

SPOTLIGHT

MARCH 2021



YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE DURING
COVID AND BEYOND

**Dennis DE VRIES****Kelsey BJORNSGAARD****Milena DE MURGA****Frank SIKKINK****Jean-Philippe FONS****Rudi AUDIENS****Karin HEREMANS**

EDITORIAL

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has given new opportunities for violent extremists and terrorists to radicalise and recruit. During the pandemic they have particularly targeted vulnerable young people – who are spending more and more time online – through gaming platforms and chat rooms.

Government measures to stop the spread of the virus have had a significant social and mental health impact on young people. With universities, schools, youth centres and sports clubs closed, young people (namely those over 12 years of age) are cut off from their friends and social networks. As a result, young people are increasingly isolated, frustrated and uncertain about their future.

With violent extremists and terrorists seeking to capitalise, the need to reach out to and engage with young people has never been more important. While practitioners must find new ways to engage with young people online, as government measures are eased towards the summer we must also consider how to engage young people offline, in schools and out in the community.

In this Spotlight, RAN practitioners working in the fields of youth work and education, including the Working Group leaders of the RAN Youth and Education Working Group, share their insights and experiences on different aspects of the challenge, including how to engage with young people online, in the classroom, through art and through sport. We also hear the perspectives of young people themselves.

We want to hear from you! If you would like to contribute to future editions of Spotlight, or if you have ideas for an article, please get in touch with the RAN communications team at ran@radaradvies.nl

The RAN Staff

Contents

03

EDITORIAL
COVID and P/CVE

08

ARTICLE
Youth isolation

12

INTERVIEW
**Youth engagement: A
practitioner perspective**

18

FEATURE
Web Citizens

24

ARTICLE
**Using popular culture
to engage vulnerable
youth**

32

FILM
**Engaging young people
through sport**

34

FEATURE
SPEY project

38

OPINION
**The algorithm
generation**

44

ARTICLE
**Fostering youth
engagement in French
schools**

50

FEATURE
**Athena-Syntax: Where
art and education meet**

56

PROFILES
RAN YOUNG

60

PAPER
**Empowering young
people to successfully
participate in P/CVE**

62

HIGHLIGHTS
**RAN Activity on
RAN YOUNG**

64

LIBRARY
Discover More



ARTICLE: **YOUTH ISOLATION: HOW TO GET THEM OUT OF IT?**



**Dennis
DE VRIES**

The theme of the RAN Youth & Education Working group meeting on December 15, 2020 was ‘Youth isolation - how to get them out of it?’. The following article summarises the insights captured during this meeting, both in terms of risks and the role which organisations and practitioners working online can play in tackling youth isolation and radicalisation...

Across Europe we see lockdowns and curfews; schools and community centres are also closed. These measures are having an impact on society, but especially on children and young people. Young people in particular have a need for contact and interaction with others; and this is important for them since their identity is still evolving.

Much research is being done into the effect this is having on young people. For example, a Dutch study shows that a third of young people surveyed are experiencing an increase in psychological problems and that half of these young people feel more lonely. In addition, young people are becoming more and more isolated and are spending more time on the internet, making them more susceptible to radicalising influences.

The Covid measures, which have created this isolation, can also foster a feeling of injustice. Young people experience that they no longer participate in society, and the differences between groups in society also seem to be widening. These processes can reinforce polarisation and radicalisation among young people.

Because young people are increasingly online, they also search for answers to questions they have on this Covid crisis. Through algorithms via social media, we see that young people are also increasingly coming into contact with conspiracy narratives. To this end, a lot is demanded of proper critical thinking at this time: Where do I get my source from? What is the truth? Is there another opinion?

The role of educators and youth workers is therefore extremely important today. Often they are the only ones who have contact with young people (next to their parents) and who can make a difference. At the same time, there is no single right approach. What we can say is that there is tremendous power in the formation of social networks in which parents, schools, police and youth workers work together from a shared pedagogical vision.

It is important that any cooperation is based upon the same preventive vision. It is also important that practitioners cross into each other's field and share their expertise. For instance, both teachers and youth workers will increasingly need to make the step to the online world – the place to meet and make contact with isolated young people. They will need support from digital workers to do this.

It is also important in today's climate to ensure that young people feel that they are participating in society. Policymakers should therefore think carefully about how they give children and young people a voice, encourage them to be part of the conversation on what matters to them and find ways to increase youth participation in developing solutions and making decisions in these difficult times.

Dennis de Vries is a Working Group leader of the RAN Working Group on Youth and Education.

“Across Europe we see lockdowns and curfews; schools and community centres are also closed. These measures are having an impact on society, but especially on children and young people.”

Interview: Youth engagement A practitioner perspective

**Hanae
HADDOUCHE**

To better understand the role of a youth worker, Dennis de Vries, the Working Group leader of RAN Youth and Education, spoke with Hanae Haddouche. Hanae works as a youth worker in Utrecht, the Netherlands. The Netherlands is currently in lockdown, there is a curfew from 0pm and secondary schools are closed. Hanae talks to Dennis about the risks, challenges and opportunities for youth work during the Covid pandemic.

In your experience are young people becoming more isolated than usual?

Yes, especially in education. Education takes up most of their day and this has now been taken away from young people. Although they are obliged to have online lessons – with exception of the most vulnerable children who can go to school – they are becoming increasingly isolated. Some schools, like the one I work in, Trajectum college in Utrecht, have also arranged emergency shelter for young people who do not have enough space at home or who do not receive support.

In our school we also have the option of conducting mentor interviews. These conversations are not conducted online. Pupils are invited individually and in this way can still have a conversation with their mentor. This is an instant instrument to check whether all students are still there studying at home.

How do you maintain contact through youth work?

As a youth worker my phone is on seven days a week. I am easily accessible on snapchat, Instagram and TikTok. I also involve young people in this; my TikTok account is managed by a young person from the local neighbourhood. I provide material, she writes the posts, she makes the hashtag and ensures that our organisation, JoU, are clearly visible. What is important is that you are available. If someone sends you a message, you must respond as soon as possible. If you do not do this, you will not be taken seriously as a youth worker.

How do you find out if there are concerns about radicalisation or polarisation?

By what young people share, like and send around. I don't wait until I get in touch with them or they get in touch with me; I regularly check their social media accounts for any updates. I can see everything they share, what they respond to and what they like. The moment I have concerns or signal something, I start a private conversation or send a DM.

Do you also see a difference in forms of radicalisation or polarisation?

Yes, for sure. I have noticed that young people are more online and looking for information there. They wonder what is going on in the world and unfortunately algorithms may cause them to pick up on disinformation and conspiracy theories. Consider, for example, QAnon-derived theories. Young people think that the Covid crisis relates to this and speak of a higher order or a deep state. In addition, videos about vaccinations go viral and a lot of disinformation is spread, which they pick up on.

We also see that social media are part of the few places where young people get their information. Another key source of information that can provide a counter balance, the school, is of course closed. Unfortunately, not all children are trained in such a way that they look for original sources, which makes the risk of disinformation higher during this Covid crisis.

