

GUIDANCE FOR INTERNATIONAL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN PVE AND CVE

Youth Responses to Resolution 2250 and the
UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism

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1. Introduction

1.1 What is YouthCAN?¹

The Youth Civil Activism Network (YouthCAN) is a global youth network designed to upscale and optimise grassroots efforts by young people to prevent and counter violent extremism (PVE and CVE) of all forms. YouthCAN connects a wide array of youth activists from around the world, including artists, tech entrepreneurs, civil society leaders, youth workers, filmmakers, illustrators, students and innovators. The network was launched to enable an ongoing and international exchange of practices and know-how, and to foster collaboration and co-creation between its members. Through the network, young people's needs and views are also represented to policy makers. This document represents one such effort to gain valuable feedback from young people on international policy.

The network was first launched at the Youth Against Violent Extremism conference in Oslo in June 2015, convening 200 youth workers and young activists from across Europe with support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The network has since expanded rapidly. Commonwealth YouthCAN was launched in Malta in November 2015 at the Youth Summit of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM), partnering with the Commonwealth Secretariat's Youth Division and supported by the Foreign Commonwealth Office. YouthCAN has grown to include over 600 members coming from 85 different countries.

1.2 About the Survey

In December 2015, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2250 and urged member states to increase the representation of youth in decision-making.² The following month the UN Secretary-General presented his Plan of Action (PoA) to Prevent Violent Extremism and called for a comprehensive approach to systematically address the underlying conditions that individuals to join violent extremism groups.³ This presented policymakers with the challenge of implementing these documents internationally with a nuanced understanding of the state of local PVE and CVE contexts.

Over the last several months, YouthCAN has made a concerted effort to reach out to young activists and garner important feedback regarding the UN PoA and Resolution 2250 in relation to specific national and regional contexts. The **YouthCAN UN PVE Survey** was distributed to young activists between April – June 2016 and contained 25 questions addressing key elements of the UN PoA and Resolution 2250. The survey was distributed online to the YouthCAN network, as well as a range of international youth

1 See Appendix for a more in-depth description of YouthCAN, its members and its programmatic work.

2 *Resolution 2250, S/RES/2250(2015)*, (United Nations Security Council, 2015), <<http://unoy.org/wp-content/uploads/2250-annotated-and-explained.pdf>>.

3 *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, A/70/674*. (United Nations General Assembly 2015), <http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674>.

networks.

Through deploying this survey and collating the results, YouthCAN has been able to represent the thoughts, opinions and concerns of 100+ young activists who are actively engaged in peacebuilding, PVE and CVE in different parts of the world. This report provides valuable insights of young activists to policymakers regarding local and national conditions for implementing the PoA and Resolution 2250.

The YouthCAN UN PVE Survey specifically addressed key elements of the UN PoA and Resolution 2250, and asked young activists for their insights into three primary themes, including:

- [Local contexts and drivers of extremism](#)
- [Methods for engaging communities and empowering youth](#)
- [Strategies for the communication and integration of the UN PoA and Resolution 2250](#)

The findings of the survey are presented in the following report in order to bridge the gap between international policymakers and the expressed needs and concerns of young PVE activists.

1.3 Survey Participants

108 young activists from 43 different countries participated in the YouthCAN UN PVE Survey. The breakdown of countries represented in the survey can be found in Figure 1.

