

The Role of the Youth Sector in Preventing Violent Extremism



The European Youth Forum believes:

- Violent extremism in the form of **religious fundamentalism** is a growing concern for Europe, however other forms of violent extremism, based on **xenophobia** or **racism**, are also growing and pose a major threat to peaceful democratic societies.
- To fight violent radicalisation, the youth sector must develop **counter-narratives** and be better at showing the opportunities it can offer to all young people. Youth work should be more **vocal and explicit** on the great opportunities it offers, **inspiring** more young people to participate, also through **online communication**. Though youth work alone cannot combat violent radicalisation, it can address some of the root causes.
- It is important to use **clear, non-discriminatory language** when talking about violent radicalisation. Being radical can lead to positive change, challenging mainstream thinking. There must be space for positively radical ideas to emerge, while condemning violent extremism.

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

1 All sectors should work together to tackle the root causes of violent radicalisation, such as the marginalisation of young people.

- A coordination body should be established to build a joint strategy for all relevant sectors.
- Social policies and services should offer all young people access to quality education (both formal and non-formal and employment).
- Easily accessible “one-stop” services should target more vulnerable neighbourhoods.
- Less privileged groups must be a priority (they must have access to social security, healthcare and “learner-centred” education).
- Encourage Member States to provide long-term investment in quality education and exclude it from deficit targets.

Mayor of Mechelen
(Belgium) at a conference about radicalism: “A cross-sectoral approach for tackling exclusion in the city has been successful as, despite the high number of foreign fighters coming from Belgium, none are from this city.”

2 Support youth work.

Youth work creates a safe environment for young people who are excluded from society, enabling them to develop their full potential and interact with others. It equips young people with key life skills to become active, responsible and critical citizens. Youth work can help tackle marginalisation of young people. It is crucial, therefore, to recognise and give it ongoing support in order to maximise its impact.

- Sustainable funding must be ensured for youth work and youth organisations to support them in reaching out to marginalised youth.
- Youth work should be more transparent and more proactive in promoting what it can offer to young people. It should use different means of communication, notably online communication, using concrete examples and storytelling. Therefore, support for partnerships with the digital sector are needed.

Estel,
participant in a youth camp:
“During this camp I felt at home, I felt I was not alone anymore and it connected to my need to belong to a group and to be accepted for who I was”.

3 Invest in quality education, both formal and non-formal.

Education should help to create **intercultural dialogue**, and provide young people with **citizenship and human rights education** which would have a positive impact on society. Youth organisations and youth workers play a key role in contributing to intercultural dialogue, respect for diversity, democratic citizenship and human rights education.

- Citizenship and human rights education must be included in school curricula and culture and should involve practical and participative learning with NFE methods. This would foster participation of young people and help to prevent different forms of “violent radicalisation”
- In addition to benefiting from citizenship education at school, young people’s participation must be facilitated (for example through allowing voting at 16 and inclusive youth representation in decision making at all levels) to create participatory habits from an early age and an inclusive democratic culture.
- Political systems must be more open to change and accessible for young people. Partnerships between formal and non-formal education providers both online and offline should be fostered. Teachers and youth workers should get continuous training on digital technologies to help prevent violent extremism and build young people’s digital literacy.
- Better recognition of different types of education (formal, non-formal, informal) in order to improve the self-confidence as well as the inclusion of young people with no formal education degree.

Digital literacy is
far more than just knowing how to use a computer,
it is being able to be critical of information flows.

PRACTICES FROM OUR MEMBERS

EEE-YFU

Over the past 64 years, more than 250,000 participants have completed our international, educational programme, which offers secondary-school students the opportunity to live with a host family and attend school in a foreign country.

These dynamic experiences offer young people a transformative learning experience that develops valuable life skills, confidence, comprehension, tolerance, and intercultural competences.

EEE-YFU developed a manual entitled “Coloured Glasses: a Resource Manual for Intercultural Education”, which contains ready-to-use workshops on intercultural learning for use in secondary schools. The coloured glasses refers to the well-known analogy of the sunglasses which represent the cultural filters through which we observe and interpret reality.

This set of tolerance workshops is tailored for both teachers and students and use interactive non-formal education methods. Participants explore and learn about values, cultural differences, stereotypes, non-verbal and verbal communication, as well as identity.

EFIL

AFS Belgium Flanders is one of the 12 coordinating youth organisations in Flanders that will contribute to the Refugee Inn project which is initiated by the *Flemish National Youth Council (De Ambrassade)* and will start in March 2016. Within the project youth organisations together will provide professional shelter for 100 unaccompanied young refugees in Flanders for a year.

The shelter will be provided in one of the youth centers and young volunteers of the organisations involved will lead activities there. The young grassroots volunteers will be coached by more experienced volunteers of our organisations that will be trained by people who are experienced in working with refugees. AFS will contribute to the project with its educational work on intercultural learning, deliver coaches and fill in 3 weekends with activities by AFS young local volunteers.

SCOUTS

Scoutisme Français is gathering 6 scouts organisations based on different religious background. Every year, Scouts camps are organised between young people from the different organisations to promote mutual understanding and combat prejudice. Last summer, during a whole week, forty scouts aged 7 to 11 from the *Muslim Scouts of France (SMF)* and the *Buddhist-based Nature Scouts (EDLN)*, also from France, gathered at a summer camp and explored each other's faiths, understanding the differences but, above all, learning about respect of difference and diversity.

National Youth Council of Ireland

This toolkit includes a checklist for youth workers to assess their practice and gives advice on how to include young people from diverse backgrounds. Written by youth workers for youth workers it is a hands on guide on working with minority ethnic young people, LGBT young people, travellers (Irish Gypsies), young people with a disability (Physical, sensory and learning), young people with mental health issues, young people who are NEET, young people involved in the juvenile justice system, young parents and young carers. It also has chapters on Intergenerational work and gender conscious youth work.

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