What is your role as a youth worker in this situation?

You can only identify signs of radicalisation when you are in touch with young people and have a trusted relationship with them. I always talk to them and take an interest in them, without blaming them or talking down on them. This conversation does not have to be face-to-face, but can also take place online. We also use online gaming as a way to get to get in touch with gamers and to know what is going on, for example through games such as Fortnite, FIFA, and Warzone. During these online tournaments, there is a lot of exchange and conversation with young people, which allows us to identify new and interesting thoughts or sentiments. The role of a youth worker is therefore mainly to build a relationship in order to identify potential signals of radicalisation.

What do you do when there are real concerns?

Take action. You first have a conversation with them yourself, and then potentially refer them to other partners in the social domain. We work together with schools, healthcare and mental health professionals, formal education and the police. Of course, there is the General Data Protection Regulation (AVG) in the Netherlands; this is a privacy law. We do not share names when we discuss a case. If safety is not guaranteed, there is an exception to the law and we are allowed to share names. Sometimes it is necessary to pass the law.

If there are concerns, we share them with each other. We then look together to see whether this is an individual observation or whether there are multiple indications among partners. Young people share many quotes and meme's on social media. You can see how it is with the mental health of a young person. These

“Take action. You first have a conversation with them yourself, and then potentially refer them to other partners in the social domain. We work together with schools, healthcare and mental health professionals, formal education and the police.”

expressions can cause specific concerns. An example of this is a girl I was concerned about. I saw a lot of snapchat videos and you could see that she had lost a lot of weight. She also came across as depressed and daily posts were made about how she considered herself inferior and ugly. This specific case is then discussed with the healthcare professionals; then it is discussed who can take on which role.

Due to the Covid crisis, we now have even shorter lines of communication. It is very good that the police, for example, also knows where to find us. I work a lot with community police and the police security department. The role of the community police officer is the face in the neighbourhood. The police officers work from a preventive approach and ensure that everyone knows them and they know everyone. In concrete terms, this means that they are present during activities for children and young people in the neighbourhood. They also regularly drop by the community centres.

If there are major concerns about radicalization, for example, I will contact the police security department. For example, there were riots in many Dutch cities during the start of the curfew. In Utrecht, we were able to signal this in good time by using social media. For example, a call was made on Telegram to start riots in Utrecht. If I do not notice this myself, I will be approached by young people who are concerned about this. I then share this information and accounts with the security department. This ensured that the accounts were offline within 24 hours and we managed to prevent riots in Utrecht.

We know the neighbourhood, the families, the situation and environment around such a young person and with whom he or she associates. In these situations it is important that you see the whole environment in which the young person is active, both online and offline. Social media can help you with this; by using social media I can see who they interact with and where their interests lie.

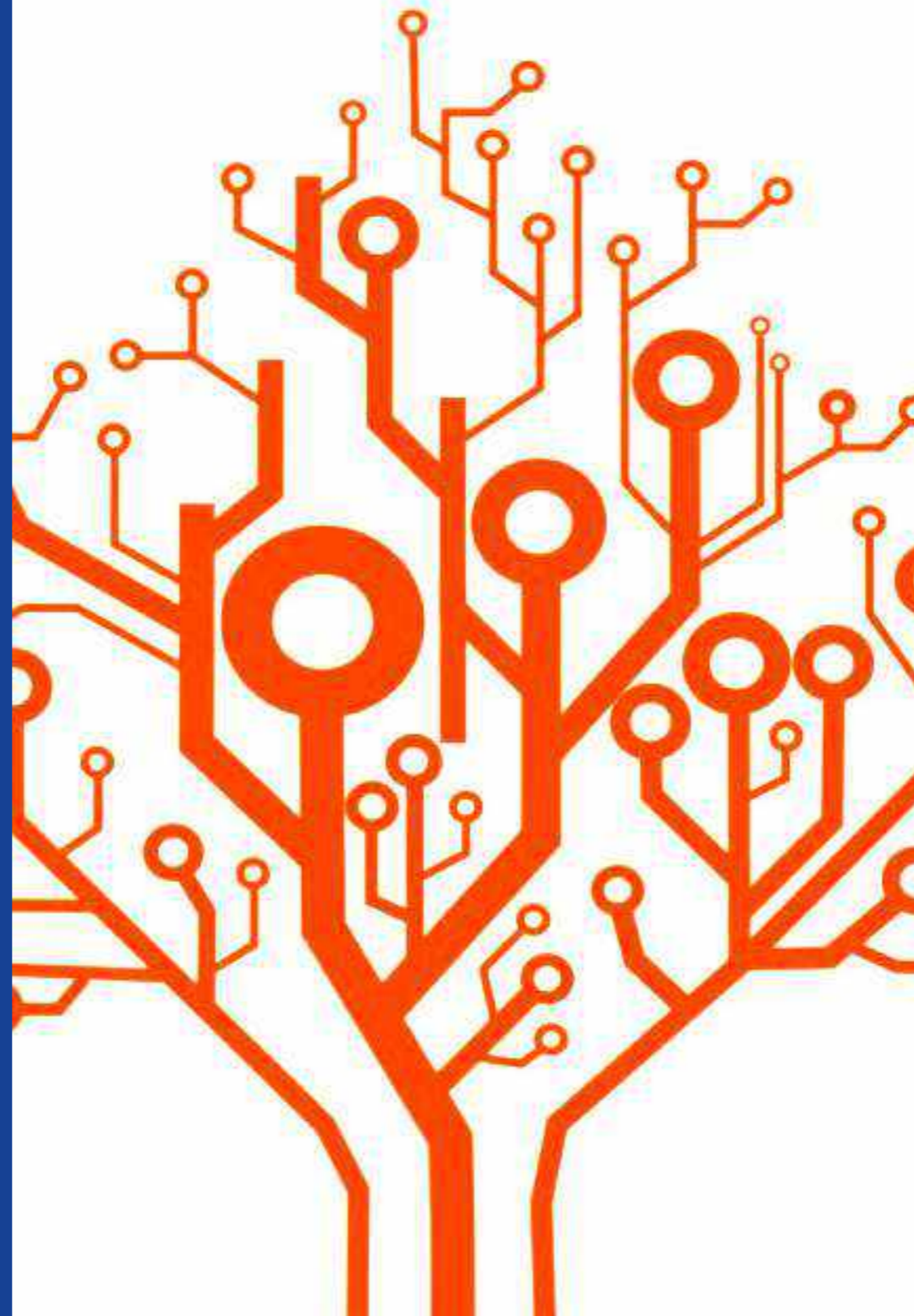
“Due to the Covid crisis, we now have even shorter lines of communication. It is very good that the police, for example, also knows where to find us. I work a lot with community police and the police security department.”

Web Citizens

FEATURE

The Web Citizens project is a training programme aimed at preventing violence, harassment and the radicalisation of young people through digital mediation.

The training is based on an online educational programme developed in France, called the 'Promeneurs du Net', which itself replicated a similar programme previously delivered by the Fryshuset youth centre in Sweden.