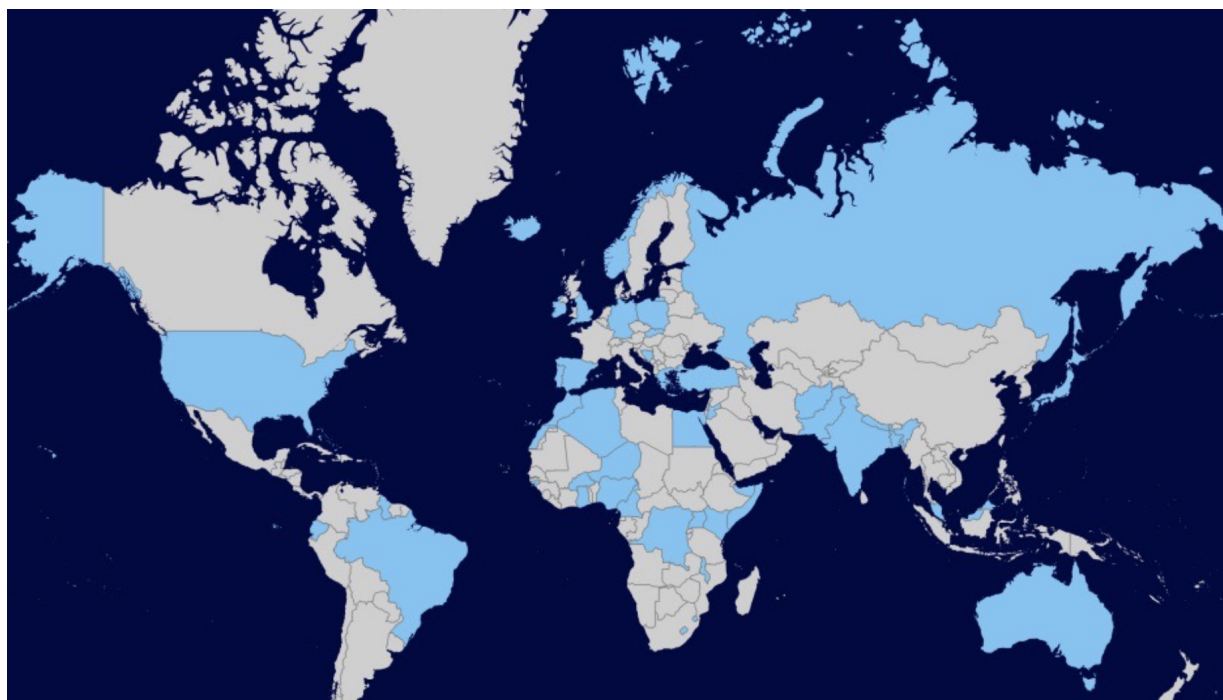


Figure 1

A breakdown of the ages of respondents is given in Figure 2, showing a range of participants between 16 and 33. Different countries have varied definitions around ‘youth’. Therefore, YouthCAN opened its survey up to those aged 16 – 33 to reflect this diversity. Those participating in the survey all have previous experience in peacebuilding, PVE and CVE activism, hence the median age of survey participants falls in the mid-20s. There is also close to equal representation of male and female survey respondents, with 56% of respondents identifying as male and 44% identifying as female (Figure 3).

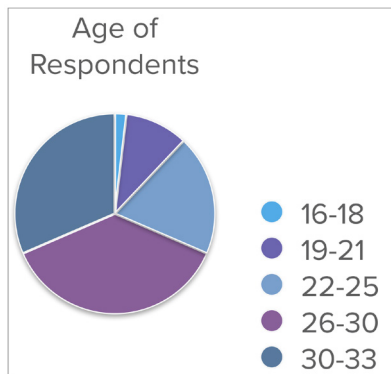


Figure 2

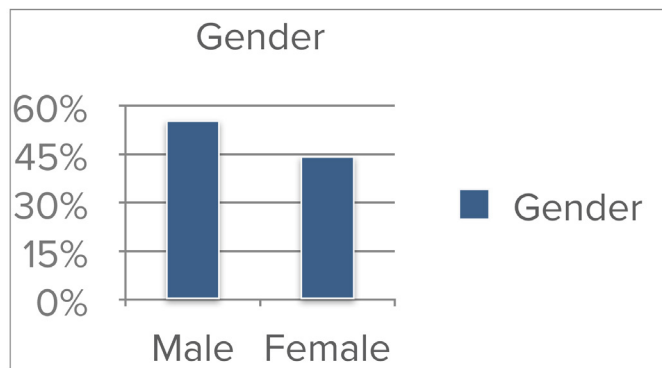


Figure 3

1.4 Key Findings and Recommendations

Based on the feedback of young people already active in peacebuilding, PVE and CVE, YouthCAN has 5 key recommendations for the international community and roles directly applicable to the UN. These recommendations will be explored in greater detail within this report.

1. *Assist local and national governments with the implementation of the UN PoA and Resolution 2250.*
2. *Facilitate the convening of local and national government representatives with young activists working on PVE within their regions to build stronger in-country networks.*
3. *Invest in the education, capacity-building, training and skills development of young people.*
4. *Strengthen and support regional and international youth networks that provide platforms for young people to share knowledge, projects and best-practices.*
5. *Enable and promote cross-sector strategies that unite governments, private sectors and civil society.*

2. Drivers and Contexts

2.1 Assessing Opportunities

Many respondents identified poverty and inequality, a lack of education, unemployment and a lack of economic opportunities as the main factors leading youth to join violent extremist groups in their communities. There is also a strong belief that social exclusion and feelings of marginalisation are driving youth to embrace extremist ideologies.

Responses in the survey regarding national education are particularly concerning. Respondents reported that due to the nature of many classroom settings, young people may fail to develop necessary skills, thus rendering them vulnerable to processes of radicalisation. These vital skill-sets include: critical thinking, respect for human rights, digital literacy, and a sense of global citizenship.

As seen in Figure 4, less than half of all respondents mentioned any of these skills or subjects when asked about what was being taught to them through education programmes. In fact, over 1/3 of respondents expressed that none of these skills or values are present in their national education system. This response was particularly noted among respondents from Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Guyana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Uganda, Bosnia, Russia, Slovakia, Afghanistan, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey and The Bahamas.

