

**YOUTH**

# INNOVATION LABS

A Model for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

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## About

The **Youth Civil Activism Network** (YouthCAN) is designed to upscale and optimise 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, cartoonists, 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.

YouthCAN is a global network. First launched to Europe at the Youth Against Violent Extremism conference in Oslo, June 2015. The network has since expanded with Commonwealth YouthCAN launched in Malta, November 2015. The network currently has over 550 members from 85 countries.

YouthCAN is managed by the **Institute for Strategic Dialogue** (ISD). ISD specialises in creating unique networks and partnerships to innovate and hypercharge countering violent extremism (CVE) efforts both online and offline. As a think tank, all of ISD's research is action-oriented and leads to the development of project pilots, which in turn have rigorous methods and evaluation processes to assess what is working and what might be re-tailored or shifted. Counter-narrative development and strategic communication projects are at the heart of ISD's efforts. Over time, ISD has built networks of 'credible messengers' and partnered with private sector organisations to ensure that the support is given to target and scale effective counter-narrative projects sustainably, and sensitively. ISD, with support from leading social media companies such as Google, Twitter, and Facebook, is also leading a data-driven approach. By turning analysis into action, and 'learning by doing', ISD are at the forefront of a new approach to countering extremism – one that breaks free from reinforcing assumptions about extremism without demonstrating what works to counter it.

## About the authors

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Lastly, we would be nothing without our incredible and dedicated YouthCAN members. We have learned so much from you and look forward to continuing our work together.

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# SUMMARY



# Summary

The following publication discusses the development, implementation and evaluation of *Youth Innovation Labs* conducted by the Youth Civil Activism Network (YouthCAN). Youth Innovation Labs are immersive, activist-led events that provide a space for innovation, co-creation and learning while giving participants the contacts, tools and resources needed to develop counter-narrative campaigns for preventing and countering violent extremism.

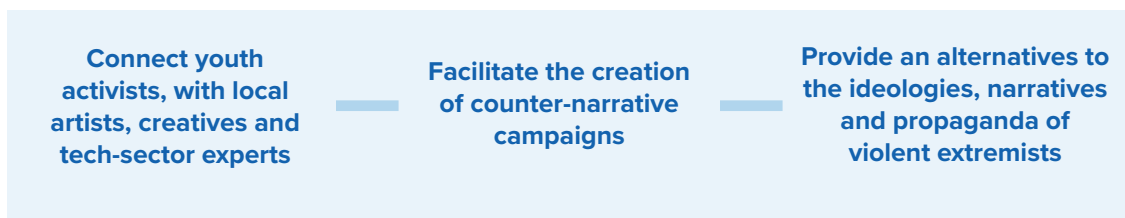
Why do we need Youth Innovation Labs? Over the last few years global attention has been paid to violent extremist organisations like ISIS, Boko Haram and a range of far-right groups. As a reaction, in 2015 there was an uprising of young voices convening on the topic of peace-building, discussing how young people can be supported in their efforts in preventing and countering violent extremism (PVE and CVE). Youth summits, supported by governments and international bodies, took place in different parts of the world, engaging a wide range of young activists.<sup>1</sup> The majority of these events reached similar conclusions about the need to actively involve young people in PVE and CVE. These events spanned regions, ethnicities, ideologies, gender and faiths to amplify the voices of young people.

## Two common conclusions reached at these events were:

- 1 | Youth activists internationally need safe spaces for dialogue and creative development.
- 2 | There is a need for different sectors to proactively support youth-led initiatives, especially government and tech sectors.

YouthCAN has been able to connect youth activists with local artists, creatives and tech-sector experts through Youth Innovation Labs. These labs serve to facilitate the creation of counter-narrative campaigns and initiatives that challenge or provide alternatives to the ideologies, narratives and propaganda of violent extremists.