The Promeneurs du Net programme was created in response to the increase in internet and social network usage among young people and the need to provide young people with a trustworthy online presence. Prior to 2012, some youth workers were already working online, but this practice was marginal due to a lack of digital competence and no common framework of intervention. An online controlled and certified pedagogical action was therefore deemed necessary for these digital youth workers.

A Promeneurs du Net youth worker is a professional community worker and/or educator)working that engages with young people. As an extension of their mission they are designated by their employer to link-up with young people on social networks. Each Promeneurs du Net professional has a bespoke profile, with his/her picture and the name of their employer. By becoming 'friends' online with young people, the Promeneurs du Net youth worker can share information with them, answer their questions or worries and give them advice. Their role is not to enforce surveillance but to provide a friendly presence online.

Thanks to this role, the professional can also detect a worrying situation that might affect a young person, such as suffering from isolation, uneasiness or fear. By conversing with young people, the Promeneurs du Net youth worker builds-up social links and cultivates the critical thinking of young people. Their action enhances expression, creativity and the sense of initiative among them. Importantly, the work of a Promeneurs du Net youth worker is always connected to offline activities.

The Promeneurs du Net programme is supported by the French National Fund for Family Allowances (CNAF), the Ministry of Health and Solidarities, the Ministry of Education and the National Agricultural Social Security Agency. Today, there are over 1,400 active Promeneurs du Net youth workers in France.

While this programme has proved fruitful, youth workers have often faced the issues of the growing phenomena of radicalisation, violence and harassment of young people online and how to deal with them effectively. This is where the Web Citizens training comes into action.

Read more about the Promeneurs du Net programme [here](#).

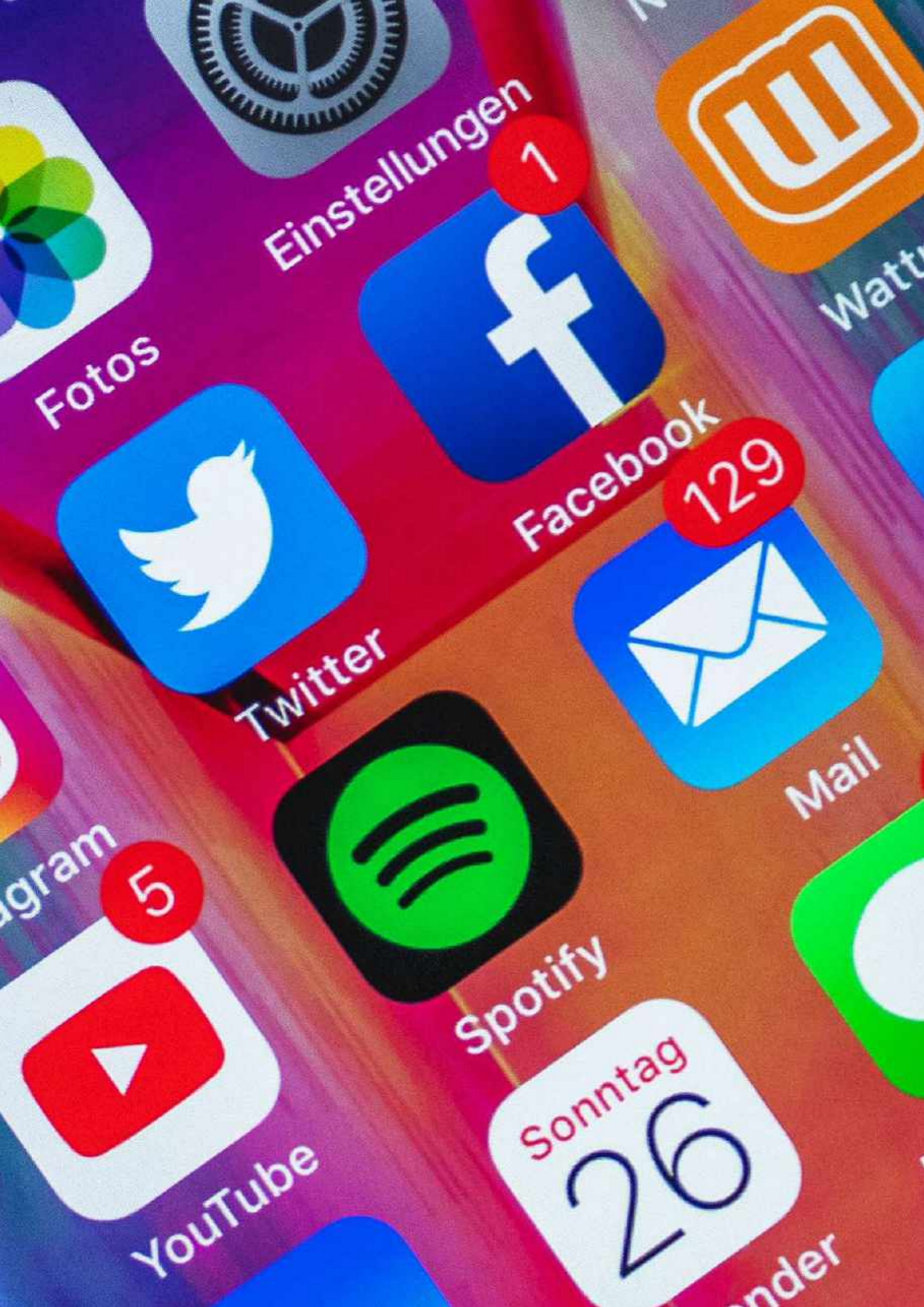
Find more examples of projects on youth engagement in the RAN Collection of Inspiring Practices [here](#).

ARTICLE: **USING POPULAR CULTURE TO ENGAGE VULNERABLE YOUTH**



**Kelsey
BJORNSGAARD**

Online campaigning is an integral part of youth programming in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). Young people around the world spend long hours online and tend to use online platforms as their primary source of information and socialising...



Online campaigning is an integral part of youth programming in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). Young people around the world spend long hours online and tend to use online platforms as their primary source of information and socialising.

It has been well documented that extremists across the spectrum have excelled in using the Internet, and particularly social media, to enhance their communication and recruitment strategies. The online space has also exacerbated the spread of disinformation. It is in response to these challenges that P/CVE practitioners have been pursuing online counter-narratives for the better part of a decade.

Despite these efforts, the P/CVE community is still struggling to reach the young audiences who need them most: vulnerable youth. Young people who may be vulnerable because they lean toward extremist content and ideologies, or because they are uninformed about the risks that they face online. It is for these audiences that online campaigns can be most effective, and it is these audiences that have been the most difficult to reach.

There are many valid critiques of online counter-narratives – that they are reactive, difficult to target and very hard to evaluate. Counter-narratives also have the potential for harm because when they are done badly, they can be counterproductive. While it is true that counter-narratives are an imperfect tool, it is their delivery that is most problematic.

For all our discussion of creative mediums and credible messengers, it is simply not enough to promote simple messages in one-off campaigns; even highly-produced content can often feel like propaganda. These online campaigns may be valued by a receptive audience, but as long as it can be identified for what it is – something specifically created to influence a person's beliefs – young, sceptical audiences are likely to dismiss it outright. This means that audiences at risk of radicalisation or indifferent to the content's message are least likely to accept it.