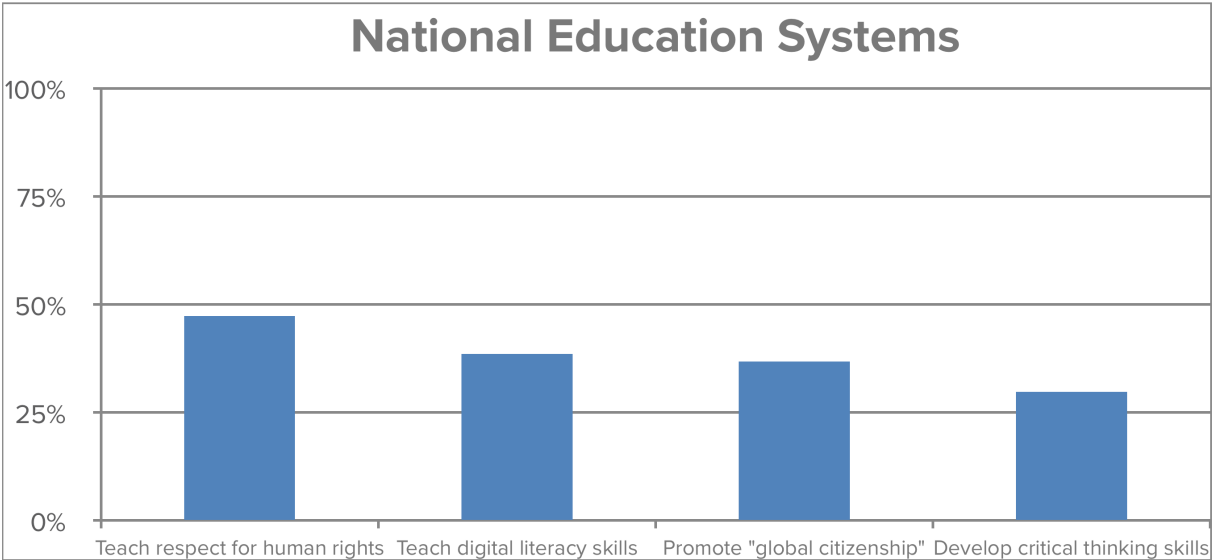


Figure 4

In contrast to responses on educational programmes, almost 60% of respondents reported that there are community programmes available to them in their countries to help young people gain valuable work skills. Although this is a sign of potential progress

in addressing unemployment, some respondents reported that these services could be more robust (Figure 5).

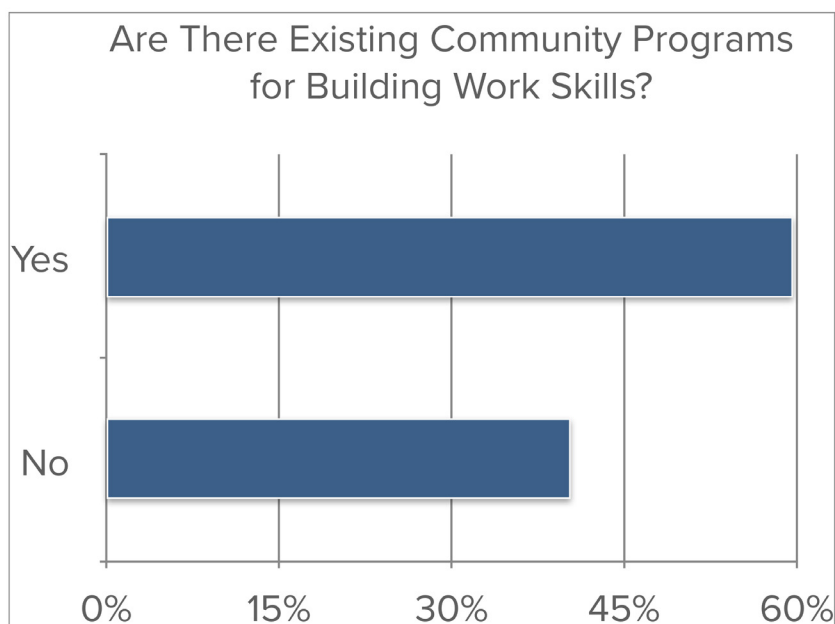


Figure 5

2.2 Addressing Drivers and Context

Based on survey results, the international community should invest greater financial and structural support to assist in reforming national education systems to ensure that youth are equipped with the skills necessary to positively contribute to society. An emphasis on human rights and global citizenship not only promotes tolerance, respect and community cohesion, but also naturally creates resilience to violent extremist pathways. Furthermore, an emphasis on critical thinking and digital literacy skills is critical not only to increase the employability of young people but also to challenge the increasing usage of the Internet by violent extremist groups to recruit young members.

