

POSITION PAPER

YOUTH WORK IN EUROPE SUPPORTING THE PREVENTION OF RADICALISATION LEADING TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Adopted at the 2017 General Assembly of the European Confederation of Youth Clubs in Brussels, Belgium, on the 28th of October 2017.

Note: this is designed to be a living document which will be amended as necessary by the membership of ECYC at General Assembly. It will inform ECYC's policy and advocacy platform for work on supporting youth work.

INTRODUCTION

Terrorist attacks in Europe and in European neighboring countries highlight the urgent need to tackle the issue of radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism. The majority of the terrorist suspects implicated in those attacks were European citizens, born and raised in EU Member States, who were radicalised and turned against their fellow citizens to commit atrocities. Prevention of radicalisation is a key part of the fight against terrorism, as highlighted in the European Agenda on Security¹. This said, it is also important to point out that the large majority of young people in Europe are well integrated and engaged on different levels in their communities and beyond.

The role and importance of youth work in the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism is highlighted in several high-level European documents, such as:

- Council of Europe's strategy "The fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism - Action Plan" from 19 May 2015
- European Commission's "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions supporting the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism" from 14 June 2016
- the Council of the European Union's "The role of the youth sector in an integrated and cross-sectorial approach to preventing and combating violent radicalisation of young people" from 30 May 2016
- The European Youth Forum's "The Role of the Youth Sector in Preventing Violent Extremism" from 30 May 2016.

As highlighted in the European Commission's Communication:

¹ The European Agenda on Security, COM (2015) 185 of 28 April 2015 http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/e-library/documents/basic-documents/docs/eu_agenda_on_security_en.pdf

“Youth work powerfully reaches out to young people, especially the disadvantaged, and helps them become engaged citizens, avoiding marginalisation and vulnerability to extremist views. Engagement of youth workers is important as part of a broader collaboration with all relevant actors, including with educational institutions, community organisations, employers and those closest to young people: their families and friends.”²

ECYC’S STAND

The European Confederation of Youth Clubs (ECYC) is made up of National Youth Organisations and National Networks of youth workers from 16 European Countries. Since 1976, its aim is to develop, support and promote Youth Work at national and international level and to empower the **1.2 million young people** ECYC’s member organisations work with to develop personally and socially through engagement in Youth Work. Youth Work focuses on the potential and resources of young people, as it is one of the main guiding principles of youth work.

ECYC and its member organisations can play a **vital role** in supporting and developing youth work in the prevention of violent radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism, as:

- local actors such as youth clubs are best placed to prevent violent radicalisation in both the short and long term and
- European youth work international cooperation, networking, funding and exchange of good practices at EU level are crucial in the prevention process.

ECYC acknowledges the many evolving challenges facing youth organisations and the provision of Youth Work today. There is an ever growing demand for provision of youth work in its traditional form, but also a demand to expand our work into more **intervention-based actions** targeting particular categories of young people.

It is ECYC’s view that intervention-based actions are best delivered in the context of mainstream Youth Work provision. Such an approach prevents the stigmatization of young people in communities.

A growing emphasis on producing **measurable outcomes** for our work, along with a **decline** in structural and up-front **funding** for youth organisations, is creating an increasingly difficult environment for us to work in.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to protect, support and develop the involvement of youth work in prevention of youth radicalisation leading to violent extremism, ECYC makes the following **recommendations**:

² European Commission’s “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions supporting the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism” from 14 June 2016

POLICY

- ECYC recommends recognizing that youth radicalisation is not a new phenomenon, but rather that its recent manifestations and the communication channels have changed and are consequently not focusing exclusively on religious fundamentalism, but also on other forms of violent extremism, for instance those based on extreme nationalism, xenophobia or racism that are currently a growing threat to democracy in Europe.
- ECYC asks for a strengthened framework for policy support and European cooperation in the context of prevention of violent radicalization.
- ECYC stresses the urgency of monitoring the implementation of the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative in the EU as important instruments for the eradication of poverty and the creation of inclusive labor markets and societies.
- ECYC warns against instrumentalising youth work in the process of security development and against wearing down the autonomy of youth work to function freely from the private and the public spheres concerning young people in the context of prevention of violent radicalization.
- ECYC warns against perceiving youth as a risk group, rather focuses on resources of young people
- ECYC underlines the necessity to use a clear, non-discriminatory language when addressing the issue of violent radicalization.
- ECYC recommends that the non-governmental youth work sector be actively involved in the formulation of any local, national or international policies or strategies related to youth work and radicalisation prevention, at the appropriate level (local government involve local project, national government involve national organisation, EU level etc).

YOUTH WORKERS, PROFESSIONALISATION AND TRAINING

- ECYC asks for further involvement of youth work organisations in ongoing European initiatives on hate speech, as well as in collaboration opportunities aimed at producing concrete working tools directly usable by youth work practitioners;
- ECYC acknowledges the establishment of working groups such as the “RAN Working Groups” or the “Commission expert group on youth work for active citizenship, preventing marginalisation and violent radicalization” and recommends creating more platforms for exchange of experiences of youth work practices through further mapping of research and existing tools that could:
 - tackle hate speech and the dissemination of extremist materials online
 - strengthen young people’s resilience against extremist propaganda
 - communicate positive narratives and offer life-affirming and personal valorizing visions to young people in a democratic context.
- ECYC recommends strengthening EU partner countries’ prevention capacity by supporting peer learning and direct exchanges to help identify youth work best practices in the field.

YOUNG PEOPLE

- Policy positions and papers concerning young people need to clearly construct young people as assets within their community and not as problems which need to be fixed.

- Youth Workers and Youth Organisations need to be supported and resourced to help young people to distinguish between real and fake news and to verify the quality of the sources of information they access, both on and off line.
- The mobility of young people must continue to be supported and resourced.

FUNDING

- ECYC recommends the provision of operational funding for the infrastructure (office, core staff and training) of youth organisations at local, national and international level by statutory and governmental agencies.
- ECYC recommends that current youth programs are retained at European level and that further European programs become more accessible for youth organisations.
- ECYC contends that volunteer-led youth work is 'low cost not no cost' and recommends that volunteers are supported in terms of administrative support and training, as well as professional development support, and that volunteer-led projects are given access to programme funding.
- As the multifaceted and complex challenge of youth violent radicalisation can be tackled through a combination of actions by actors from different domains, and cannot be dealt with just through an increase and diversification in security measures – as these seem to have been heavily financed in the past 2 years - ECYC recommends balanced funding budgets that take into consideration security not prevailing prevention budgeting needs.