“Encompassing entertainment, media, sports, art, and fashion, popular culture can emerge bottom-up as an outlet for unique expression – either in one-off content or as a sub-culture movement.”

So how do we overcome the scepticism of these young audiences to effectively challenge extremism and promote open, peaceful societies? The same way we have been shaping the moral identity of our societies for generations: popular culture.

Popular culture is a contested term within cultural studies, but when we examine its impact on individuals and societies, it is clearly far more than just fun. Pop culture is a site of real power that can, as cultural theorist Nadine Dolby argues, ‘alter social conditions at the very foundation of people’s lives’. Encompassing entertainment, media, sports, art, and fashion, popular culture can emerge bottom-up as an outlet for unique expression – either in one-off content or as a sub-culture movement. Alternatively, it can also be introduced top-down in the form of commercialised pop culture that transmits social norms to document and drive shifts in cultural paradigms.

Either way, popular culture is a crucial point of identity formation for individuals and reflects a society’s values and practices as they change and evolve. For example, TV’s depiction of gay characters and families played a role in driving acceptance of gay marriage across the US.

The impact of popular culture on young voters in the US can also offer some inspiration. In the 1990s, the Rock the Vote campaign contributed to a 12% increase in youth voter turn-out in the 1992 presidential election by looking at the impact of voting through the lens of popular culture. Rock the Vote partnered with the music channel MTV to encourage young people to use their vote to combat increasing censorship in music. Its high-profile messengers certainly boosted its reach, but the campaign succeeded on the relevance of its message, not the power of celebrities. It placed voting squarely within young voters’ cultural context and made it personal.

This example is uniquely American, but only in its execution, not its approach. Culture is unique to a given group and popular culture is unique to a given time. To make counternarratives



Home

Trending

effective, practitioners have to take into account the individual characteristics of the audience, the environment in which they live and all the vulnerabilities, grievances, beliefs and desires that environment might create. It will not be as simple as writing a song or filming a movie. Instead, practitioners must consider how they can tap into cultural trends and begin blending their messaging – both direct counter-messaging and indirect alternative messaging – into content that

Kelsey Bjornsgaard is Senior Manager for Civic Action Campaigns and Capacity Building at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue and a member of the RAN YOUNG Review Panel.

“The online space has also exacerbated the spread of disinformation. It is in response to these challenges that P/CVE practitioners have been pursuing online counternarratives for the better part of a decade.”

FILM:
**ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE
THROUGH SPORT**

A new programme from RAN explores how sport can be used to engage vulnerable young people in communities and prevent them from being radicalised. The programme hears from two RAN Working Group leaders about the merits of sport engagement and from two practitioners about their sport-based projects in Spain and France respectively. They describe how sports such as football, basketball and hockey can instil young people with a sense of purpose, loyalty and pride, and thereby build their resilience against radicalising influences.

FILM
ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH SPORT

MARCH 2021
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE
DURING COVID AND BEYOND

You can watch the film in full [here](#).



In Saint-Denis, CSOs and local government

turned to sport after an upsurge in violence



SPEY project

FEATURE

In 2020, the Union of Catalan Sport Federations launched the SPEY project (Sports for Preventing Extremism in Youth), funded by the European Commission. It was born from the desire to contribute to the prevention of violent extremism among young people through sport.

Together with a team of experts from the University of Córdoba, a program which combined both socio-educational and sports components was created. The SPEY project is therefore a program which includes different sports and outdoor activities, skills training, education on core and common values, and much more.

This program, which is based on the 3N theory model – which identifies need, narrative, and network, as the three categories of factors involved in producing radicalisation toward violence – has been designed to minimise risk factors and enhance protective factors that intervene in the adoption of extreme behaviours or ideas among young people.

To effectively deliver the program, multi-agency cooperation at multiple levels, between national and the grassroots, is needed. NGOs, CSOs, local administrations and municipalities, international institutions, sports clubs and an extensive network of professionals have been brought together to pursue the same goal: to offer young people a counter-engagement which allows them to make a difference in their communities.

The program was initially launched with hockey as its main sport, giving young people between the ages of 16 and 23, many of them at a risk of social exclusion, the opportunity to engage in an activity that gives them a sense of purpose, pride and loyalty to a new group of peers. Through this activity young people learn vital skills that will make them more resilient to radicalising influences and more capable of becoming active citizens. A second phase of the program is about to be launched with soccer as its main sport.

Due to the Covid pandemic, the program has been redesigned so that it can be delivered outdoors and has adapted to the current climate by creating new activities which bring these young people together in safe spaces online, for as long as the Covid restrictions last. These activities have been developed in an affordable way to cope with the consequences of the digital gap.

