

16/01/2021

CONCLUSION PAPER

RAN event – Civil Society Empowerment Programme (CSEP)

Peer learning sessions

26 November/8 December 2020, Digital Meeting

Civil Society Empowerment Programme (CSEP) – Peer learning sessions

Key outcomes

RAN hosted two digital sessions that aimed at facilitating peer to peer learning amongst the 20 CSEP projects, which all received EU funding to conduct P/CVE alternative or counter narrative campaigns. During these sessions, the projects were asked to demonstrate to their peers what they had learned and how they overcame challenges relating to their campaign activities. Although the projects have a shared framework, there is significant degree of variation amongst them. Some focus on videos, others use online games or workshops or a combination of different tools and formats. The RAN facilitated this sharing of insights by creating a digital safe space which allowed for all participating projects to openly share good and less successful practices. This paper captures the most common challenges faced by the projects and their lessons learned to help other civil society organisations benefit from the learnings of the CSEP projects when creating alternative or counter narrative campaigns.

Some of the key learnings were:

- Develop an evidence-based “theory of change” that serves as a formative road map for the project activities. See your project as a “change journey”, stay flexible and adjust when needed.
- Involve representatives of your target audiences or work closely with partners who have an in-depth understanding of them. Co-create, this will help you identify what is important to your target audiences, the online platforms they use and the authorities/influencers they listen to.
- Consider using an external facilitator who helps building a shared understanding of the key elements of your activities when working with a team with diverse professional backgrounds. Don't automatically expect everyone to see things the same way.
- Ensure the safety of your staff and partners by making risk assessments and risk monitoring a standard part of your campaign.

Overarching topics of relevance

- **COVID-19 pandemic**

The current COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions on movement and activities was a key challenge for many of the projects, particularly for those who were at the stage of implementing offline project activities like workshops or shooting videos.

- **Networking and peer learning**

Many projects articulated an increased need for networking and peer learning. Since there were two rounds of CSEP funding, some projects are already finished while others have just started. Having access to a needs-based peer learning mechanism was seen as crucial.

- **Future cooperation**

Several projects, particularly those that are advanced in their activities or almost complete, have articulated an interest in building new consortia to apply for follow up projects on EU and EU Member State level.

- **Communication of CSEP results**

To ensure that P/CVE practitioners aim at conducting alternative and counter narrative campaigns can benefit from the learnings of the CSEP projects, a communication strategy to disseminate lessons learned should be developed and an online knowledge hub should be established.

Recommendations

Based on their experiences, the CSEP project representatives formulated several recommendations for other projects and/or project teams who are developing counter- or alternative narrative campaigns.

- Make sure you understand why the audience should listen to you

Develop an evidence-based “theory of change” that serves as a formative roadmap for the project activities. See your project as a “change journey”, stay flexible and adjust when needed. To reduce the risk of producing content that is not relevant to the target audience or that might even offend them, involve representatives of your target audiences or work closely with partners who have an in-depth practical understanding of them. Co-create the sensitive parts of your campaign, this will help you identify what the target audiences care about, the online platforms they use and the authorities/influencers they listen to.

- Good teams make successful campaigns, not good ideas

Many of the tasks necessary for running a successful campaign require specific expert knowledge and experience, by creating surveys, conducting interviews, developing a (digital) communications strategy or “understanding” the psychological dimensions of narratives and persuasion. Don’t underestimate these specialised skills or tasks and think that one can “read up” on them. Instead, build a consortium that has the necessary core skillset on board or plan for an appropriate budget to hire external support for those tasks or skills lacking in the (core) team. Once you have a diverse team in terms of professional backgrounds, it has proven useful to spend time on building a shared understanding of the key elements of your activities. Don’t expect that everyone sees things the same way or shares the same language, they more than likely do not. Consider using an external facilitator to help create this shared understanding within the team.

- Transnational campaigns need a common methodology

Most of the CSEP projects work in parallel in different EU Member States with different partners which makes the process of reaching target audiences even more challenging than it is for local or national campaigns. For the concept of “hyperlocal” campaigns to work, which aims at interacting with a clearly defined and understood target audience, a shared methodology and framework is needed to ensure either one cohesive campaign or a set of “hyperlocal” campaigns under a unified umbrella is being implemented. A co-creative process leading to an agreement on shared values, concrete objectives and essential milestones can help the different project teams of a consortium to see themselves as part of one bigger endeavour.

Follow-up

The main objective of the CSEP is to create a support structure for capacity building, training and peer learning for campaigns designed to reach individuals at risk of radicalisation and recruitment by extremists. During the CSEP support in 2020, many CSEP projects have articulated the need for more facilitated networking, peer to peer learning and for a knowledge hub with easy access to practical lessons learned, good practices and vetted experts. Hence, CSEP support in 2021 should focus on three key aspects that could contribute significantly to the current and future success of alternative and counternarrative campaigns in the EU:

- Creating synergies by grouping projects together that aim to reach the same or similar target audiences or have similar methodologies (e.g. through small scale meetings for those projects).
- Communicating success and lessons learned to policy makers of EU Member States (e.g. through briefings, large events, etc.) and other key stakeholders to facilitate continuity and future funding
- Promoting innovation, networking and transferability of good practices through digital means via an information hub (training videos, project descriptions, Q&A, etc.).

Further reading

Civil Society Empowerment Programme (Website)

https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/civil-society-empowerment-programme_en

Civil Society Empowerment Programme: Campaigns Event #02, Ex Post Paper, 18-19 November 2019, Dublin, Ireland

https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/rancsep/docs/csep_ex_post_paper_18-19_112019_dublin_en.pdf

Civil Society Empowerment Programme: The nine essentials to consider while engaging in online P/CVE campaigning, Ex Post Paper, January 2019, Brussels, Belgium

https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/rancsep/docs/csep_campaigns_event_ex_post_brussel_31012019_en.pdf

RAN C&N Effective Narratives: Updating the GAMMMA+ model

https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/ran-cn-effective-narratives-updating-gamma-model-brussels-14-15-november-2019_en