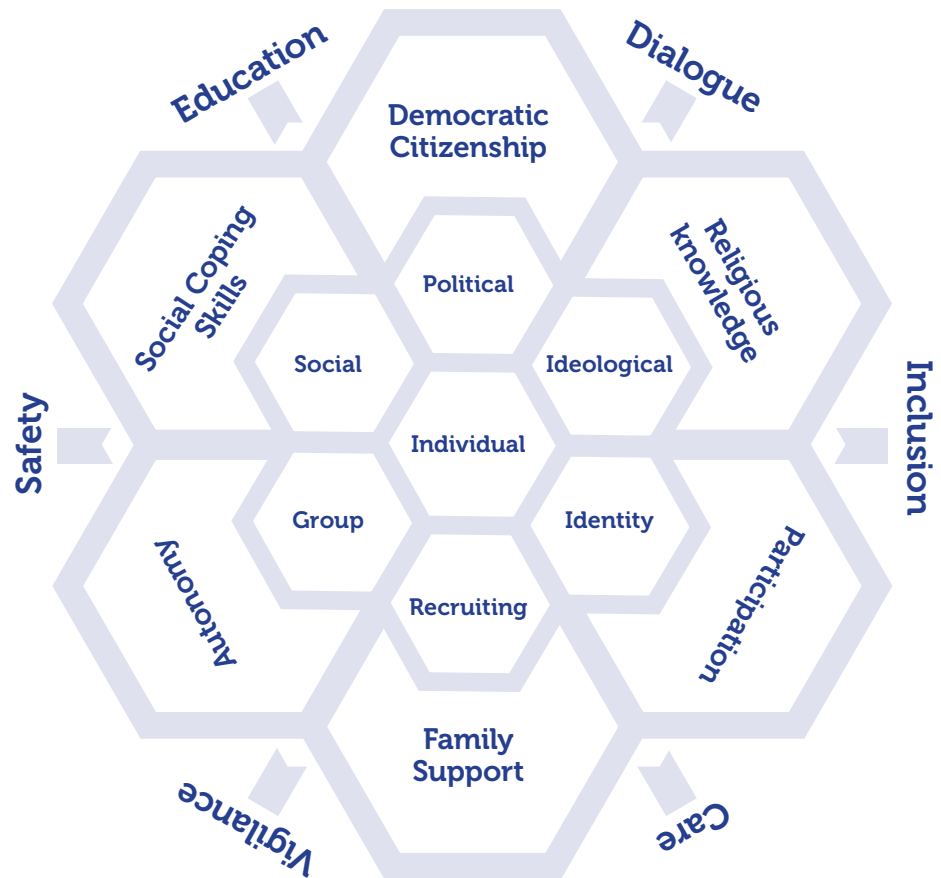
There are numerous risk factors for radicalisation; a single factor alone does not allow for prediction of a pos-

sible shift towards violent extremism. Many of these risk factors are outside the remit and scope of teachers and schools: for instance, education cannot provide relief for grievances over social and political conflicts and real or supposed injustices, or over international conflicts. While teachers can promote active citizenship, and empower students to become involved, it is through political action that most risk factors must be addressed and confined, if not overcome (Sieckelinck & Gielen, 2018). And, as they pointed out in a recent RAN Issue paper on risks, protective and promotive factors, education is a critical, but by no means exclusive domain for building resilience (see Figure 4).

Taken together, the following policy recommendations are likely to offer the context needed to thoroughly support schools. However, while helping schools instill a democratic ethos, we cannot hold this separate from the political reality in liberal democratic societies. Beyond these separate domains, there exists a need for rethinking political engagement, as such.

In this regard, tackling social and political polarisation has become a key priority in support of educational prevention strategies (RAN EDU/POL, 2017). This relates to the root causes of populism and extremism and their impact on radicalisation, but also to the immediate effects of populist and extremist currents on youngsters. As a 'vicious circle of Islamist and right-wing extremism' (Ebner, 2017), the recent rise of extremist violence illustrates the urgent political need to limit its impact on youngsters and young adults. This not only involves preventing extremist violence, but

**Figure 4**



also demands resolute political action against all forms of hate speech, dehumanisation and incitement to violence.