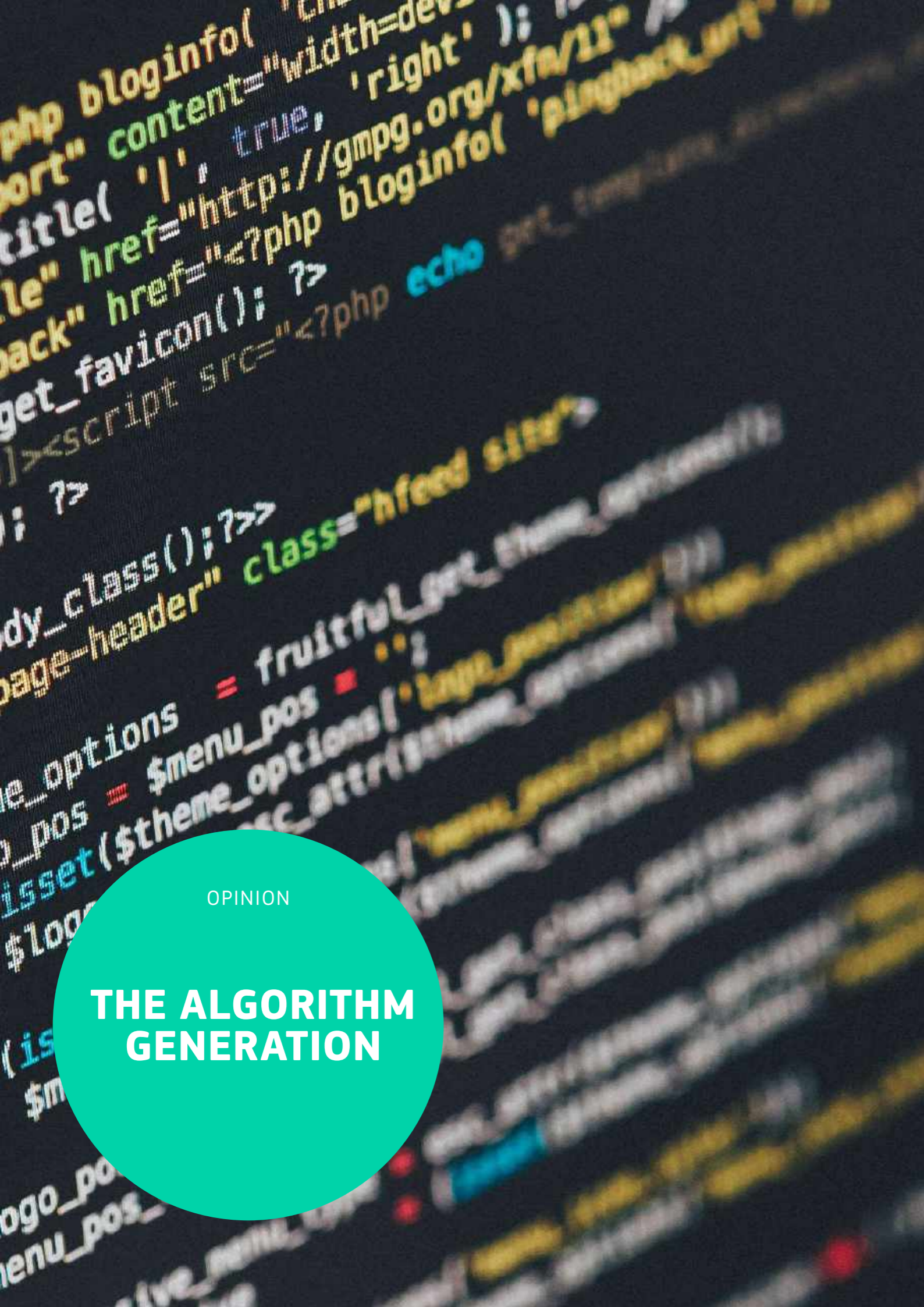


**Milena
DE MURGA**

The SPEY project intends to prove the concept that sport and its benefits can contribute not only to well-being, but also to minimise the radicalisation towards violent extremism, criminality and other social harms among young people.

Find more examples of sports-based P/CVE projects in the RAN Collection of Inspiring Practices [here](#).





OPINION

THE ALGORITHM GENERATION

OPINION
THE ALGORITHM GENERATION

MARCH 2021
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE
DURING COVID AND BEYOND



**Frank
SKKINK**

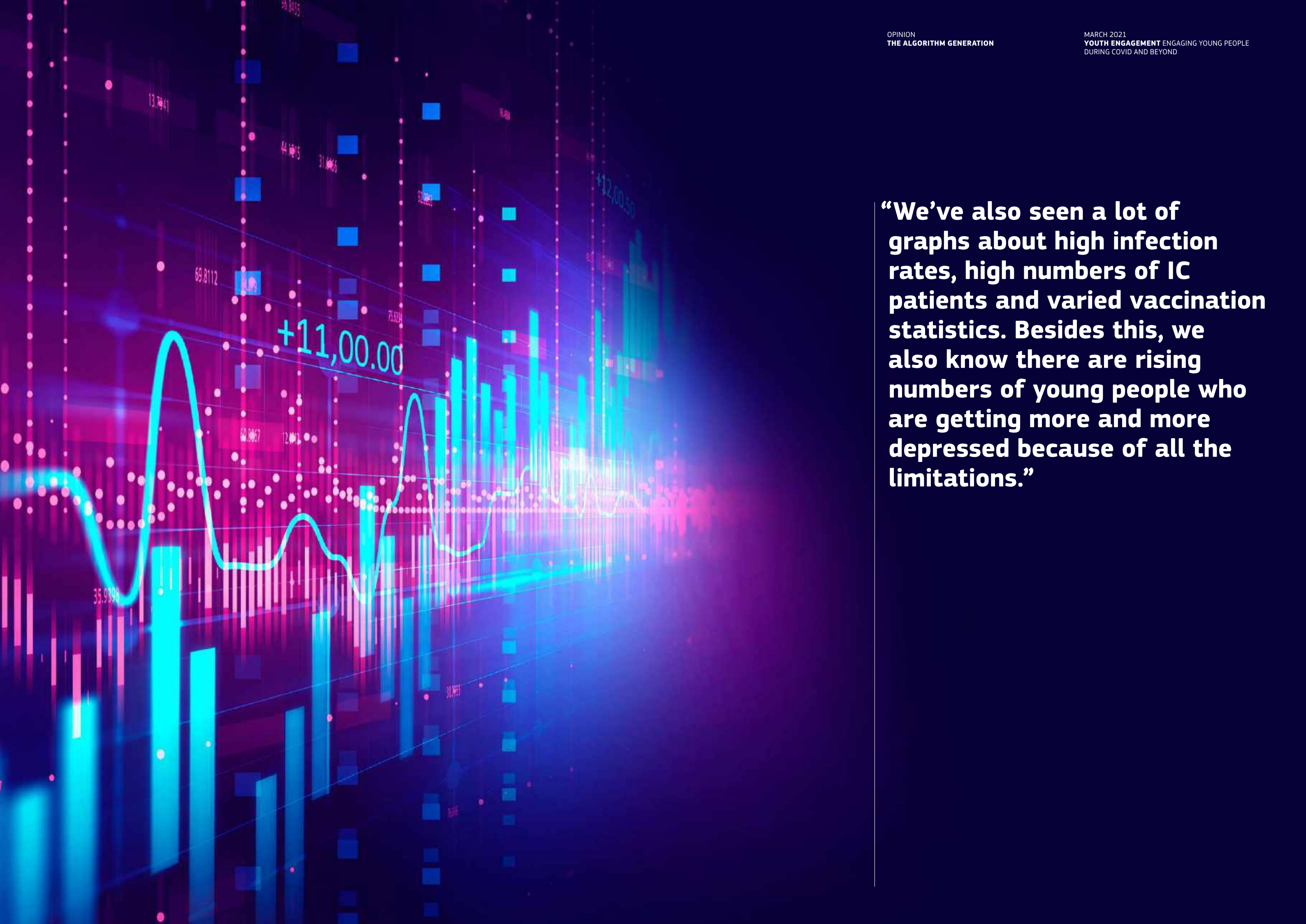
2021 is here. We now have a generation which has been educated online for almost a whole year.

The lockdown shows us the hard facts of class differences. Schools are trying to ensure that students stay on top of their study, but perhaps may not always be able to organise this well. Younger teenagers and children sometimes only have one moment a day to have some online contact with their teacher. The lockdown highlights that perhaps not every child gets the same chances to work on their talents and get educated well enough (e.g. via home schooling) to get good results for further education. A whole generation is more and more separated because of the prosperity of their parents and the neighbourhood within which they live. Many live in small houses, sometimes with big families, with no privacy to study, shut in by the lockdown. These children have a higher risk of feeling hopeless, bored and stressed.

The neighbourhood that now matters most to young children is the online neighbourhood. For teenagers and young people of all ages, the smartphone and social media platforms are the only way to be in contact with all of their friends. Government lockdown restrictions, the lack of regular education and their “normal” social life result in young people being reliant on their phones and social media for their social environment.

We’ve seen children, youngsters and teenagers resisting against the restrictions. Some famous influencers young people look up to are telling them their opinion on Covid. If these influencers, with many followers, tell them that the restrictions are unnecessary because they will not get ill from Covid, a lot of these followers are willing to believe that. These feelings and alternative facts can also be reinforced by algorithms, who may push other messages and videos that reaffirm these ideas.

