



EX POST PAPER

RAN YOUNG Empowerment Academy Session 1
25-27 MARCH 2019, Amsterdam (NL)

How to develop your own PVE initiative

The RAN YOUNG Empowerment Academy (RYEA) held its first session from 25 to 27 March: participants were trained in the use of group and personal development tools, attended workshops, learnt about the process of radicalisation and its root causes, and worked on developing their initiatives. This paper is based on the RYEA kick-off session.

A number of key lessons were highlighted in the session:

- 1) young activists should understand the context within which they are operating — a one-size-fits-all approach is not recommended in the prevention and/or countering of violent extremism (P/CVE), as the drivers and manifestations of violent extremism are different in every context;
- 2) they must map the important aspects of proposed solutions, so that the initiative meets the need;
- 3) when defining the problem and mapping the solution, it is useful to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon of radicalisation, its root causes, and of prevention work in general.

This paper is written for young activists who have decided to take action and seek solutions to the issues and challenges in their communities by setting up their own local PVE initiative. In 2019, the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) will publish four practical papers to support this target group, corresponding to the stages of initiative development.



Introduction

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

RAN espouses the belief expressed by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, and aims to empower young people wishing to play an active role in the prevention of radicalisation through RYEA, a capacity-building programme supporting the development of local PVE initiatives. In the RYEA sessions, young people work on enhancing their personal development, expand their knowledge on P/CVE, and develop the skills and competences needed to become a youth influencer and/or set up their own local sustainable P/CVE initiative.

The idea of setting up RYEA originated in a RAN YOUNG meeting held in Nice, France in 2018. The topic of this meeting was empowering young people to participate in P/CVE. Working alongside a group of young activists and practitioners, RAN explored the prerequisites for young people to successfully work on preventing radicalisation. Attendees highlighted that youth participation is often given too little attention or the wrong kind of attention: it is not organised under the correct conditions for it to be successful. One such condition is to **invest in young people** and to provide them with the appropriate knowledge and tools to participate — to **empower** them. RAN is supporting youth engagement in PVE in a meaningful and successful way through RYEA .

Participants in the Nice meeting identified four types of empowerment, which are interlinked and feature in all RYEA sessions:

- **knowledge empowerment:** understanding the radicalisation process, prevention work, and P/CVE and youth policies;
- **skills empowerment:** enhancing presentation and communication skills, and skills for critical thinking, leadership and decision-making, and managing/raising funds;
- **personal empowerment:** managing emotions, enhancing self-confidence, self-reflection and awareness of personal motivation and drive;
- **professional empowerment:** understanding how to advance the initiative to the next level and ensure its sustainability.

Young people play a vital and irreplaceable role in efforts to build social resilience, bring societies together, generate prosperity and employment, and resolve personal, community and larger-scale conflicts and grievances, many of which drive radicalisation. (Extremely together) ⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾ Extremely together. (2017). *Countering violent extremism: A guide by young people for young people*. Kofi Annan Foundation. p. 7.

Guidelines for young activists: how to set up a PVE initiative

In the course of 2019, after each RYEA session, RAN will produce a series of papers offering practical advice to young activists wishing to take action in PVE. Each paper addresses an essential part of this process: collectively, the four papers form the guidelines for young people starting their own PVE initiatives.

Ex post edition 1: How to develop a PVE initiative

Ex post edition 2: How to develop a project plan for your PVE initiative

Ex post edition 3: Teamwork and personal development

Ex post edition 4: How to professionalise your initiative



Identify the problem: background research on local context

The RAN paper [A Nimble \(NMBL\) Approach to Youth Engagement in P/CVE](#) provides extensive, practical guidelines for developing PVE projects and a step-by-step approach on how to involve young people in this process. Summarised below are the most important elements to consider when setting out to develop a PVE initiative.

The first and most important task in any P/CVE initiative is to understand the context. A one-size-fits-all approach is never recommended for P/CVE, as the drivers and manifestations of violent extremism are different in every context. The starting point is to identify the specific issues to be addressed in a given community setting, and consider what might be causing them.

How is violent extremism occurring in the context?

Violent extremism is an umbrella term that encompasses a spectrum of behaviour:

- damage to property (including graffiti and stickers)
- hate speech, both online and offline
- community/group violence and violent protest
- hate crime and terrorism.

What are the identifiable drivers of this behaviour?