### YouthCAN Youth Innovation Labs



<sup>1</sup> The largest of these international youth events were the *Youth Against Violent Extremism Summit* in Oslo (June 2015), the *Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security* in Amman (August 2015) and the *Global Youth Summit Against Violent Extremism* at the UNGA Summit in New York (September 2015).

After carrying out regional labs in Amsterdam, Kigali, Madrid and Budapest, YouthCAN has six key lessons to share with organisations and practitioners developing similar events.

- 1 Size matters:** Smaller and medium-sized events (between 25 and 35) seem to produce better results.
- 2 Everyone is equal:** Participants come from a wide range of backgrounds and experience. However, the format of a lab and content should not assume previous knowledge or bias.
- 3 Make it local:** Tailor your event to the community or region you are working with.
- 4 Give time for ideas to materialise:** Give time for concepts to turn into tangible projects.
- 5 Follow up is crucial:** To ensure output, follow up is necessary after the event.
- 6 Do no harm:** It is important to take a 'Do No Harm' approach when encouraging PVE and CVE engagement.

YouthCAN's ultimate goal is to engage young people and provide them with the tools they need to create effective content aimed at challenging hate speech and violent extremism. We hope that this model will help other practitioners, activists and policy makers grow and expand their own efforts to increase the powerful voice of young people in efforts towards preventing and countering violent extremism.



# **INTRODUCTION**



# Introduction

The following publication discusses the development, implementation and evaluation of Youth Innovation Labs. Labs are immersive, activist-led events that create a secure environment to facilitate capacity-building while giving participants the contacts, tools and resources needed to develop strategic campaigns for preventing and countering violent extremism. When looking at larger international efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism, youth are often discussed as either part of the problem or as an ‘at risk’ cohort that needs safeguarding.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, these positions give little agency to young activists and provides little support for proactive youth initiatives.

The challenge is involving youth as part of the solution. There have been some attempts to do this through conferences, hackathons<sup>3</sup> and training programmes. The problem with these events is that they tend to either focus purely on knowledge exchanges, or solely on campaign development and they rarely have diligent follow-up or support after the event. Thus, labs work with a youth-led approach, combining knowledge exchanges with action-oriented output. Capacity building is developed alongside campaign and initiative creation.

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) initially developed and delivered the Innovation Lab model through capacity building workshops in Indonesia and Kenya. While ISD Innovation Labs have been organised for a range of audiences, this publication focusses on the implementation of Youth Innovation Labs involving young people through the Youth Civil Activism Network (YouthCAN).

Between June 2015 and April 2016 YouthCAN hosted four Youth Innovation Labs, specifically tailored for its youth network.<sup>4</sup> All labs resulted in completely original counter-narrative products launching new youth-led initiatives to wide audiences on social media platforms. YouthCAN and ISD are currently supporting the progression of these campaigns, with ISD’s counter-narrative team working with the lab participants to enhance and develop their initiatives.

The purpose of this publication is to share the methodology and structure that YouthCAN has developed, as well as the best-practices and outcomes from YouthCAN’s work with young activists and creatives.

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<sup>2</sup> See: *Youth Against Violent Extremism: Findings and Conclusions*, (Oslo: Youth Against Violent Extremism Summit, 4 June 2015). See also: *Amman Youth Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security*, (Amman: Global Youth Forum on Youth, Peace and Security, 22 August 2015), < <http://www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/pdf/AMMAN%20YOUTH%20DECLARATION.pdf>>.

<sup>3</sup> S. Leckart, ‘The Hackathon is On: Pitching and Programming the Next Killer App’, *Wired Magazine*, (February 2012), < [http://www.wired.com/2012/02/ff\\_hackathons/all/1](http://www.wired.com/2012/02/ff_hackathons/all/1)>.

<sup>4</sup> A detailed break down and in-depth examination of YouthCAN Labs can be found in the next section.