We have seen many experts explaining during late night talkshows the reasons for, the importance of and the effect of the restrictions. What we need is to get the information out of the late night talk shows and onto the streets of the digital neighbourhood of the young generations.



“We’ve also seen a lot of graphs about high infection rates, high numbers of IC patients and varied vaccination statistics. Besides this, we also know there are rising numbers of young people who are getting more and more depressed because of all the limitations.”

“Why would you wait until 6pm to watch the news on TV? If something important happens, we’ll get a push message. Besides that, I have a lot of friends who know what’s going on.”

Local youth workers and social workers can help spread factual messages. They must get (and keep!) in touch with these young people, both offline and online. When they see online comments and posts of young people they know, they should reply online and offline to them. Online (youth) work is a crucial aspect of modern day youth and social work!

We’ve also seen a lot of graphs about high infection rates, high numbers of IC patients and varied vaccination statistics. Besides this, we also know there are rising numbers of young people who are getting more and more depressed because of all the limitations. For a lot of young people social media is their way of expression. If youth workers and social workers are in (online) contact, they can respond to posts or comments which could suggest they are not feeling mentally well.

We must look after each other, especially during hard times and especially after the new generations. Get in contact with them, in whatever way we can. Digital youth work can help to provide young people with an extra possibility of interaction, low level, with a professional they “know”. Youth workers and social workers can help to tell real stories and facts about the pandemic, see and hear about (mental) problems and be the first helping hand. This helping hand could be simply arranging an extra laptop, having a conversation in which they can vent, or a referral to a healthcare professional.

To be able to realise that, policymakers must know the importance of digital work. It’s not something that professionals do in addition to their normal activities. Good online work takes time, good equipment, training and support!

***Frank Sikkink** is a specialist in online youth work and the impact of social media on children, teenagers and youngsters. He provides training on all related topics such as cyberbullying, sexting, polarisation and hate speech.*

ARTICLE: **FOSTERING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN FRENCH SCHOOLS**



**Jean-Philippe
FONS**

Like most other EU countries and most contemporary societies, France has been confronted with signs of youth disengagement from contributing or participating in mainstream society over the last few decades, mostly visible with very low turnouts at elections (whether local, national or European) among the 18-25 years-olds. One out of two voters aged 18-25 did not cast his or her vote during the last French presidential elections in 2017...



Like most other EU countries and most contemporary societies, France has been confronted with signs of youth disengagement from contributing or participating in mainstream society over the last few decades, mostly visible with very low turnouts at elections (whether local, national or European) among the 18-25 years-olds. One out of two voters aged 18-25 did not cast his or her vote during the last French presidential elections in 2017.

To counter youth disengagement and foster the ideals of democratic citizenship, the French Government has implemented a national and universal service (SNU), delivered through schools. The service is based on a voluntary basis but will be made compulsory by 2024. It concerns all French young people aged 15 to 17 and is specifically designed to develop engagement and a sense of 'belonging' to a national community.

The program is two-fold: participants first enroll in a period of social cohesion, in which they are brought together through group activity, followed by a general interest mission, where young people are encouraged to participate in an activity which they are interested in, through internships, joining clubs or independent study. Those who wish so can also extend this mission and join a non-for-profit organisation.

The SNU ambition is to bring together young people from different social and geographical origins, and unite them around a common and shared identity. It is articulated around four modules: defense and heritage, security, road and traffic regulations, and health. Activities are carried out to develop resilience and raise young people's awareness regarding a vast array of issues: sustainable development, citizenship, national and European institutions, culture, leisure and sports.

The period of social cohesion covers a two-week period. Participants are invited to reflect on the future track of their professional careers as well as promote a sense of engagement. The SNU scheme ultimately aims at forging responsible, autonomous and resilient citizens, fully aware of their legal rights and responsibilities.

A similar ambition of the SNU is achieved with teachers inviting all pupils, from primary school age onwards, to ponder over the meanings of concepts which could have different meanings for different people, such as citizenship, equality, equity, liberty, freedom of speech, freedom of consciousness, etc. Citizenship education and its contents were reformed after the attacks on the journalists of Charlie Hebdo in 2015. The rationale is two-fold: build resilience to violent and extremist discourses within the context of the classroom and encourage pupils of all age to engage in citizenship-related actions.

Middle schools (11-15) and high schools (15-18) have been encouraged to foster youth engagement through, notably, student councils. Young people aged 16-25 can also take part in a paid civic service period to pursue their engagement within various national (or international) institutions.

Jean-Philippe Fons is a Working Group leader for the RAN Working Group on Youth and Education.

“To counter youth disengagement and foster the ideals of democratic citizenship, the French Government has implemented a national and universal service (SNU), delivered through schools. The service is based on a voluntary basis but will be made compulsory by 2024.”

FEATURE

Athena-Syntax:

WHERE ART AND EDUCATION MEET

The influence of art on individual and social behaviour is undeniably great. Many studies indicate that art plays a crucial role in providing positive and alternative narratives against polarising and radicalising ideas.



The 'Athena-Syntax Where Art and Education Meet' project offers a model for teachers to explore difficult and sensitive topics – such as religion, philosophy, science and identity – with students in schools. To do this, a group of teachers of science, language or philosophical subjects introduce projects which involve art. Through these projects teachers are able to open a dialogue with pupils around these topics.

But WHY ART? Art is universal and is often seen as a culturally acceptable activity. All of the projects start out by looking at similarities and are conceived with the ambition of conveying a positive message. This doesn't mean difficult or sensitive subjects cannot be addressed: confrontations and the airing of challenging feelings are positive and essential in the process.

The Athena-Syntax project emerged from a dialogue between teachers of science, religions and worldviews, after they observed that students were confused by discrepancies between evolution and origin narratives. These teachers collaborated together and devised a form of horizontal dialogue, in which both narratives can co-exist.

Designed with our multicultural students and teachers in mind, Athena-Syntax draws on, and celebrates, the diversity within our school. The dialogues that take place through the art projects are designed to take students on a learning pathway linked towards active citizenship. This process is rolled out in various planned steps throughout the school year, and built up slowly in the form of lessons, lectures, workshops and other extra-curricular activities.

The dialogue around the difficult and sensitive topics is based on core and common values and universal human rights. At the school, we translate these core values into four universal themes (time, choice, space and human being) which are explored across the different school subjects through focused projects during lessons.

The themes are introduced in a phased approach: Discover, Encounter and Evolve. In the first two years of secondary school, students are encouraged to explore their own (religious or other) world view (DISCOVER). In years 3 and 4, other worldviews are introduced (ENCOUNTER). In the last two years, students explore broader societal themes, using various worldviews to offer diverse perspectives on these themes (EVOLVE).

Athena-Syntax is conceived as an enriching experience for students and teachers alike. Thanks to the creation of an effective relationship between student and teacher, we hope to help students as they shape their own philosophical and/or religious and scientific thinking. By drawing on what is shared between them rather than what is different, students are empowered to be involved in a pluralist society where science and art can co-exist with religion and philosophy.