Consider the following drivers:

- political drivers such as global events, conflict zones, lack of respect for human rights and the rule of law;
- socioeconomic drivers such as lack of employment opportunities and income restraints, restricted access to quality education (academic and ideological), and perceptions/levels of civic participation;
- cultural (or cross-cultural) drivers such as discrimination, community conflict and collective narratives ('shared traumas and glories').

How are young people affected by these influences?

- They might be targeted by recruiters.
- They might be exposed to harmful/hateful ideologies.
- Alternatively, they must ascertain whether any active youth groups/activities are interested in developing the capacity for P/CVE.

What other dynamics must be considered in this setting?

- Influential figures and groups.
- Other manifestations of the causes.
- Perceptions of P/CVE.
- Why isn't the problem worse? Pre-existing preventive factors.

Map the solution: the idea for your initiative

After identifying the driving forces of violent extremist behaviour in the community, the next step is to set out the key aspects of a proposed solution so that the initiative can best fulfil its purpose.

Who is the main focus of the programme?

- Young people who are being targeted for recruitment.
- Young people in need of support communities.
- Entire communities.

This will involve weighing up the vulnerabilities of the young people against their assets. It is understandable that young activists may want to engage directly with young people directly affected by extremist influences, but this may not always be possible. It may not also be where they are most effective.

Young activists should consider:

- the audiences they have access to;
- how they and/or their organisation is perceived by young people;
- whether they can tap into existing youth networks instead.

What is the main aim of the programme?

- Prevent violence and recruitment.
- Facilitate youth disengagement.
- Establish meaningful partnerships.
- Produce and amplify new narratives.
- Reinforce social connection.

The following three functions reinforce how 'social connection' lies at the heart of community resilience to violent extremism, but also underline the importance of social connection beyond the interpersonal realm:

- bonding relationships between people from the same community;
- bridging relationships between people from different communities;
- linking relationships to support community infrastructure.

For more information and specified guidelines, see the [Nimble \(NMBL\) Approach to Youth Engagement in P/CVE](#).

Explore the field

As described previously, young activists should clearly identify the problem to be resolved with their initiative, as well as indicate how the initiative aims to achieve this. An in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of radicalisation and its root causes and of prevention work in general is useful when defining the problem and mapping the solution.

Root causes of radicalisation leading to violent extremism

There is no single root cause of radicalisation and violent extremism. According to Magnus Ranstorp ⁽²⁾, the pathway to violent extremism can be best conceptualised as a kaleidoscope of factors, creating infinite, distinct combinations. PVE initiatives focus on removing the root causes of radicalisation. It is vital that they set out which root cause(s) their initiative aims to tackle, with a clear argument for how the initiative contributes to the prevention of radicalisation. Ideally, this argument should be backed by studies and literature justifying the preferred course of action for developing the initiative.

In the kaleidoscope of factors, some basic primary 'colours' create complex interlocking combinations:

- 1) individual sociopsychological factors:
 - a sense of injustice and feelings of humiliation
 - anger and frustration resulting from rigid binary thinking and conspiracy theories promoted through propaganda;
- 2) social factors:
 - social exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination (real or perceived);
 - political factors:
 - increasing xenophobia and discrimination
 - across the EU, authorities opposing Salafism – claimed to be opposing all/true Muslims
- 3) ideological and religious dimensions:
 - normalisation of far-right extremist claims, in some Member States more than others
 - strong support for the violent jihadi mission in limited sections of communities across the EU, in some Member States more than others;
- 4) culture and identity issues:
 - cultural marginalisation, resulting in alienation and lack of a sense of belonging to either home or an individual's parents' society;
- 5) trauma and other trigger mechanisms:
 - psychological trauma experienced owing to parents with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or other complex psychological problems;
- 6) group dynamics:
 - **Scott Atran** claims that 'extremism arises, in part, when membership in a group reinforces deeply held ideals, and an individual's identity merges with the group's' ⁽³⁾;
- 7) radicalisers/groomers:
 - critical mass of both jihadist and far-right recruiters that prey on vulnerabilities and grievances, steering recruits into violent extremism through persuasion, pressure and manipulation;
- 8) social media — the combined interplay of some of these factors results in violent extremism:
 - for some time now, social media has provided connectivity, virtual participation and an echo chamber for like-minded extremist views.