## ***The Challenge of Online Extremism***

Extremist groups like ISIS have effectively used social media to spread their propaganda and recruit supporters from around the world. Utilising savvy audio-visual content and technical resources, extremist groups tailor their messages to specific audiences, including men or women, local citizens or foreign supporters. Much of extremist propaganda is now professionalised, with strong artistic capabilities coupled with marketing strategies. Far-right extremist groups across Europe and the US - such as the English Defence League in Britain, Golden Dawn in Greece, or PEGIDA in Germany - have also utilised potential benefits online tools have to offer.<sup>5</sup> As the vast majority of far-right extremist campaigns focus on recruiting domestic support, these groups leverage mediums such as Facebook and Twitter, not only to increase their reach and followers, but also as an aid in organising their offline activities.

The need to counter the increasingly professional propaganda campaigns created by violent extremist groups is apparent. Recent research has demonstrated the substantial disparity between extremist groups and those who work to counter them.<sup>6</sup> Typically, past approaches have focused on removing content with passive ‘take down’ policies. However, with 5 billion new items of content added to Facebook each day, 100 hours of videos uploaded to YouTube every minute and 6,000 tweets per second on Twitter, ‘take down’ approaches are only part of the solution. There is also a need to create, produce and disseminate similarly compelling content that directly and indirectly undermines the arguments of extremist groups.

However, those best suited to deliver counter-narrative campaigns often struggle to have their voices heard. Credible messengers – such as former extremists, survivors of extremist violence and the young people whom the majority of these campaigns are targeted towards – often lack the necessary funds, skills and support to effectively launch their campaigns. YouthCAN is an initiative aimed at giving credible messengers, in this case young activists who know what messages will resonant with their generation, the tools and support they need to create compelling content effectively and at scale.

## ***Encouraging Activism Through Youth Innovation Labs***

YouthCAN’s Youth Innovation Labs aim to give young people the skills and knowledge they need to create effective counter-narrative campaigns and initiatives. Too often, young people are seen as part of the problem, rather than the solution.

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<sup>5</sup> Ramalingam, V. *Old Threat, New Approach: Tackling the Far Right Across Europe*, (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2013), <[http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/OldThreatNewApproach\\_2014.pdf](http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/OldThreatNewApproach_2014.pdf)>

<sup>6</sup> *Countering Violent Extremism: Understanding the Role of Former Extremists and Counter Messaging*, (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2015), <[http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Formers\\_brochure\\_-\\_small.pdf](http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Formers_brochure_-_small.pdf)>.

As said in the *Youth Action Agenda to Prevent Violent Extremism and Promote Peace*:

*Many Counter Violent Extremism initiatives frame youth as either perpetrators of violent extremism or as possible victims of recruitment into violent groups. However, this narrative fails to capture the fact that most young people are part of the solution. They are not turning to violence. Young people around the world are working to build peace and prevent violent extremism.<sup>7</sup>*

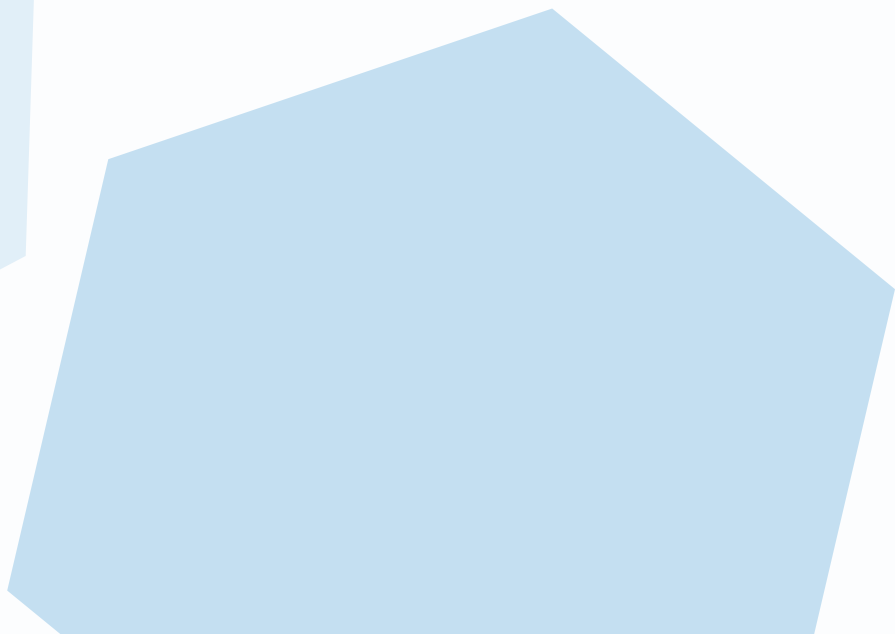
Youth Innovation Labs were developed in recognition of the power that young people's voices can have in tackling these issues. These labs bring activists together to connect and engage effectively through regional workshops. The YouthCAN team, including counter-narrative experts and network specialists, train participants in skills which can then be translated to both online and offline engagement. These labs therefore act as the first step towards building an internet-savvy civil society with the knowledge and capacity to effectively challenge extremism.