The Athena-Syntax project has been reviewed by the RAN YOUNG review panel. The perspectives of young people on this and other practices have been captured in a paper which can be found in the Library section of this publication. Find more examples of school-based projects in the RAN Collection of Inspiring Practices [here](#).

PROFILES: RAN YOUNG



Agnes GKOUTZIAMANI

I am from a small town in Northern Greece, Siatista. From a young age I developed a profound love for multicultural environments and human rights. This led me at first to learn various foreign languages, as it is the first step to understand a different culture, and then to be actively engaged as a youth worker in European funded projects. Observing the increase in polarisation and incidents of violent extremism, I knew I had to take action.

This is why I, along with two other RAN YOUNG members, Giorgos Kotenidis and Vivian Lada, developed the project 'Humans First'. Humans First aims to create a strong message of humanity, an indisputable narrative of respect towards 'the other' and the promotion of democratic values across society in order to minimise the impact of far-right rhetoric and propaganda. The project engages young people through the creation of a short movie, in which they will gradually deconstruct the notions and narratives of radicalisation and violent extremism in the far-right ideology context.

RAN YOUNG has had a big impact on my work. I have had the opportunity to meet other young professionals with whom I share the same values and aspirations and with whom I will be able to work with in the future and exchange practices and views. Meanwhile, training workshops equipped me with a deep understanding of the different models of radicalisation and violent extremism. Networking with experts and mentors, and cooperating with co-workers will enhance my ability to promote human rights. Within RAN, the networks that we create remind us that we are not alone and unite us towards our common goal, that is, to tackle violent extremist behaviour across Europe.



Alexandra TURTULEA

I am from Romania and I currently study with Erasmus in the Czech Republic. I decided to join the RAN Young Academy in 2019 when I saw an announcement looking like this: "Do you have an idea for a local PVE initiative? And would you like to be guided by experts in creating local impact? Apply!". I joined because I really wanted to raise awareness about PVE and radicalisation among young communities from Cluj. I have been involved in this field since 2015, in GEYC (Group of the European Youth for Change).

What followed was an amazing year-long transformation process, in which I gathered an amazing amount of information related to RAN's mission and how it helps the world to be better. I got the chance to meet first-line practitioners and discuss local challenges or specific issues related to violent extremism, or exchange with experts on new insights into tackling radicalisation. In the Working Groups, I met peers from around Europe, built up long-lasting relationships, and reviewed best practices. After this, I had all the necessary skills and background in order to implement a local initiative with the help of my team and mentors from RAN.

Because the experience of the first RAN YOUNG session was rich in knowledge and because I made so many friends with whom I share the same passions and interests, I decided to continue to apply to a new session of the academy. Unfortunately, we did not get the chance to meet physically with the other participants, but just via on-line calls. This digital RAN YOUNG academy definitely improves everybody's skills in the digital area, and the tackled topics help the participants raise awareness about fake news and how it can lead to radicalisation or violent extremism.

I believe that people can change their mindset, leading to a better, more inclusive world. Participating in RAN helped me to improve the knowledge about PVE and radicalisation in my community, and I feel that I want to continue being part of RAN for a long time. I would love to get the chance to help with organising RAN official events, or facilitating some workshops on the topics I have some expertise in.

“I joined RAN YOUNG so that I could increase my knowledge and practical experience and also my networking skills. I firmly believe that solidarity and cooperation within the EU can provide solutions to severe issues that beset peace and prosperity in the region.”



Michelle Blaya BURGO

I am a 25-year-old with a passion for the science behind P/CVE. I work as research assistant in the University of Córdoba, Spain, involved in national and international projects focused on the prevention of youth radicalisation and antisocial behaviours. Whilst a RAN YOUNG participant, I recently joined a group supporting a new global program from the UNAOC, tackling PVE through sport. I hope to soon pursue a PhD in Psychology in the field of P/CVE and radicalisation.

Being a part of RAN YOUNG 2020 was presented to me as a fantastic opportunity: not only was I looking for ways to get more involved in P/CVE, but the COVID situation also had me sitting at home wondering how I could stay an active member of the community and engaged in a cause I cared about. I got to know about RAN thanks to my professor. As soon as he knew about the call for participants, he reached out to me and encouraged me to apply.

For me, to be selected to participate was an honour and the push I needed. RAN YOUNG gave me and my colleagues the nurturing stage to share thoughts, knowledge and experiences; to learn in a very much needed intercultural and interprofessional context; and connect with a great group of people who work toward a common goal.

Being a RAN YOUNG participant boosted my confidence in my career. I therefore hope that I can continue to be a part of the platform and continue to meet such educated, creative and inspiring people, and share knowledge and expertise. As has been widely discussed when referring to youth, we are not perpetrators or victims. We are agents for peace and that is my aim as a part of RAN.



Vivian LADA

My first experience with issues related to radicalisation started with my participation in RAN YOUNG and in the RAN Communication and Narratives Working Group. Since then, I have been involved in a project called 'Humans First', which is based in Siatista, a northern town in West Macedonia, where people are facing great unemployment which leads to polarisation, stereotypes and xenophobia. In this society, far-right ideology finds common ground with its supporters and as a result there is much tension. Our aim is to raise awareness among the public about radicalisation, its roots and its manifestation in society. Refugee participation in our initiative is vital since it will both contribute to their gradual social inclusion, their active participation and engagement in the civic life.

I joined RAN YOUNG so that I could increase my knowledge and practical experience and also my networking skills. I firmly believe that solidarity and cooperation within the EU can provide solutions to severe issues that beset peace and prosperity in the region. Through my participation in RAN YOUNG, I learnt to work in an international, multicultural and multilingual environment, I familiarised myself with cultures unknown to me, I exchanged opinions, I made invaluable relationships and lastly I boosted my European identity. On a professional level, I enriched my public speaking skills, my lobbying skills, my media skills and my soft skills in general.

I am particularly drawn to the area of Human Rights protection, and since radicalisation which leads to extremism is the ultimate infringement of human rights, I am deeply motivated to contribute to the prevention of it. To that end I entered this network to gain the theoretic knowledge, resources, tools and guidance in order to include them in my work as an expertise lawyer, a youth worker, a volunteer and an active European citizen.

As for the future, I firmly believe that due to the Covid pandemic people are more prone to misinformation and polarisation through their dependence on social media, meaning that more action in the field of social engagement is required. Youth engagement is the key factor to manage this crucial situation and protect human rights. Young people act as 'Guardians', as those who look ahead and envisage the future. We can act 'influencers' for other young people, we have the power to influence them, inspire them and protect them from being prejudiced or radicalised. We can be the 'link' between the authorities and our peers.

A RAN paper – produced in 2018, but still relevant today – provides insights for practitioners on how to empower young people to successfully participate in P/CVE. The paper, which features a series of good practices, details how to strengthen the capacities of young people so that they are better capable of setting up and delivering their own P/CVE initiative. You can read the paper in full [here](#).

