Recommendations for the prevention of violent extremism and youth radicalization

The recommendations that have emerged from the research *"Violent extremism and youth radicalization: vectors, signs and intervention strategies"* and from the roundtable on March 19th 2021 *"Which strategies can prevent youth radicalization? Educational and community work for youngsters' urban contexts"* carried out within the RaP-Rhizome Against Polarization project.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

▶ Act at a **social level**, in order to avoid a purely security-based and repressive approach: polarization, radicalization and violent extremism should be defined not so much in terms of insecurity but of inequality, poverty and justice. This concept leads to the need to work on marginalization, social isolation, a lack of cohesion, little recognition for cultural roots, poor academic achievement, and difficulty in communication;

▶ act on **prevention** as a key aspect, in order to intercept forms of social difficulty and exclusion underpinning radicalization. Prevention activities enable intervention on push and pull factors (requiring first-level prevention), thus avoiding the shift from radicalization to mobilization (second-level), and therefore not triggering recurring behaviour (third-level);

▶ adopt a **multidisciplinary approach** with a particular focus on **adolescence** and the **urban outskirts** and on **areas at most risk of social exclusion**;

▶ **a systematic method** should be adopted: continuity is needed, above all in relations with youngsters, so as to avoid creating impromptu solutions. The intervention opted for should not be exclusively bound to single projects or to specific lines of funding: sustainability and a systematic approach are required in order to generate effective change.

WHAT CAN BE DONE IN EDUCATIONAL AND SCHOOL CONTEXTS? / 1

▶ Devise multi-sector **education strategies** that are not *for* but *with* **those directly affected**, involving and increasing their level of awareness, also by working with them on the concept and perception of different identities;

▶ encourage or organize **cross-cutting opportunities for socialization and educational work** with groups of youngsters from mixed social backgrounds;

▶ try out **innovative educational methods** and use **language and codes** that are appropriate to the target group to encourage interest in attractive and stimulating initiatives (music, theatre and creativity workshops, role-plays, narration methods, creation of images and video footage, graphic novels) in order to work on emotional contagion, on development of emotional skills (both regarding cognition and feelings), and on the creation and dissemination of an alternative language;

▶ draw on **the role of equals and peer education** not only as an intervention method but also for the reading of problems: the target group is human and social capital, and able to play a role within the educating community (e.g. by involving youngsters from secondary education facilities – through school/training and apprenticeship programmes – as young intercultural communicators);

▶ educate youngsters to **aware thinking**: work on the feelings of hostility and frustration that can lead to actual aggression, **educating them on complexity**, and fostering critical observation that takes into account information, data, and reliable and credible sources;

▶ use **real life stories and first-person testimony** by youngsters who have already experienced migration

WHAT CAN BE DONE IN EDUCATIONAL AND SCHOOL CONTEXTS? / 2

or situations requiring resilience, and who stand as positive models: direct contact between students and testimony;

▶ **underline the value of mother-tongue languages**: encourage multi-lingualism by creating common ground for collective skills (e.g. native languages, dialects);

▶ **underline the value of different backgrounds to prevent possible divides** and breakaways **from youths' own cultures of origin**, traditions and relations with their parents;

▶ encourage **Global Citizenship Education** (also outside of school contexts) in terms of active citizenship: foster **intercultural dialogue** through educational programmes – also through sport – that aim at contemplation on topics involved in understanding differences;

▶ make the classroom/the place of residence a **resilient community**, a safe environment where youngsters can speak, with their approach mediated by the teacher/educator, on controversial issues with an approach that is aware and critical of reality (by developing democratic dialogue, open communication, and conflict management through guided brainstorming);

▶ develop **cultural welfare action**: work in the outskirts to bring youngsters into contact with cultural and artistic heritage;

▶ strengthen **street-based education** to mediate between institutions and youngsters, to move closer to youth subcultures: the streets and squares, including virtual ones (social media and gaming contexts) are meeting places that should also be learning places, where the risk of marginalization can be intercepted.