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<sup>7</sup> *Youth Action Agenda to Prevent Violent Extremism and Promote Peace* (New York City: Global Youth Summit Against Violent Extremism, 28 September 2015), <<https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/FINAL-Youth-Action-Agenda-1.pdf>>.



# **FACILITATING A YOUTH INNOVATION LAB**



# Facilitating a Youth Innovation Lab

*This section outlines the key guidelines to ensure the curation and running of a successful Youth Innovation Lab, including regional representation, participant selection and a lab's structure.*

## ***Universal and Regional***

Youth Innovation Labs were developed to be compatible in a wide range of national and regional contexts and to audiences coming from a variety of backgrounds. The labs are designed to ensure that everyone can start at the same level, with nothing assumed of them other than their willingness to engage. Participants are encouraged to bring their own experience and expertise to the table, whether that is in peacebuilding, countering violent extremism, combating hate speech, technological expertise or a creative talent. The Innovation Lab is a highly versatile model with almost universal applicability; however, extremism affects different regions differently and labs must reflect this diversity.

In order to fully engage participants, each individual lab should take a regional approach that offers a focused examination of the problem and discusses relevant examples of innovative solutions with distinct localised contexts in mind. Between June 2015 and April 2016, YouthCAN held four Youth Innovation Labs:

### **AMSTERDAM, OCTOBER 2015:**

Hosted 38 participants from the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland.

### **KIGALI, FEBRUARY 2016:**

Hosted 35 participants from 11 countries in the African region.

### **MADRID, MARCH 2016:**

Hosted 35 participants from Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece and France.

### **BUDAPEST, APRIL 2016:**

Hosted 33 participants from Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria and Romania.

The following visualisation shows the regions covered in the first four Youth Innovation Labs:

**Figure 1: Regional Representation in First Four Youth Innovation Labs**

### AMSTERDAM



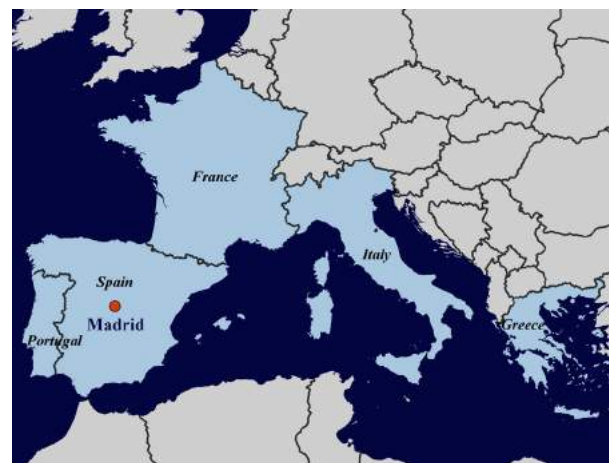
### KIGALI



### BUDAPEST



### MADRID



*Countries Represented at Each Regional Youth Innovation Labs*

While the structure of each lab remains the same, the examples given to expose extremist propaganda, as well as examples showing how grassroots efforts are using innovation to counter extremism, are tailored to the regional audience. For example, in the Amsterdam

Lab the examples of extremist propaganda and counter-extremist initiatives were different to those shared in Rwanda, while those shown in Madrid differed from Budapest.

