

Building Peace Together



Youth-led initiatives
to prevent violent
extremism

Inspiring practices from
South & Southeast Asia



About the partners



Kofi Annan
FOUNDATION



Extremely
TOGETHER

A Kofi Annan Foundation Initiative



college of
youth activism
and development



GCERF
Preventing Violent Extremism



KRIS

The Kofi Annan Foundation & Extremely Together, Switzerland

The Kofi Annan Foundation is an independent, not-for-profit organization that works to promote better global governance and strengthen the capacities of people and countries to achieve a fairer, more peaceful world. One of our key areas of focus at the Foundation is promoting youth leadership in the context of preventing violent extremism which we work on with our Extremely Together initiative. Launched in 2016, the Extremely Together initiative works with a global network of young people who help us respond to the increasing threat of recruitment and narratives of violent extremist groups. The network is made up of ten young leaders from around the globe and four country chapters in the Philippines, Pakistan, Somalia, and Uganda. Through our initiative, we aim to provide a sense of identity and purpose to young people worldwide, helping them to take action for positive change and peace in their communities.

Learn more about the Foundation: <https://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/>

The College of Youth Activism and Development (CYAAD), Pakistan

CYAAD is a non-profit organization based in Pakistan which aims to empower local youth. Its main areas of focus are poverty alleviation, youth inclusion in politics, countering extremism and radicalization, and empowering young people through education and technical training to encourage entrepreneurship and social development. It subscribes to the philosophy that young people are brimming with energy and potential, and that they should be given the knowledge and confidence to act.

Learn more about the organization: <https://www.cyaad.org.pk/>

The Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), Bangladesh

GCERF is the global fund dedicated to preventing violent extremism. They connect local communities to global resources and support grassroots initiatives that are typically out of reach for international donors to help them develop and thrive. GCERF has been active in Bangladesh since 2016 and supports local level initiatives that work to strengthen community resilience against violent extremist agendas.

Learn more about GCERF's activities in Bangladesh:

<https://www.gcerf.org/bangladesh/>

The Kristiyano-Islam Peace Library (KRIS), Philippines

KRIS is a non-profit organization based in the Philippines that aims to promote peace through education by empowering young people to become pillars of peace in their own families, schools, and communities. KRIS commits to developing Filipino youth by building avenues that cultivate a cycle of peace and empowerment. The organization aims to strengthen the networks between the youth and its fellow civil society organizations through different projects, campaigns, and exhibits to showcase unity in the country despite differences between individual Filipinos.

Learn more about the organization: <https://www.krisforpeace.org/>



Funded by the
European Union

This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union in the context of the "Leading the Way to Peace – Youth Together for Social Cohesion" project. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of the Kofi Annan Foundation and its partners and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.



Executive summary



Do you want to rally other young people to help you prevent violent extremism (PVE)



Then this guide is for you!

We have assembled learnings and advice from diverse civil society and youth-led organizations to help guide and inspire you on your own journey to build peace in your community.

Do you want to foster a strong sense of shared responsibility and create a healthy environment in which they can grow and thrive



The guide is structured around three main goals for fostering a youth-led approach to preventing violent extremism and seven main challenges that PVE practitioners face. It offers solutions for overcoming these challenges and takes you through the process of reaching out to young participants through to scaling your movement and putting it on the global map. It also includes ten case studies from diverse local civil society organizations to demonstrate how these principles work in practice and inspire you when thinking about implementing your own creative approaches to PVE action.

Do you want to grow your PVE movement and maybe even create systemic change on a wider scale



So why this guide?

Since 2020, the Kofi Annan Foundation and its Extremely Together initiative have been working with young leaders in South and Southeast Asia on preventing violent extremism in the region in the context of the “Leading the Way to Peace – Youth Together for Social Cohesion” project supported by the European Union. The project has been carried out in collaboration with our partners the Kristiyano-Islam Peace Library (KRIS) in the Philippines, the College of Youth Activism and Development (CYAAD) in Pakistan and the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) and Rupantar in Bangladesh. Together, we researched the motivations behind youth involvement in violent extremist activities, trained over 2600 young people in PVE, and supported the implementation of over 30 participant-led projects designed to promote peace in their communities.