In many countries there is a positive trend which illustrates that community-led programmes are stepping in to fill the gaps created by weaker national institutions (see Figure 5). Throughout the survey, young activists emphasised the importance of context-specific efforts in calling for locally-led processes. As such, the international community should strengthen and support existing community programmes and encourage the implementation of similar programmes in communities where they are absent.

3. Engaging Communities and Empowering Youth

The UN PoA states that it is necessary to have ‘regional and national dialogues on preventing violent extremism with a range of actors’ including youth, gender equality activists, marginalised groups, municipalities and social media companies.⁴ Nearly 60% of respondents reported that dialogues are already taking place in their countries, which is a positive sign. However, less than 40% reported that there was a lack of such dialogues and a further 10% of respondents were unsure whether or not dialogues were happening in their countries (Figure 6).

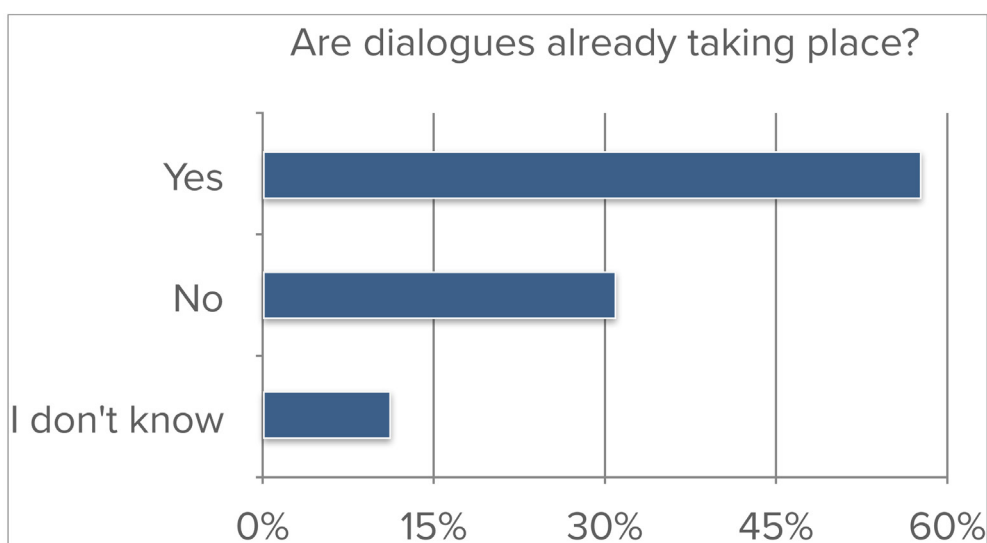


Figure 6

The youth respondents of the survey are all actively involved in peacebuilding, PVE and CVE within their communities, and are generally the most aware of related initiatives. If the most active and engaged youth within a community are unsure or unaware of local, national or regional dialogues taking place, it is evident there is a greater need for awareness raising. Youth awareness of the dialogue initiatives that do exist should be enhanced and dialogues should be supported and developed in areas where they are lacking.

A majority of the youth activists surveyed felt that young people were not involved in decision-making processes at the local or national levels. Among the respondents that reported youth involvement in local or national contexts, a majority reported that most youth positions in their communities felt more symbolic than practical. Some respondents labelled current models of youth involvement as disingenuous and tokenising and believed that youth were not given positions in which they would be able to affect real change.

⁴ Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, A/70/674. (United Nations General Assembly 2015), <http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674>.

Young people appear to be a part of decision-making positions, but in reality, have little or no inputs.

(Female, 26-30, Nigeria)

There are some people involved, but the problem is they do not represent the communities, especially the minorities.

(Male, 26-30, Somalia)

Based on these responses, it is necessary to create mechanisms to ensure meaningful youth engagement that can impact local and national developments while also ensuring that these decision-making bodies and positions are accessible to youth from underrepresented or marginalised groups in society.

3.1 Facilitating Network-building and Meaningful Dialogues

The majority of respondents believe that regional and national dialogues on PVE and CVE could be strengthened through the involvement of a variety of sectors and the inclusion of diverse communities. There is a strong call for the inclusion of government, education programmes and social media in these dialogues, however, respondents emphasised the need for initiatives to remain locally-led and community-driven.

These dialogues take place usually with certain government bodies and have an elite circle of feedback. Or they take place within civil society and the voices are not heard at higher levels. We need the top down levels to hear the bottom up levels in a more streamlined way.