**Figure 2: Examples of Regional Content Shared at Youth Innovation Labs**

## RWANDA



**In Rwanda, for an Innovation Lab with participants coming from 14 African countries, non-violent propaganda from Boko Haram was shared alongside the Nigerian #BringBackOurGirls counter-narratives**

## HUNGARY



**In comparison, in Hungary, for an Innovation Lab given to Central and Eastern European participants, Hungarian far-right propaganda was shown alongside Polish anti-neo-Nazi counter-narratives**

Discussing regional examples helps start a dialogue among the groups and allows participants to start deconstructing extremist propaganda to help them construct their own PVE and CVE campaigns and initiatives. The extremist material shared at Youth Innovation Labs consists of non-violent, 'soft' content that exposes the fact that a large proportion of extremist-related content is often not illegal content, nor is it always openly offensive.

The table below gives examples of the extremist group content discussed and grassroots efforts to counter extremism during each of the regional labs:

AMSTERDAM	
EXTREMIST CONTENT EXAMPLES	PVE AND CVE EXAMPLES
<p>PEGIDA</p> <p>Golden Dawn</p> <p>ISIS</p>	<p>Abdullah X</p> <p>Extreme Dialogue</p> <p>Laut Gegen Nazis - Like Attack</p> <p>Norway's Peace Ring</p>
KIGALI	
EXTREMIST CONTENT EXAMPLES	PVE AND CVE EXAMPLES
<p>Boko Haram</p> <p>ELAM</p> <p>Australia First</p>	<p>One Parramatta</p> <p>Paasban</p> <p>Bring Back Our Girls</p>
MADRID	
EXTREMIST CONTENT EXAMPLES	PVE AND CVE EXAMPLES
<p>CasaPound Italia</p> <p>ISIS</p> <p>Golden Dawn</p>	<p>Muslimah X</p> <p>JiLadz</p> <p>One to One</p>
BUDAPEST	
EXTREMIST CONTENT EXAMPLES	PVE AND CVE EXAMPLES
<p>Austrian Freedom Party</p> <p>Magyar Gárda/Hungarian Guard</p> <p>ISIS</p>	<p>Stop Hate Speech</p> <p>Truth About Halal</p> <p>Laut Gegen Nazis - Like Attack</p>

The terminology used by facilitators of the labs can also shift depending on the region. While terms like ‘Preventing Violent Extremism’, ‘Countering Violent Extremism’ and ‘radicalisation’ are well understood across Western Europe and North America, these terms are not always familiar in different regional contexts. Terms are discussed in opening sessions and language



is considered and adapted to the region(s) of participants.

Taking a regional approach also helps facilitate the development of highly targeted campaigns. Mixed groups ensure that a wide range of experiences and input are considered, however members of each group must share enough in common to be able to hone in on a specific audience and message. Furthermore, regional labs help ensure that participants are able to continue developing their initiatives after the lab. Geographical proximity of participants enables groups to create a local support network, connecting youth activists involved in similar projects, as well as creatives or tech entrepreneurs that may be able to provide in-kind assistance.

Currently the primary language of lab materials and presentations is English. This is partly due to capacity, but also is a conscious choice since each lab brings together participants from a range of countries. This is both an advantage and disadvantage. It is advantageous to have activists from different countries exposed to one another, but it means the content they develop together is often presented in their shared language: English. In future iterations of Youth Innovation Labs, it will be beneficial to develop materials in a wider range of languages. As it stands, regional examples of extremist content and counter-narrative campaigns that are shared at the labs are in national and local languages with English subtitles.