In the past decade, the South and Southeast Asian region has witnessed a series of attacks that were perpetrated by educated, middle-class and urban youth. These attacks challenged the PVE approach in the region, which had been focusing on low income, marginalized communities. A new, more holistic approach was needed. When it comes to applying fresh approaches to social problems, who better to do so than youth? With their energy, creativity and idealism, young people are uniquely positioned to push for positive change and prevent violence in society. And that is where you come in!

Getting started

Sometimes it can feel hard to know where to start. Getting your peers and other young activists excited about preventing violent extremism (PVE) and peacebuilding can often be the greatest hurdle, but it can be done. The first step is to make the topic as fun and relatable as possible; organizing recreational activities is a good way to attract new members and make the topic more engaging. It is also critical to be specific about your target group. Understanding who they are, what they do, and where their interests lie will help you create activities and messages that are tailored to their needs. Partnering with local youth organizations and engaging with as many community actors as possible will help establish trust and credibility from the onset. Once you have crafted a strong message and know who you want to reach, the guide highlights how you can spread your message via online campaigning and how to make your activities more approachable.

A second challenge that many PVE organizations and actors face is how to create meaningful inclusion of youth and foster belonging – especially when it comes to youth from marginalized communities. To do so, you must first be aware of your contextual biases. We have found that professional training in the forms of workshops on stigma, discrimination, and cultural biases can be useful. Once you have worked on internal awareness, it is also imperative that you

Gaining momentum

communicate this outwardly. If you are part of a formal organization, your organization must be willing to publicly challenge discriminatory narratives and support the inclusion of diverse communities. Creating meaningful inclusion of young people also involves engaging them in every step of the process, from ideation to implementation, as this will strengthen their sense of ownership. Whenever possible, co-create and co-lead projects to help guarantee their long-term engagement. Special attention should be paid to ensuring that minority groups and marginalized communities feel included. This can be done by challenging stereotypes, building trust, listening to their needs, and elevating their voices.

Once you have initiated contact, it is time to turn your attention to sustaining engagement and gaining momentum. One way to sustain participation is to offer members of your movement incentives. The guide outlines suggestions for various incentives that you can use and how you can strengthen a sense of ownership. We have found that engaging young leaders both online and in face-to-face activities works best for sustaining engagement. While a strong social media presence will help you stay connected to your online community and rally youth to PVE action, regular in-person meetings are important for creating strong emotional connections. By utilizing both approaches, you can stay connected with young participants and retain engagement over time. Building trust, friendships, and encouraging community participants to find common ground will help your movement grow more unified. This will directly impact participants' capacity to work together and the quality of output.

A second aspect of sustaining engagement and growing momentum is guaranteeing the physical and emotional safety of young practitioners and those working with them. Guaranteeing the reputational and physical safety of participants should be of utmost priority and this guide will outline the steps for you to take to do so. Reconciling different points of view goes hand in hand with building a healthy and unified movement, but this needs to be done respectfully and sensitively. It is also critical to provide mental health support to help manage the heavy impact of social pressure and loneliness experienced by those working in PVE. When guaranteeing the physical and emotional safety of young people, pay attention to your movement's cyber health and make sure everyone is aware of the safety tools at their disposal. In an increasingly hostile cyber world, it is critical that youth can identify and call out hate speech and disinformation.

Scaling up

Once you have solidified your engagement strategies, you may want to start scaling up your activities beyond your local level to reach more people either nationally, regionally, or even globally. Fostering mutual learning and joint action between young PVE activists at different levels is an important first step. One way of doing this is by setting up networks of peer-to-peer learning which provide an opportunity for groups to increase their visibility, elevate their voices, get inspiration, share experiences and lean on other likeminded networks to build their capacity. In addition to connecting with national, regional or global networks, creating partnerships with larger organizations will help to strengthen your credibility if you are still operating on a smaller scale. To scale and grow your movement, and create systemic change, it is helpful to gain the support of policymakers and government leaders to advocate for and invest in youth-led PVE actions. For this, a first step is to identify the key priorities for policymaking and align your thematic focuses with those of policymakers. Once you have defined these, it is time to reach out to multipliers and allies within government who can help advocate on behalf of your cause.

