

CONFERENCE: YOUTH WORK FIGHTS BACK VIOLENT EXTREMISM – RECOMMENDATIONS –

INTRODUCTION

Without any doubt, the population affected the most by violent extremism is youth. However, profiling and targeting directly youth at risk, is not an easy task. As Magnus Ranstorp describes, violent extremism can be conceptualized the best as a kaleidoscope of factors, creating infinite individual combinations. There are some basic primary colors which create complex interlocking combinations, like: 1) individual socio-psychological factors; 2) social factors; 3) political factors; 4) ideological and religious dimensions; 5) the role of culture and identity issues; 6) trauma and other trigger mechanisms; and three other factors that are a motor for radicalization: 7) group dynamics; 8) radicalizers / groomers; and 9) the role of social media. But it is the combined interplay of some of these factors that causes violent extremism.

Therefore, six organizations from the Western Balkans: **Forum MNE** from Montenegro, **DamaD** from Serbia, **PRONI** Center for Youth Development from Bosnia and Herzegovina; **IDM** Institute for Democracy and Mediation from Albania, **FIQ** Forum for Civic Initiatives from Kosovo and **SEGA** Coalition of youth organizations from Macedonia during a two-day regional conference Youth Work Fights Back Violent Extremism, held in February 2018, focused on an in-depth analyses of violent extremism in the region – its drivers, examples of positive practices in building resilience – aimed at capturing regional strength and creating a corner stone for regional cooperation in prevention and combating VE.

The conference was organized as a part of the project *Youth Resilience to Radical and Extreme Behaviors* financially supported by the Balkan Trust for Democracy, a project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

Beside the national CVE strategies, we believe that larger number of stakeholders needs to take an active part in creating sustainable solutions for our communities, countries and our region on their path to health and safety, so we developed recommendations for the three most important levels.



1. GOVERNMENTAL LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

Governmental sector should focus its work on preventing and combating violent extremism of youth on three levels: national, local and regional.

There is a need for more in-depth researches in the area of violent extremism among youth – about the roots of the problem, pull and push factors (factors that attract or force young people to step into this field). Stronger partnership among governmental research institutions, academia, think tanks and other research organizations is needed.

- ▲ Governments need to create supportive environment and develop and/or support programs for work on the prevention of violent extremism from the early ages, already in preschool and elementary school environment.
- ▲ It is necessarily to put more in practice usage of existing structures in the system when working on P/CVE among youth: teachers/professors, psychologists, pedagogues, especially professionals like social workers employed in social protection system.
- ▲ In the countries where religious education is included in school curriculum, governments should ensure that those subjects include topics like religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue.
- ▲ It is necessarily to strengthen cooperation of governmental sector with civil society, especially non-governmental organizations and faith-based organizations and groups.
- ▲ Governments should ensure clear and regularly used communication channels between all sectors relevant for P/CVE among youth, governmental and non-governmental sector, especially: education sector, security sector, social protection and welfare, and health sector, so all relevant actors could react accordingly.



It is necessary to implement multisector approach in process of creating, implementing and monitoring of policies targeting youth, with special focus on P/CVE related policies.

It is important to understand that radicalization is not only migrant, religious based issue, and try to understand roots in order to plan steps in this area.

When creating policies on national/local/regional level that are focused on P/CVE among youth, governments should plan activities that localize intervention because it would bring better results.

It is necessary to implement and support activities that will strengthen capacities of governmental institutions from all sectors (education, security, social protection and welfare, health sector) to work on P/CVE among youth – through raising awareness, training etc.

Governments should support implementation of continuous training on digital technologies for all professionals in direct contact with youth, in order to give them skills to work on prevention and combating violent extremism in an online space.

To develop/strengthen “task force” model at the level of the government, that is multisector body at the highest level (prime minister office) that monitors implementation of P/CVE strategy and action plan, and ensures that measures covering youth are incorporated, institutions in charged for implementation are held accountable.

Support developing of different, innovative approaches in work with young people – in the frame of governmental institutions and also civil society (through sharing data, knowledge, allocating funds etc.).

To involve more young people in decision making and political discussions and life, and to strengthen link between government – elected representatives and young citizens.

To ensure that there is a space and supportive environment in the educational system for free speech of children and youth and to have the right to opinion; and to create and implement reforms that develop critical thinking and self-confidence of youth.



- ▶ To develop national and regional web platforms that will ensure accessibility of data and provide space for sharing knowledge, research results, developing partnerships on national and international level on P/CVE among youth.
- ▶ To include gender component in all governmental policies dealing with P/CVE among youth.
- ▶ There is a need to increase regional cooperation, exchange of information and expertise among governmental institutions that are important actors in P/CVE (cross border cooperation, signing bilateral agreements, implementing people to people programs for transfer of knowledge and practice etc.).
- ▶ Better visibility of intergovernmental regional initiatives like Regional Cooperation Council, RYCO and others should be ensured among diverse group of stakeholders, including stakeholders from national but also, local level.