(Female, 26-30, UK)

Respondents identified social media and broadcast media (i.e. TV and radio) as important tools and avenues through which dialogues can reach larger and less accessible audiences and ultimately become strengthened. Some activists suggest that integrating PVE dialogues into formal education systems will ensure that resilience against violent extremist pathways is being developed at an earlier age. However, others stressed the importance of including credible voices in these dialogues, such as the voices of former extremists, survivors of extremism and families of extremists to illustrate the damaging physical, psychological and emotional effects of violent extremism.

There is a growing number of regional and global networks for civil society that enable young activists, women's organisations and religious leaders to share best practices and experiences. Some of the networks mentioned by respondents included:

Existing Youth Networks on Peacebuilding, PVE and CVE

- **YouthCAN**, <http://youthcan.net/>
- **United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY)**, <http://unoy.org/>
- **Anna Lindh Foundation**, <http://www.annalindhfoundation.org/>
- **Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN)**, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/index_en.htm
- **Generation Change at the United States Institute for Peace (USIP)**, <http://www.usip.org/programs/projects/generation-change-program-emerging-leaders>
- **Global Changemakers**, <http://www.global-changemakers.net/>
- **Families Against Terrorism and Extremism (FATE)**, <http://www.findfate.org/>
- **Commonwealth Youth Peace Ambassadors Network (CYPAN)**, <http://www.yourcommonwealth.org/cypan/>
- **Youth Alliance International**, <https://www.facebook.com/YouthAllianceInternational/>
- **Youth for Peace International**, <https://www.facebook.com/yfpinternational/>
- **No Hate Speech Movement**, <http://www.nohatespeechmovement.org/>
- **Youth Organisation CEMAC**, <http://www.sjcemac.org/en/>
- **Salaam 4 East Africa**
- **Pan African Youth Union**, <http://pyu.org/en/>

Young activists stressed the importance of these networks and highlighted the need for the international community to strengthen and support pre-existing efforts such as these networks. Many respondents stated that the international community should not only provide more much-needed funding to these organisations, but also engage in capacity-building to expand the tools of young leaders already working to prevent and counter violent extremism. Young activists also called on the international community to endorse, publicise and spread awareness about existing networks to expand their outreach and recruitment capabilities.

The main support to be able to continue to bring together young people in building peace and preventing violence is financial. The investment in this sector remains minimal.

(Male, 26-30, Netherlands)

They could be strengthened by having different sectors give in-kind expertise and services like tech and marketing.

(Female, 26-33, USA)

As mentioned, young activists expressed concerns that youth involvement in decision-making was largely tokenistic. The international community should promote genuine youth consultation, engagement and representation at the local and national levels and encourage governments and municipalities to actively invite youth to deliver feedback to decision-makers. Additionally, the international community must focus on training and empowering youth through capacity-building and equipping young people with the skills

to actively engage and participate in decision-making processes themselves.

Give them an equitable seat at the local and national policy making table. Have an actual young person to decide what is best for the young population group.

(Male, 26-30, Malaysia)

3.2 Innovating Youth Engagement

Many young activists believe that a soft approach is the best way to reach other young people that are considered ‘at risk’ or are coming from marginalised parts of society. Survey respondents identified educational programmes, sports, arts, cultural events, social media, broadcast media, and peer-to-peer groups as important avenues for community outreach and engagement. In PVE and CVE work, it is critical to prioritize the safety and security of young activists. Through soft-power approaches to peacebuilding and PVE, activists are able to utilise creative pathways for engagement in safer spaces, but also develop much-needed innovation in these fields.

You need to work directly in the communities. Physically pay a visit to local schools, youth centres, or sports clubs [...] they will not have an interested in speaking out unless they are asked directly because they don't believe their voices matter/are recognised. It needs to be clear that you're actually interested in what they have to say and not just using them as token representatives of their groups to fill a quota.

(Female, 26-30, Slovakia)

In the survey, respondents gave examples of locally-led initiatives using innovation and cross-sectoral engagement to assist peacebuilding, PVE and CVE efforts. One example given is the ‘Imam Exchange Program’, where credible imams and renowned Islamic scholars engage in speaking tours throughout east Africa and the United States to address issues of religious tolerance, peaceful coexistence and Islam. The campaign ‘Caravan: No to Terror’ is another innovative campaign that involves a non-traditional sector in PVE work, and consists of a traveling exhibition of artists and cartoonists aimed at promoting tolerance and peace in Africa.

4. Cross-Sector Communication

4.1 Sectoral Support for Youth Activism

Young activists are calling out to NGOs, education programmes, social media companies and governments for help with their peacebuilding, PVE and CVE initiatives. More than 80% of respondents believe that NGOs and education programmes can help them with their activism, and more than 70% believe the same for social media companies and governments (Figure 7).