In addition to working towards systemic change, it is essential to translate your work and message into the broader arena. To gain visibility and scale up your PVE efforts, align your programming with local, regional, and global agendas for peace. Capitalize on critical moments that galvanize public attention (e.g., mass protests, elections, constitutional reforms, or security incidents) as these defining moments can help you change narratives. The fact that people are more open to change at these pivotal points in time can also give you just the right impulse to transform your movement into tangible organized action. Finally, to scale your activities and reach more people with your message, you should put an emphasis on campaigning and outreach.

Take it away

Outlined in the guide are a set of proven practices from countries across South and Southeast Asia that can serve as inspiration and guidance for your PVE activities, especially when aiming to engage urban youth. However, we also invite you to explore new avenues for PVE action, including building bridges with academia and adopting an intersectional mindset. There are many ways of linking these major challenges of our time – you will never succeed if you do not at least try.

Remember, even if it can sometimes feel daunting, you are not alone. Youth actions are driving positive change around the world and proving that it can be done. By sharing these tips about youth engagement, we hope youth movements for peace will grow, connect, and flourish. Together we can make peace happen. Now take it away!

Check out the full guide on:
www.kofiannanfoundation.org

About the project

From 2020 to 2022, the Kofi Annan Foundation's Extremely Together initiative worked on the "Leading the Way to Peace – Youth Together for Social Cohesion" project with the financial support of the European Union. We partnered with the Kristiyano-Islam Peace Library (KRIS) in the Philippines, the College of Youth Activism and Development (CYAAD) in Pakistan, as well as the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) and Rupantar in Bangladesh to promote youth engagement in peacebuilding efforts in urban communities across the region. Together, we conducted extensive research¹ in three countries on how and why urban youth may be vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremist organizations. We tested different strategies to strengthen social cohesion in these settings in which we trained over 2600 young people and empowered them to act for peace in their communities by supporting over 30 youth-led initiatives. Through this collaborative effort, we were able to learn from one another's experiences, improve our practices and share our insights with partners and other youth organizations from the region.

1 Read about our research here: https://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/publications/research-urban-youth-building-peace-in-south-southeast-asia-key-drivers-of-violent-extremism-and-ways-to-prevent-it/attachment/urban-youth-building-peace-in-south-and-south-east-asia_2021_final/

Contributors and Acknowledgements

We would like to extend a warm thank you to the organizations who joined us during our "Envision Together: Youth Building the Future for Peace" South and Southeast Asia regional conference in October 2021 and took part in the discussions that informed our thinking for this guide.

- Agency for Peacebuilding, Italy
- Al Qalam Institute, United Kingdom
- BENI, United Kingdom
- British Council, United Kingdom
- Centre for Media and Information Literacy (CMIL), Sri Lanka
- Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society (CBCS), Philippines
- College of Youth Activism and Development (CYAAD), Pakistan
- Extremely Together Pakistan, Pakistan
- Extremely Together Philippines, Philippines
- Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), Switzerland
- Generasi Literat, Indonesia
- Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT)
- Hashtag Generation, Sri Lanka
- Hive, Pakistan
- Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF), Hong Kong
- International Indonesian Forum on Indonesian Development (INFID), Indonesia
- Kalimudan, Philippines
- Khalifa Ihler Institute, Norway
- Kristiyano-Islam Peace Library (KRIS), Philippines
- Makesense, Philippines
- Moonshot CVE, United Kingdom
- Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, Finland
- PAIMAN Alumni Trust, Pakistan
- Rupantar, Bangladesh
- Tuffix, Germany
- United Nations Development Program (UNDP)
- UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP), India
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY)

We would also like to thank the European Union who has supported us financially throughout the implementation of the project.



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