WHAT CAN BE DONE IN SUPPORT OF OPERATORS AND STAFF?

▶ Promote **training programmes** and the fine-tuning of ad-hoc **teaching material and strategies** for those people in everyday contact with the youth population (teachers, school principals, host community providers, street educators, healthcare staff, correctional facility personnel, law enforcers and frontline operators) on the causes, indicators and signs of polarization, group dynamics etc.;

▶ set up **educational/digital and media literacy courses** for adults, in order to provide them with the tools to fully understand this occurrence;

▶ develop **observation charts**, risk **assessment tools**, and terminology that is shared and common to all the operators able to monitor certain aspects of this occurrence.

HOW SHOULD THIS OCCURRENCE BE NARRATED?

▶ Give **careful attention to the language used**, to tackle the widespread trivialization of aggressiveness and insult both in face-to-face and online interaction;

▶ combat the idea that **hate speeches** and verbal violence are behaviours that are far from physical violence;

▶ acquire knowledge on the connection between **fake news** and discrimination;

▶ encourage awareness among the media to narrate contexts, stories, life stories and people, in order to create an **alternative narrative** and responsible communication;

▶ pair **in-depth journalism and investigation** (increasing both quality and quantity) with information dissemination (documentaries and insight films);

▶ encourage **correct information provision** also by institutions (e.g. local councils, police forces) so as to avoid reproducing discriminatory images;

▶ **involve those directly interested** in communication processes: provide youngsters with a space where their voice can be heard and create conditions that encourage youngsters to take part and stand out;

▶ **narrate different types of radicalization**, in order not to "blame" specific communities and to avoid extremisms feeding on each other;

▶ identify **new audiences** that are not already aware of certain issues and values.

WHAT SHOULD POLICY MAKERS AND INSTITUTIONS DO? / 1

▶ Adopt an **intrinsic and comprehensive approach** to systematize the single prevention initiatives: set up a **"coordination centre"** within the local public authority to systematize knowledge, needs analysis and good practices, also through specific work groups involving local councils, school institutions, other education entities, the tertiary sector, tertiary sector organizations and associations in the education and healthcare fields, courts of justice, law enforcement bodies, and correctional facilities;

▶ create the opportunity for **structured dialogue** and discussion **between youngsters and policymakers**, making available a space where youths are able to express their opinions regarding the prevention of violence and extremism, offering up standpoints and possible solutions (for instance, a group drafting of guidelines for urban spaces frequented mainly by youths);

▶ foster the availability of (physical and permanent) **spaces for social interaction** that are within the local area and accessible to youngsters;

▶ remove **bureaucratic obstacles** hindering recognition of the right of residence and citizenship for young migrants;

▶ work with the **various European nations** to place the spotlight on commonalities and the individual features of the single contexts, enhancing best practices, **European exchange programmes** and group socialization;

WHAT SHOULD POLICY MAKERS AND INSTITUTIONS DO? / 2

▶ **increase resources to the tertiary sector** for education policies – with criteria of quality (result assessment) to access forms of funding – aiming to ensure intervention continuity and the stable presence of education staff in the private social sector;

▶ adopt forms of **support to parenthood**, also for migrants, with the intent of encouraging harmonious growth capable of preventing divides and breakaways;

▶ **involve churches, mosques and prayer halls** in the local area as potential resources against polarization: establish forms of dialogue between these and local institutions;

▶ carry out **checks** and intervention **on online hatred**, also regarding xenophobic websites and movements (as in the Jo Cox recommendations, 2017);

▶ systematize good practices specific to the justice sector: mediation processes and meetings between victims and offenders, protection for persons with a hybrid legal status, monitoring tools and crosschecking with the penitentiary police to be carried out by the juvenile correctional facilities.

RaP - Rhizome Against Polarization, promoted by WeWorld and
funded by the European Union's Internal Security Fund – Police,
aims to prevent social polarization and violent radicalization
in Europe, especially in Spain, Italy and Austria,
from a human rights, community-based approach
and the empowerment of civil society.

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