## ***The Participants: Cross Sector Collaboration***

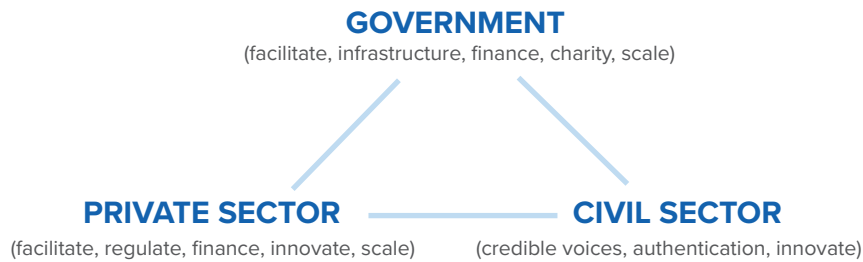
Cross-sector collaboration is an essential component of the Innovation Lab model, helping guide the output of a lab towards effective development of counter-narrative campaigns and initiatives.<sup>8</sup> Labs present an opportunity to connect the credible voices of youth activists with experts including: videographers, artists, comedians, civil society organisations, advertising firms, social media platforms and even government representatives.<sup>9</sup>

One of the greatest challenges in effective PVE and CVE work has been bringing different sectors to the same table, so that sectoral skills are used effectively and efficiently together. Civil society is a mandatory component in developing credible and targeted counter-narratives for countering violent extremism. Civil society can harness credible voices, grassroots authenticity, and a localised perspective. However, often civil society NGOs and activists lack access to the expertise, support and the creativity other sectors hold. Local to national governments, technology and creative sectors are all needed to effectively counter violent extremism. Violent extremism is a challenge faced by the whole of society and it will require a society-wide solution.

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<sup>8</sup> See European Commission Press Release: *EU Internet Forum: Bringing together governments, Europol and technology companies to counter terrorist content and hate speech online* (Brussels: European Commission, 3 December 2005), < [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-15-6243\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-15-6243_en.htm)>.

<sup>9</sup> The inclusion of local or international government representatives is a choice to be made by the event organisers within the context of where they are working. Some countries and regions have higher levels of trust and engagement with authorities, while others do not. The decision to include certain government-related individuals should be based on the context and desired outcome of the event.



**Sector Roles within PVE and CVE<sup>10</sup>**

The above diagram shows the strong roles that each sector has in PVE and CVE work. Governments are key in facilitating others to effectively carry out this work. Governments can also provide valuable infrastructure and finance. Likewise the private sector (including social media and technology companies) can provide innovative tools and scale to civil society.

Often the most potent activists, particularly among the youth, work with very little support that could help to fund, amplify or develop initiatives. For this reason, Youth Innovation Labs approach technology representatives and a wide range of creatives to participate in the labs with youth activists so new ideas and different perspectives can be developed through partnerships. Representatives from social media companies have attended all YouthCAN’s labs, providing both expertise and strategic in-kind support for campaigns produced. The involvement of governments varies depending on regions and dynamics between government and civil society. Labs move beyond the inter-sector neglect that many activists face and push momentum into a space of equality, inspiration and output.



*Young activists are a core part of Facebook users and they always come up with really innovative ideas in terms of developing content, which is really useful for our platform. This is not something that can be done only by governments or only by tech companies or only by civil society, but it needs to be a combination of all these actors. So such events like we had today are very important.*

**Iris Boyer,**  
Facebook Policy Programmes

<sup>10</sup> Graphic was first published in: Saltman, E and Smith, M. *Till Martyrdom Do Us Part: Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon*, (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2015), < [http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Till\\_Martyrdom\\_Do\\_Us\\_Part\\_Gender\\_and\\_the\\_ISIS\\_Phenomenon.pdf](http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Till_Martyrdom_Do_Us_Part_Gender_and_the_ISIS_Phenomenon.pdf)>.