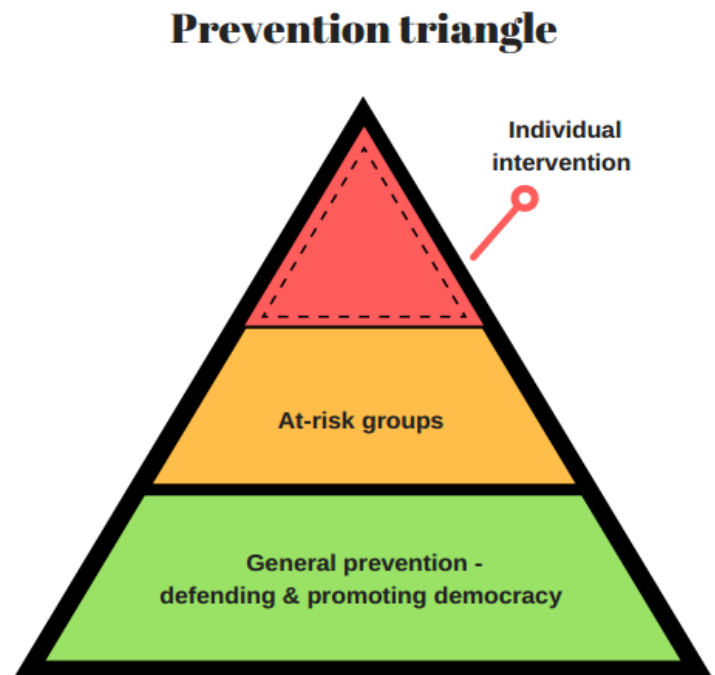
⁽²⁾ Ranstorp, M. (2016). *The root causes of violent extremism*. RAN issue paper. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_root-causes_jan2016_en.pdf

⁽³⁾ Ranstorp, M. (2016). *The root causes of violent extremism*. RAN issue paper. p. 3. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_root-causes_jan2016_en.pdf

Prevention triangle

Young activists must also understand the field of prevention work, in order to develop their initiatives. The prevention triangle ⁽⁴⁾ is useful for this purpose. It features the following three levels.

- General prevention** ⁽⁵⁾ is a crucial component and forms the foundation of most prevention intervention, with a broad target group. This level of prevention is primarily concerned with developing social skills, increasing involvement in society and fostering a sense of responsibility among children and young people. Activities include cultivating democracy-promoting, critical-thinking skills in educational settings and strengthening general protective factors within society. Measures are designed to strengthen social resilience.
- Prevention efforts targeting at-risk groups** are directed at those vulnerable to radicalisation and at risk of recruitment for terrorist or extremist purposes. Typical initiatives are contact points for support services, mentors and parental coaches. The focus is on intervention in cases where there are clear indications that an individual is at risk of being radicalised. This level does not apply to broad target groups, as the general preventive level does, but rather tackles specific problems, groups and individuals. The objective is to reduce the number of people at risk of radicalisation, through activities that strengthen the individual's social skills and enhance their positive relations.
- Individual prevention or intervention** is directed at individuals active in extremist environments, and those at risk of becoming violent or involved with other criminal activities. The focus here is on individuals; typical initiatives involve preventative dialogue, rehabilitation from prisons and exit strategies.



Further reading on radicalisation and root causes

- Bjørge, T. (Ed.). (2004). *Root causes of terrorism: Myths, reality and ways forward*. Routledge.
- Hafez, M., & Mullins, C. (2015). The radicalization puzzle: A theoretical synthesis of empirical approaches to homegrown extremism. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 38(11), 958-975.
- Atran, S., Sheikh, H., & Gomez, A. (2014). Devoted actors sacrifice for close comrades and sacred cause. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111(50), 17702-17703.
- Doosje, B., Moghaddam, F. M., Kruglanski, A. W., De Wolf, A., Mann, L., & Feddes, A. R. (2016). Terrorism, radicalization and de-radicalization. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 11, 79-84.

⁽⁴⁾ Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). (2018). *Developing a local prevent framework and guiding principles — Part 2*. RAN policy paper. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/policy_paper_developing_local_prevent_framework_guiding_principles_part2_112018_en.pdf

⁽⁵⁾ Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). (2016). *Developing a local prevent framework and guiding principles*. RAN policy paper. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/policy_paper_developing_local_prevent_framework_guiding_112016_en.pdf

5. Vergani, M., Iqbal, M., Ilbahar, E., & Barton, G. (2018). The three Ps of radicalization: Push, pull and personal. A systematic scoping review of the scientific evidence about radicalization into violent extremism. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1-32.
6. Bondokji, N., Wilkinson, K., & Aghabi, L. (2016). *Understanding Radicalisation: A Literature Review of Models and Drivers*. West Asia-North Africa (WANA) Institute, Royal Scientific Society in Amman, Jordan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.
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