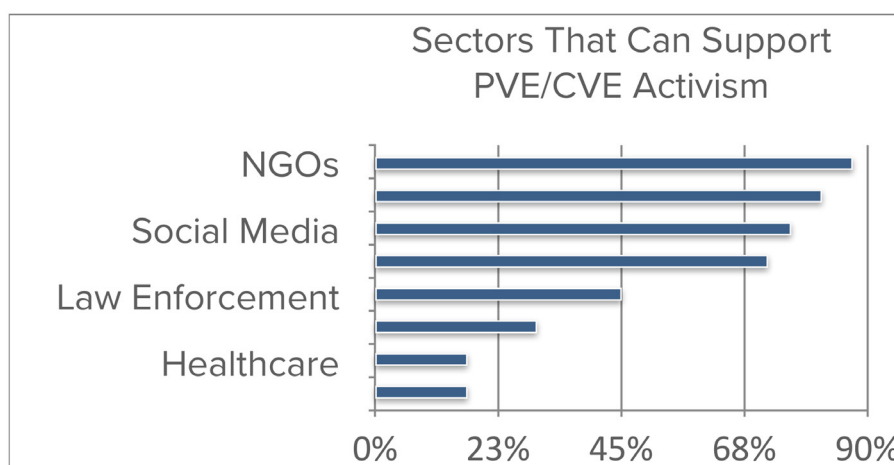


Figure 7

Despite respondents highlighting these four sectors as necessary partners in their PVE and CVE work, less than half of young activists reported having worked with governments and education programmes (Figure 8). There is a higher engagement rate of young activists utilising social media tools and working with non-governmental sectors, however, there is a desire to increase these collaborations.

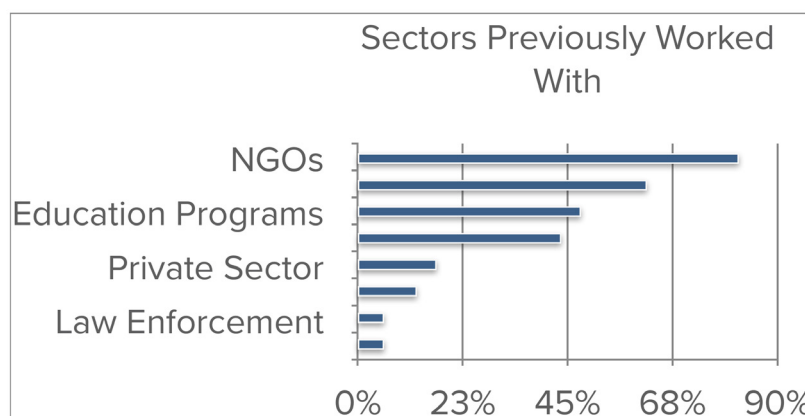


Figure 8

It is clear that there is a need to bring in resources and expertise from other sectors to assist young people in their PVE and CVE activism.

The survey also questioned young people about their confidence in various levels of government to implement the UN PoA and Resolution 2250. Overall, young activists internationally have relatively little trust in their local and national governments. Less than a quarter of respondents felt positively about their national or local governments in implementing the UN policies concerning youth (Figure 9). Interestingly, there is a much higher level of trust among the youth towards international governing bodies, such as the UN.