As with its online network, YouthCAN provides the infrastructure to facilitate productive discussion between all of these groups. To ensure separate sectors mix and connect with one another, the lab splits participants into smaller, intimate groups, blending civil society activists with young creatives and tech experts. This ensures participants connect over the course of the lab which, in turn, constructs a regional support system. These connections will aid and boost future youth activists' outputs and product cycles.

Social Media companies like Facebook and Twitter have also actively supported the work produced at labs. Facebook has sent representatives to a number of labs to give presentations about new applications and how their messages can reach further through social media:

### ***Active Learning and Co-Creation***

Effective teaching recognises how participants learn and encourages them to think critically by providing an inclusive and supportive environment. Youth Innovation Labs aim to enhance learning and spawn co-creation through discussion and participant engagement. In the curation of labs there are multiple goals aimed at creating a friendly, safe and productive environment. Efforts are taken to ensure the following:

- **Curating the optimal number of participants.** There must be diversity to bring a range

of perspectives to the event, while also creating an environment where everyone feels involved. Having experimented with a range of participant numbers, YouthCAN has found that smaller events with between 25 to 35 participants allow members to get to know one another and yield a better chance of continued dialogue after the event.

- **Ensuring a diverse range of perspectives on PVE and CVE.** It is necessary to have new perspectives working within PVE and CVE. For this reason labs are optimised by inviting activists, as well as various creative sectors. Young tech engineers, graphic designers, actors, artists, performers, illustrators, photographers and videographers are all invited.
- **Turning passive learning into active creation.** The schedule of a lab moves from imparting knowledge into a co-creation model. In the first stages of the labs, brief presentations frame the intent of the event and give a range of tips for effective production of counter-narratives. As the labs progress the activities lead groups to develop their own autonomy, solidify their ideas, and create unique counter-narratives and initiatives.

In order to enforce a structure that encourages critical thinking, it is crucial to go beyond learning in a hierarchical ‘teacher-led’ approach. When an intensive environment of ‘learning and doing’ is established, critical thought becomes more likely to develop as a reflex for participants. The role of the moderators is to lead dialogues from one point to the next, allowing different discussions to evolve to ideas that can be turned into actionable projects.<sup>11</sup>

## **Structure of a Youth Innovation Lab**

Youth Innovation Labs contain highly interactive and practical exercises that increase participants’ knowledge and ability to challenge hate speech. These labs move away from the traditional event structure and utilise ‘hands on’ group exercises and breakout sessions as opposed to lectures or panel discussions. Short presentations are given throughout the lab to contextualise the event and move activities from one moment to the next, building ideas that can lead to the development of actual campaigns or initiatives. As seen in Figure 3, as the lab progresses, there is increasingly less interjection from facilitators and more peer-to-peer group development work.

Labs cover all the major elements of building PVE and CVE initiatives and enable participants to build a comprehensive tool kit for how to plan, create, target and promote a counter-narrative campaign. As topics are addressed (see Figure 3) participants learn by doing, immediately applying each lesson as it is discussed. The lab is carefully structured so that each section builds on those that came before it. In order to create impact-oriented initiatives, participants build a campaign using a specific audience as a starting point. Groups first decide the form of hate speech or extremism they would like to address and determine the target audience

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<sup>11</sup> For more on Active Learning approaches to teaching see: Bonwell, C and James E, *Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom*, (Washington D.C.: Association for the Study of Higher Education, 1991).

that they want their message or engagement to reach. Only after establishing an audience do they develop their content, tailored specifically to this group.