We must remain aware of the effects of political discourses that reproduce and foster stigmatisation. Speech matters – and it is important to promote inclusive language on a political level, and to resist divisive discourses of any kind.

Likewise, the success of educational prevention strategies is dependent upon increasing political efforts to counter social marginalisation and exclusion. Again, grievances related to social disintegration and experiences of discrimination cannot be addressed by education alone; substantial political engagement is required to advance social cohesion and equality and to reduce vulnerability due to deprivation and exclusion.

### **Legal framework**

Prevention work in education is strongly framed with legal rights and obligations, yet teachers and schools often face considerable challenges in defining their role and assessing and fulfilling their legal obligations. This relates to the basic question of what exactly is to be prevented, and by whom (Van de Weert & Eijkman, 2018). In fact, definitions of radicalisation differ considerably. While it is apparent that violence or support for violence is a key element, the position on various forms of extremism not directly linked to violence is far less clear. For instance, schools are expected to provide safe spaces for students to develop and voice their views and convictions, even if these views are at variance with generally agreed upon norms (RAN EDU, 2016b: 4). But no consensus exists on how to define the limits of an acceptable viewpoint.



Similar concerns over legal contexts relate to issues of data protection and the sharing of information. In many Member States, security agencies have substantially increased demands for information from teachers and schools about individual students suspected of being at risk of radicalisation. While these demands might be understandable from a security perspective, they are incompatible with the schools' responsibility to provide safe educational spaces.

If teachers and schools are to fulfil their role in any prevention scheme, these questions must be answered in a political dialogue involving all relevant actors, and reflecting the challenges of radicalisation as well as the fundamental principles and needs of education.

### **Mainstreaming prevention in education: think global, act local**

Over the last few years, an impressive corpus of educational methods and tools has been developed by educators and researchers across different fields. This describes promising and evidence-based responses to various dimensions of radicalisation (RAN CoE, 2017a). Yet teachers and school officials often voice concern over lack of resources and opportunities to implement these strategies in a sustainable and wide-reaching way (RAN EDU, 2016a).

While countless short-term projects and ad hoc initiatives of schools and teachers have been successful in individual schools across Europe, there is a dearth of political strategies to transfer these experiences and implement them as standard methods and routines in curricula and education systems countrywide.

Every government would benefit from a support structure that helps schools to navigate these dilemmas, so they

meet the conditions for transformation into labs for democracy.

While national strategies are important in defining strategic goals, roles and standards, and in supervising their implementation, they should also allow for tailored responses adapted to local conditions and contexts. No one city district resembles another, and their individual challenges are unique. It is thus on a local level that prevention measures should be designed and implemented, by local actors.

### **Active citizenship at the centre of education: prioritising civic education and media education**

The promotion of active citizenship and of common values of freedom, equality and pluralism is the cornerstone of the Paris Declaration of March 2015.

Despite this explicit importance attributed to citizenship and civic education for the prevention of radicalisation, educators across Europe are facing serious constraints in implementing existing approaches and tools in their classes. These constraints are often linked to the limited time allocated to citizenship education in curricula, and to a persisting emphasis on the transmission of knowledge, technical skills and competencies in national education. This also relates to the field of media education that often remains confined to technical learning. Experiences from teachers across Europe as well as recent research on radicalisation processes highlight instead the importance of (online) media for the promotion of communicative skills and critical thinking. In consequence, citizenship education and media education should be placed at the centre of educational policies targeting polarisation and prevention of violent radicalisation.

## Adapting curricula to match present-day realities and to reflect contemporary educational needs.

Curricula and textbooks often lag behind social realities and educational needs. While curricula and teaching material have improved considerably over the past decades, they are still far from responsive to and representative of the diverse identities and biographies making up today's classes.

All too often, histories of migration are only addressed in terms of conflicts, be they social, cultural or religious. Migration is thus not portrayed as a regular feature of most European societies, but rather as a problem and a cause of concern and decay. The same applies to the representation of Islam and Muslims in European societies. Even in most recent textbooks, Islam is mentioned primarily in the context of medieval history, or in relation to religious texts, with no links to current social life in most European cities. Muslim students will hardly feel represented in these references to early Islamic history or Islamic scripture.