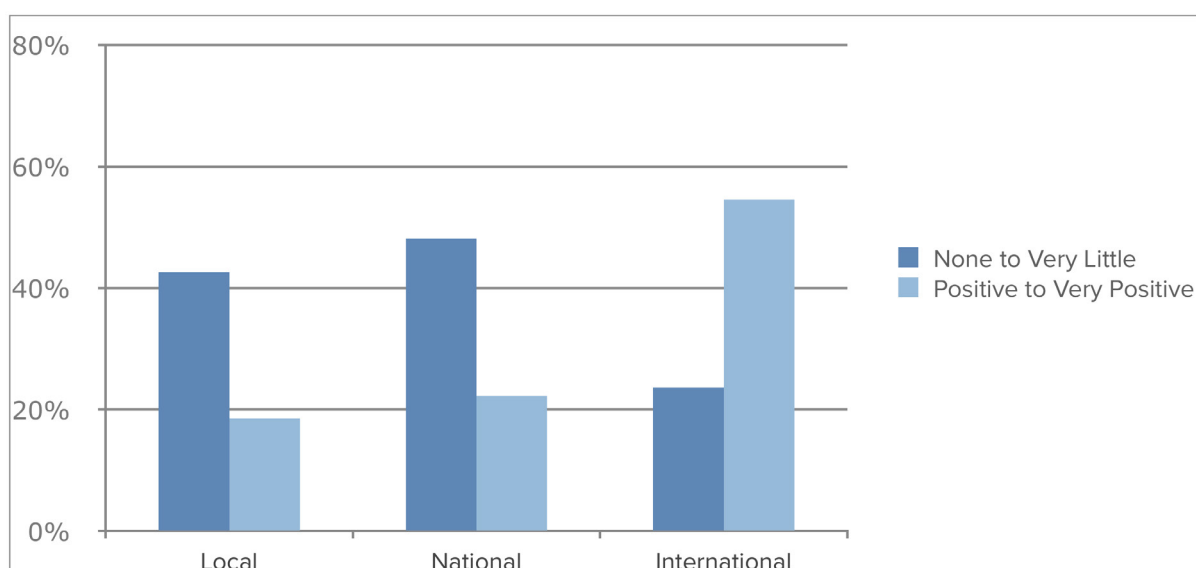


Figure 9

4.2 Strategies for Cross-Sector Involvement

Plans of action need effective communication strategies so that relevant stakeholders not only understand what is needed but also comprehend how to implement the relevant action items. The successful communication and integration of the UN PoA must involve an innovative cross-sector approach and strategy. Over 70% of young activists interviewed believed that the development and implementation of a successful national communications strategy should involve a multiplicity of actors, including governments, schools, religious representatives, social media companies, and community representatives (Figure 10).

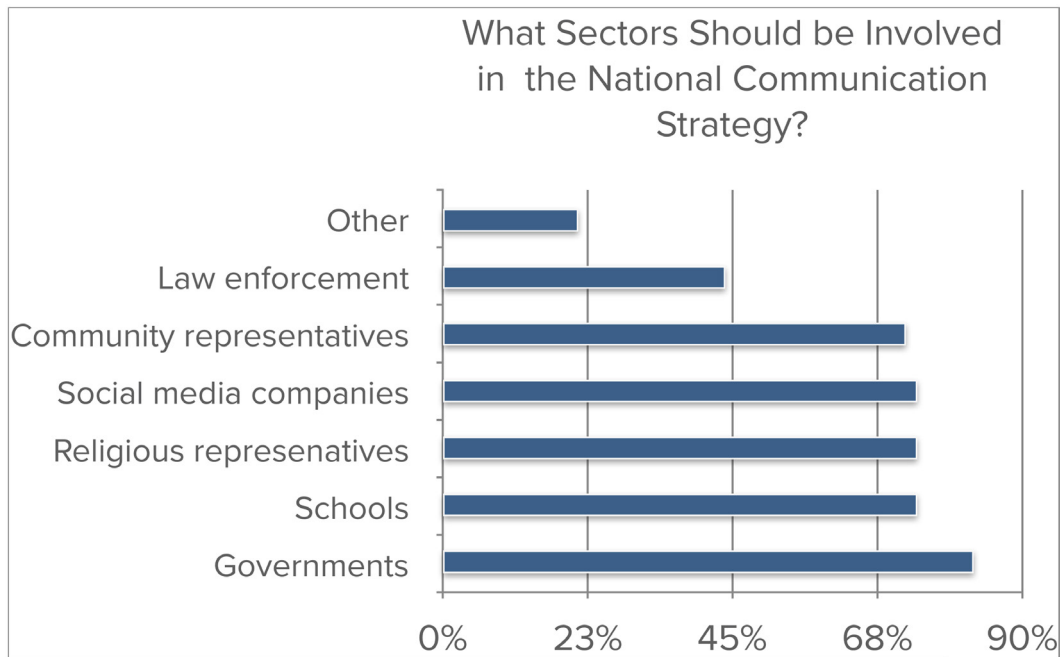


Figure 10

While many sectors were listed as being beneficial in implementation strategies, some were seen as less necessary, and even counter-productive. For example, less than half of the respondents believed that law enforcement should be included in the strategy (Figure 10). This is unsurprising given that policing is often associated with negative and reactionary responses rather than positive and proactive measures.

The need for cross-sector participation and innovation is further supported by the fact that nearly half of young activists have little trust in their local and national governments to carry out the UN PoA (see Figure 9). This lack of trust indicates that there is a need for organisations and bodies previously absent in preventing and countering violent extremism to step in and contribute to approaching these issues through new strategies and lenses.

In particular, more than half of young activists indicated that they have 'positive to very positive' levels of trust in the international government to carry out initiatives UN PoA (Figure 9). This indicates that the international community has an important role to play in facilitating top-down involvement in the UN PoA and it is critical that the UN assist in facilitating the implementation of the plan on the national and local levels. International bodies can broker valuable partnerships with local and regional NGOs to develop frameworks for implementation that can successfully transfer best practices and infrastructures to other localities.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the feedback from the YouthCAN UN PVE Survey we recommend that the international community and the UN take into consideration the recommendations listed in section 1.4 and throughout the document. These include:

- 1. Assisting local and national governments with the implementation of the UN PoA and Resolution 2250 by creating a platform to access existing tool kits, best practices and practical guides for developing PVE and CVE programmes.*
- 2. Facilitating the convening of local and national government representatives with young activists working on PVE within their regions to build stronger in-country networks. This will contribute to youth engagement that has the ability to impact real change.*
- 3. Investing in the education, capacity-building, training and skills development of young people by strengthening existing community-led programmes and facilitate the creation of community-based initiatives in regions where they are absent. This will allow for the development of youth-led initiatives and projects that can multiply through peer-to-peer engagement.*
- 4. Strengthening and supporting regional and international youth networks that provide platforms for young people to share knowledge, projects and best-practices.*
- 5. Enabling and promoting cross-sector strategies that unite governments, private sectors and civil society. By combining sectoral expertise, the much needed innovation and scale can be applied to PVE and CVE efforts.*

Respondents of the YouthCAN UN PVE Survey highlight the fact that a range of community-led efforts and attempts to address extremism are already taking place in many countries. The survey findings also show that progress is being made to create spaces for PVE dialogues in many countries. In the countries where youth respondents noted weaker national institutions, community-led programmes often step in to make up for lacking government infrastructure. Additionally, many young people internationally are already working with NGOs, education programmes, governments and using social media tools to further their PVE and CVE activism.

In light of these positive indicators, it is evident that the international community should not reinvent the wheel in its implementation of the UN PoA and Resolution 2250. Instead, the UN should work together with young activists to strengthen, support and expand already existing initiatives to ensure their sustainability and impact. The programmes and infrastructure to combat violent extremism already exist in many regions and should be capitalised on by the international community. However, in some countries, and particularly outside of larger cities, there may be a greater need for the development of such initiatives.

Appendix: More about YouthCAN

Youth Civil Activism Network (YouthCAN)

The Youth Civil Activism Network (YouthCAN) is designed to upscale and optimize grassroots efforts to combat violent extremism of all forms. It connects a wide array of youth activists from around the world, including artists, tech entrepreneurs, civil society leaders, youth workers, filmmakers, illustrators, students and innovators. The network was launched to enable an ongoing and international exchange of practices and know-how, and to foster collaboration and co-creation between its members. Through the network, young people's needs and views will also be represented to policy makers.

YouthCAN is a global network. First launched to Europe at the Youth Against Violent Extremism conference in Oslo, June 2015 with support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The network has since expanded following the launch of Commonwealth YouthCAN in Malta on 26th November 2015 with support from the Foreign Commonwealth Office and in partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat. The network currently has over 600 members from 85 countries.

Network Membership: Driven by Civil Society

YouthCAN is run *by* civil society activists *for* civil society activists. It is a network of young individuals, not institutions. Due to the sensitive nature of the group, ISD acts as the gateway manager, ensuring a 'safe space' for its members in the form of an online hub. Within this hub, activists can discuss their proposals, campaigns and concerns in a safe, credible, and efficient way. As the network is designed to maintain the independence of its members, government representatives are not allowed to formally join. However, governments may consult the network for the latest trends and innovations in CVE work.

Network Activities and Benefits

- **Exchange of best practices:** including highlighting of model projects that have potential for scaling up and replication.
- **Online Hub:** The network provides a stream of news and information for activists and campaigners provided by members and network managers. These include:
 - **Resource exchange:** Match-making projects to connect like-minded campaigns and initiatives.
 - **Private sector capacity building:** Engaging tech sector connections for in-kind, creative and financial support.

- **Tracking funding and engagement opportunities:** Updating members of grant opportunities for local initiatives, events relevant to their CVE work and new initiatives.
- **Youth Innovation Labs:** YouthCAN conducts regional Innovation Labs throughout Europe and the Commonwealth. These labs consist of ISD and Social Media representatives to facilitate:
 - **Capacity Building:** Campaigns training, tech training, social media support, strategic and security advice, data and best practice support through private sector, individual, and NGO partnerships.
 - **Counter-Narrative Production Support:** Giving members advice and structural support to help them turn their ideas into tangible counter-narrative campaigns on multiple platforms.
- **Data Analytics:** Tracking YouthCAN members' effective counter-narrative campaigns and mapping best practices to feed back into production streams.
- **Tool Kits:** Through the YouthCAN Facebook group, we provide the network with updated tool kits, links to research and best-practice guidelines so that participants of the network continue to gain knowledge and are able to share their own innovations in this space.

YouthCAN Online Network

Due to the sensitive nature of YouthCAN, ISD will act as a gateway manager to the group. As such, YouthCAN currently operates as a closed Facebook group with membership approval by administrators required. As a closed group, its existence is open to the public, but the material posted by members remains private. This protects the efforts of participants from wider audiences, allowing for a forum of honesty and freedom of expression.



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Combining research and analysis with government advisory work and delivery programmes, ISD has been at the forefront of forging real-world, evidence-based responses to the challenges of integration, extremism and terrorism.

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