2. INTERNATIONAL ACTORS' RECOMMENDATIONS

International actors are considered to be UN agencies, the European Commission and the Council of Europe bodies, intergovernmental organizations, OSCE, foreign embassies, international donor community (foundations) and other international political organizations. Their role and potential influence in supporting activities on prevention and combating violent extremism is recognized as very important, and therefore the main recommendations are:

- ▶ To have as one of the long term priorities work on improving economic and social condition of youth in the country where they implement their programs.
- ▶ To ensure coordination and synergy among activities implemented by all international actors active in certain community.
- ▶ To include governments and civil society when defining national and regional priorities of work in the area of human rights and youth related policies, especially in the field of preventing and combating violent extremism.
- ▶ To support activities of national and local stakeholders that are directly working with youth on prevention and combating violent extremism, and invest more in strengthening the local response to this problem through capacity building, allocating funds and other measures.



▶ All international actors that consider themselves as a part of donor community: to establish system for regular communication and exchange of information on priorities and projects to be supported, in order to avoid overlapping support for certain type of activities and leaving the gap in the other areas that are recognized as important for working with youth on prevention and combating violent extremism.

▶ To cherish model of partnership with youth and civil society organizations and governmental sector that works on P/CVE, and take into consideration national and local expertise and knowledge.

▶ Donor community to diversify list of partners and grant beneficiaries and break the monopoly of certain organizations that are recognized as “usual suspects” or so called “proven partners” in implementing projects and receiving their financial support.

▶ Donor community to develop multiannual financing schemes and provide operating (administrative) grants to youth and civil society organizations and other stakeholders working on P/CVE, because regarding this topic if we want to reach objectives it is not recommended to have short term projects and activities.



3. YOUTH & CSO LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth activist, CSO activist, within youth, women, and human rights organizations, which are in daily contact with young people should take active role in P/CVE and join the community & country and regional teams in prevention and countering of violent extremism. In order to maximize their impact youth and civil society organizations should:

- ▶ Create regional online platforms for tracking and monitoring P/CVE among youth.
- ▶ Strengthen existing and develop new youth and civil society organizations' networks on regional level that will focus on working on youth wellbeing and mitigating pull and push factors for violent extremism.
- ▶ Shape positive narrative and promote positive examples and role models among youth.
- ▶ Cooperate with education sector on updating school curriculum in line with the needs of youth and modern developments in all sectors, especially digital technologies.
- ▶ Implement non-formal education activities for youth, parents and professionals from education sector in cooperation with schools, universities and other educational institutions.



- ▶ Build partnership with media, and implement joint activities (campaigns, trainings etc.) on the topic important for building youth resilience to violent extremism and influence of hate speech and online violence in social media on youth development.
- ▶ To be more inclusive and directly involve young people in planning and implementation of their activities, especially young coming from vulnerable groups and youth at risk.
- ▶ To promote intercultural dialogue among young people, and support their mobility.
- ▶ To establish partnership with influencers (people from public life, celebrities) in order to involve them as human right activists and peace and nonviolence ambassadors.
- ▶ To develop and implement peer education programs.
- ▶ Incorporate “her perspective” into all activities in P/CVE among youth, meaning gender mainstreaming all activities in this field.
- ▶ Develop/strengthen cooperation with religious groups and faith-based organizations working with youth and providing services for youth in order to provide more comprehensive respond to youth needs and prevent and combat violent extremism.

We consider this document valuable in process of P/CVE and see it as possible source of ideas for planning future actions in this field.





ABOUT THE PROJECT YOUTH RESILIENCE TO RADICAL AND EXTREME BEHAVIORS:

The Western Balkans (WB) countries have been in the spotlight of international attention in recent years due to their lack of resilience when it comes to recruitment strategies of violent extremists groups. Local and regional stakeholders and affected communities are still grappling with finding effective responses and preventive measures to tackle this phenomenon. Thus, there is a strong need for the region to develop inclusive and targeted programs which can help building resilient states and communities against violent extremism (VE).

The population affected the most by violent extremism is youth. Youth is in the core of Youth Work – Profession that is only modestly recognized in the WB region and this only due to the civil society initiatives. Youth work has primary objective personal and social development of young individuals. That is why Youth Work needs to be dynamic and responsive to contemporary issues and challenges that young people are facing – rising of violent extremism being one with high potential to harm.

Youth activist, CSO activist within youth, women and human rights organizations which are in daily contact with young people should join the community & country and regional teams in prevention and countering of

violent extremism. Therefore, the consortium made of six WB countries has launched an initiative on PCVE with aim of providing space for exchange of information, relevant data, practices, tools and insights among the first liners/youth workers, youth activists, NGO activists, youth researchers, academia, decision makers and other stakeholders on the issue of youth resilience to extreme violent behaviors.

The project is financially supported by the Balkan Trust for Democracy, a project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

For more information please contact:

- Montenegro – Forum MNE: www.forum-mne.com
- Serbia – DamaD: www.kcdamad.org
- Bosnia and Herzegovina – PRONI Center for Youth Development: www.proni.ba
- Albania – Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM): www.idmalbania.org
- Kosovo – Forum for Civic Initiatives (FIQ): www.fiq-fci.org
- Macedonia – SEGA Coalition of youth organizations: www.sega.org.mk