Representation also entails narrating European colonial histories as global history, including the perspectives of colonised societies themselves. One-dimensional narratives of European colonial rule can still be found in many national curricula. Not only are these historically inaccurate, but they also lend legitimacy to the extreme religious propaganda based on calls for revenge for the European history of colonial violence.

Political action is thus needed to advance the development of inclusive curricula and teaching material in line with today's classrooms, and that responds to relevant new topics and educational needs.

## School policies for democratic school ethos

Participants in our meetings frequently stressed the importance of the right 'school ethos' as an 'oxygen' for the transformation of schools into 'labs for democracy'.

Political action is urgently needed to ensure there are sufficient personal, financial and institutional resources to develop and implement educational strategies that will tackle the cognitive, social and emotional dimensions of radicalisation. This also includes measures to allow for flexible and adaptive teaching arrangements that can be tailored in response to specific situations and concerns in schools. As a rule, teachers' experiences point to the need for a significant extension of student participation and representation in the institution's day-to-day activities and procedures.

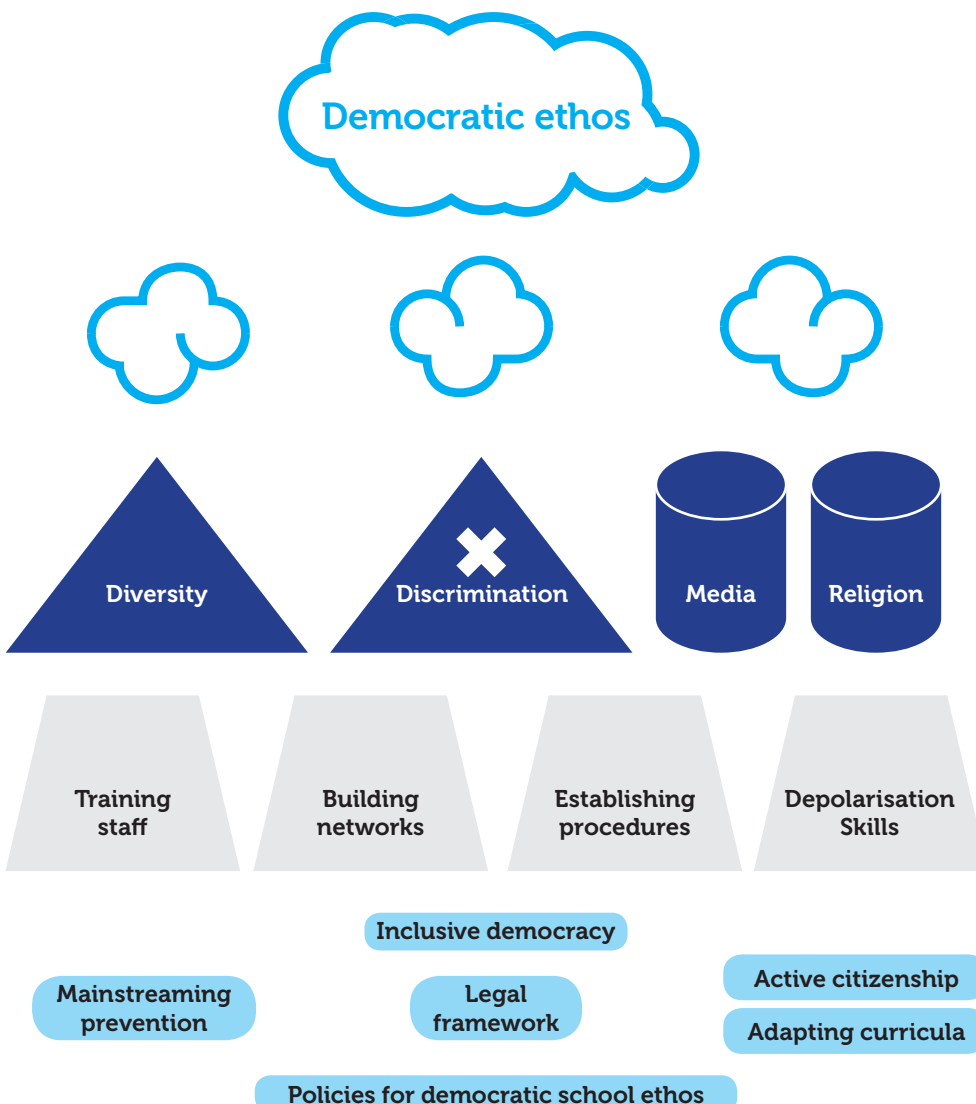
While the need for training in the field of prevention is widely recognised on a political level, most schools experience considerable constraints in time and resources that do not allow for such training (RAN EDU, 2017). Political action is required to secure this training and to facilitate a sustainable and continuous qualification level of all relevant staff members. For prevention work to remain sustainable, prevention must be integrated as a key topic in curricula of universities or other relevant institutions in which teachers receive their initial qualification.