RAN EX POST PAPER
10-11 September 2018



EX POST PAPER

Empowering young people to successfully participate in PCVE

'Listen to young people, really to what they say, not what you want them to say.'

Kofi Annan

Introduction

Successful participation and engagement of youth in the prevention and countering of violent extremism (PCVE) has a beneficial impact far beyond the scope of a given activity or organisation. In order to sustain such successful youth participation (SYP), young people should be empowered to contribute to the process in a valuable way. On an individual level, empowerment means gaining control of one's life by being skilled, knowledgeable and confident in one's ability to create community change. Young people's capacities should be strengthened on this level of empowerment, as SYP calls for knowledge, skills and personal development.

This ex post paper builds upon lessons learned from the RAN YOUNG meeting 'Empowering young people to successfully participate in P/CVE'. The RAN YOUNG Empowerment Table (Table 1, see Conclusion) offers an overview of the individual-level empowerment categories and elements required for SYP in PCVE. It addresses young people wishing to actively participate in PCVE, as well as first-line practitioners and policymakers wishing to organise successful and meaningful youth participation.

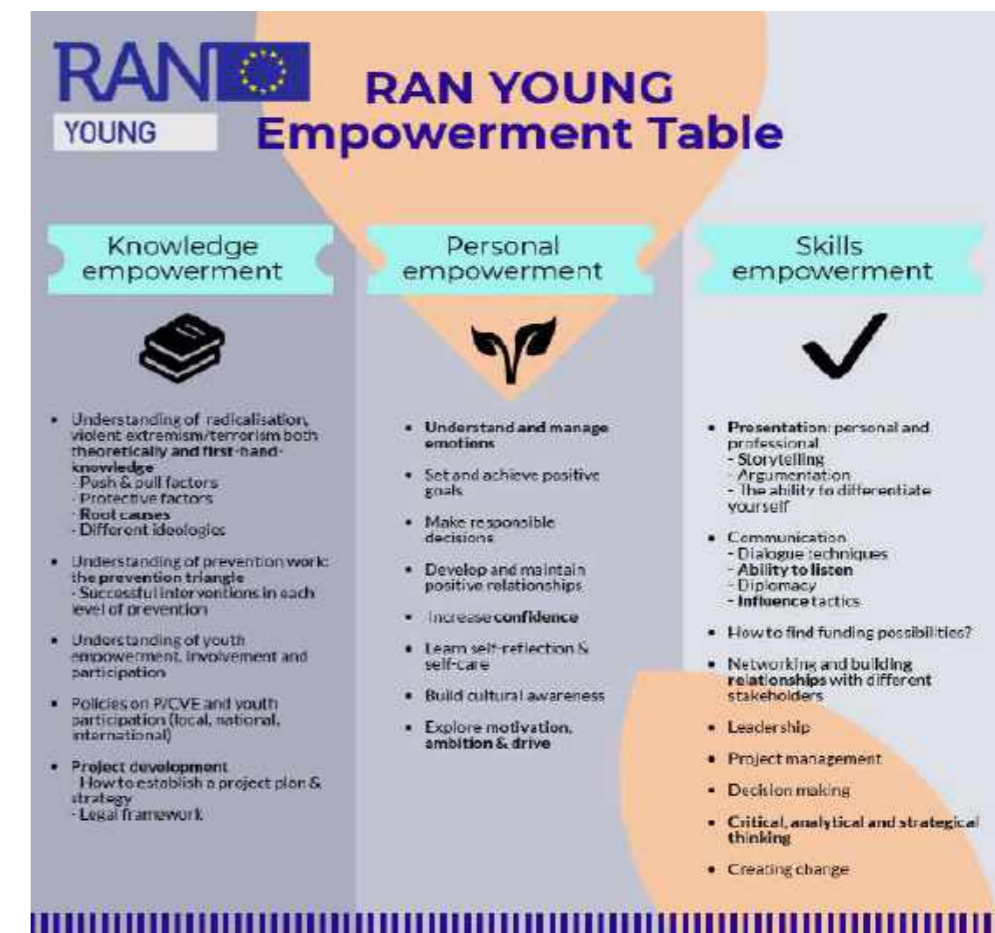
This paper was written by **Pomme Woltman** and **Yasmine Gssime**, RAN Centre of Excellence.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the RAN Centre of Excellence, the European Commission or any other RAN YOUNG institution or participant.

EX POST PAPER
RAN YOUNG, Nice (FR)
10-11 September 2018



Table 1 RAN YOUNG Empowerment Table (September 2018, Nice)



Highlights: RAN YOUNG activity

The RAN YOUNG platform will convene on a number of occasions in 2021, including workshops, meetings and training events. Due to the pandemic the foreseen activities will take place online. The insights and outcomes gathered from these meetings will be published in the RAN Update and on the RAN website. Stay tuned for updates on RAN social media channels.

For more information about RAN activities please visit the Calendar on the RAN website [here](#).



Youth participation in P/CVE
for local authorities

2 and 3 March 2021
(9.00–12.30)
Online meeting

The workshop focused on disseminating and exchanging knowledge on how local authorities can organise youth participation in P/CVE within their own municipalities. The aim of this meeting was to provide local authorities with the right tools, methods and inspiration to practically organise youth participation in P/CVE on the local level.

The RAN YOUNG platform has tested different methods for youth engagement throughout 2020 which has resulted in two informative papers for local authorities. The highlights will be shared by members of the RAN YOUNG platform. This meeting also dealt with overcoming municipalities' challenges, such as how to build a sustainable relationship to enhance youth participation. Participants furthermore had the opportunity to ask young people's perspectives on their dilemmas and/or ideas.

To find out about RAN YOUNG meetings and register your interest to participate please contact f.keijzer@radaradvies.nl.

LIBRARY: DISCOVER MORE

IF you would like to discover more about the topic of youth engagement you can get in touch with the RAN Staff, take a look at the [RAN Collection of Inspiring Practices](#) or read through some of the latest [RAN papers](#). We have included some of these papers in a carefully selected collection of interesting and relevant articles below.

RUSI (2021)
[‘The Contested Relationship Between Youth and Violent Extremism’](#)

RAN. (2020).
[‘Youth isolation: how to get them out of it?’](#)

RAN. (2020)
[‘Short handbook: ‘Narratives that polarise’’](#)

RAN. (2020)
[‘Galvanising youth in combatting online disinformation’](#)

RAN. (2020)
[‘Guidelines for local authorities: How to organise a youth review panel’](#)

RAN. (2019)
[‘Guidelines for young activists: How to set up a P/CVE initiative Paper 3’](#)

RAN. (2019)
[‘Guidelines for young activists: How to set up a P/CVE initiative Paper 2’](#)

RAN. (2019)
[‘Guidelines for young activists: How to set up a P/CVE initiative Paper 1’](#)

RAN. (2018)
[‘A nimble \(NMBL\) approach to youth engagement in P/CVE’](#)

RAN. (2018)
[‘Study visit: Youth participation in the City of Leicester’](#)



European
Commission

This publication has been commissioned by the European Commission and has been prepared by REOC Communications on behalf of RadarEurope, a subsidiary of RadarGroup.