The experiences of several Member States point to the importance of reinforcing the role of social work in schools. While teaching is the primary task of formal education, social work has been recognised as a key element in safeguarding students and supporting and advising them beyond the classroom. This includes psychological support to manage personal or family-related conflicts and uncertainties.

Prevention work requires close co-operation between different actors (RAN EDU, 2016d). And although most schools may be part of various local networks, schools often remain rather closed institutions, reluctant to draw on external expertise and support. On a political level, the importance of co-operation with local partners should be highlighted and encouraged to ensure effective and coordinated measures from various actors. In this regard, NGOs are key: these organisations have gained considerable expertise and experience in developing and implementing strategies of prevention.

Based on the three chapters of this companion, the following figure (Figure 5) depicts the prevention of violent radicalisation through education. We call it the L4D-plan: Laboratories for democracy.

**Figure 5**



## IV. In lieu of a conclusion: voices of those most affected

In closing, it is worth listening to what youth have to say on the issue. The RAN YOUNG participants invited to recent RAN meetings set out the reasons they believe young people 'flirt' with extremism, and their answers are consistent with practitioners' experiences and academic analyses. They noted that radicalised youth are unable to cope with a complex reality; they experience difficulty finding 'the truth'; they are struggling with insecurity, and identity and belonging issues; they have easy access to alternative worlds via the internet; they experience challenging family situations; and they experience a perceived lack of perspectives.

Their advice to adults, however, was less anticipated. First and foremost, they warned of the dangers of portraying a negative image of young people, and proposed focusing security measures on small radicalised groups. Their view was that this will prove not only more just, but also more effective, because the larger group has the potential to challenge such small groups; they are the ones who can prevent peers from being drawn towards extremism.

This companion was written to remind us of these simple truths, to ground us and help us reconnect with such common sense advice. In a time of alienation, desperation and polarisation, the way we approach youth and our educational agenda matters enormously.

Research on extremism and terrorism is equivocal on the role of education: while an individual's education level is not a causal factor for radicalisation, the democratic quality of education can definitely make a difference. Children and young people who are taught to handle conflict in a peaceful way, who have been supported and guided in their identity development, and who feel their voices are heard on key issues for them, will less likely be seduced by socially harmful propaganda.

This is a significant message to bear in mind; radical violent movements abound, and they are waging a war over the hearts and minds of our younger generations. Teachers and schools on the frontline of this battle need to be supported and encouraged. They deserve respect and backing if this battle is to be won peacefully.

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# Appendix

Manifesto for Education – Empowering Educators and Schools  
(Radicalisation Awareness Network, March 2015)

## Recommendations (summary)

### The educator

1. Invest in training.
2. Hold difficult conversations.
3. Offer alternatives.
4. Build educator networks.
5. Learn about student activity online.
6. Use testimonials of victims or formers.

### The school

7. Develop a clear vision on how to deal with radicalisation and extremism in the school.
8. Innovate within the curriculum.
9. Enrich the curriculum, using online tools.
10. Make use of extracurricular activities.
11. Have educators be trained in holding difficult conversations.
12. Lead by example to create an open and safe space for school staff.
13. Work together in robust partnerships with other organisations.
14. Involve students in prevention initiatives.

### The partners

15. Manage cooperation between schools and law enforcement.
16. Involve parents and families of students.
17. Engage NGOs and other external organisations.
18. Aid organisations and community initiatives offer alternatives to students.
19. Raise awareness of radicalisation in teacher training.

### The government

20. Develop a sustainable response to radicalisation.
21. Define criteria of success of prevention work.
22. Allow for tailored approaches within schools.
23. Foster innovation on a larger scale.
24. Invest in the future.

Source: RAN Prevent, 2015.





Radicalisation Awareness Network