The following flow chart shows the themes and activities covered during the course of a Youth Innovation Lab:

**Figure 3: Themes and Activities Covered During Youth Innovation Labs**

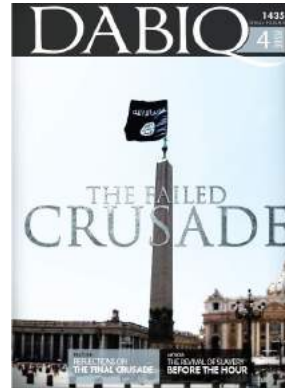


Labs start with a brief introduction into the nature of violent extremist content and hate speech. Here, regional extremist propaganda is shared to demonstrate the scope and scale of violent extremism online (refer to Figure 1). As the lab is catering to younger individuals, no overtly violent or graphic content is shown. Instead, videos and images showcase how extremist messaging aims to establish an ‘us versus them’ worldview.<sup>12</sup> Understanding the nature of the problem allows participants to fully understand what they are challenging. However, the problem is only briefly touched upon over the course of the event, as the lab is designed to be solution orientated.

Counter-narratives are introduced as a creative solution, which can be used in both offline and online activism.<sup>13</sup> It is vital that labs are led and shaped by the participant’s own experiences and expertise. The role participants can play in these proactive solutions, as well as the limitations to their activism is highlighted. This discussion includes security practices and protocol that participants can observe to reduce their exposure to hazards.

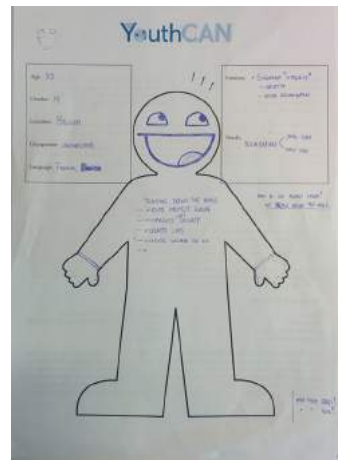
<sup>12</sup> See: Tajfel, H and Turner, J. C. ‘An integrative theory of intergroup conflict’. In W. G. Austin and S. Worchel. *The social psychology of intergroup relations*, (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979), pp. 33–47.

<sup>13</sup> A counter-narrative is a message that offers a positive alternative to extremist propaganda, or alternatively aims to deconstruct or delegitimise extremist narratives. For further definitions of terms refer to the glossary at the end of this publication.



*Examples of extremist content shown at the Budapest Youth Innovation Lab*

In addition to discussing what counter-narratives are and how they can be utilised, participants are shown how to amplify their efforts by targeting and promoting their message to reach the right audience. Discussions focus on crafting impact-oriented campaigns which are designed to reach and engage specific key audiences, rather than ‘going viral’. While working in their groups, participants are taken through exercises that demonstrate how to define their own target audience and establish the parameters for crafting a targeted message to reach them. Groups are encouraged to think critically about the messages and images that resonate with their audience. The target audience and messages that each group designs provides the framework for the counter-narrative campaigns they produce later in the lab.



*Participants at the Budapest Youth Innovation Lab Developing a Target Audience*

Having considered both the target audience and target message, groups are tasked with how to reach their intended audience and promote their campaigns. Participants are given the opportunity to connect, and learn from, leading social media representatives in creating an advertising campaign. Following this, groups are allocated time to use social media tools,

inputting the data produced in the previous exercises to translate their offline targets to the online sphere. Development of the campaigns is paired with measurement and evaluation guidelines. This session includes an exploration of the uses of online analytics, as well as methods for offline measurement and evaluation.

At this stage, participants have produced a target audience, a target message and explored the way in which these messages can be promoted. The labs conclude with a 'creative session' in which groups work together and apply everything they have learned to create their own campaign. Here each group is equipped with, and able to utilise, their creative members and tech experts to bring the ideas discussed throughout the lab into reality. At the close of the lab, the groups present their content. The campaigns that are complete and ready to launch receive in-kind advertising credits, donated by social media platforms such as Facebook. Whilst, those that require a little more development are passed on to ISD's counter-narrative team, who are equipped with the experience, expertise and connections to ensure the campaign's progression. These end products demonstrate the practical and pragmatic nature of the labs. Ultimately, Youth Innovation Labs are a space where concrete solutions are created, rather than just problems highlighted.



# **EVALUATING A YOUTH INNOVATION LAB**





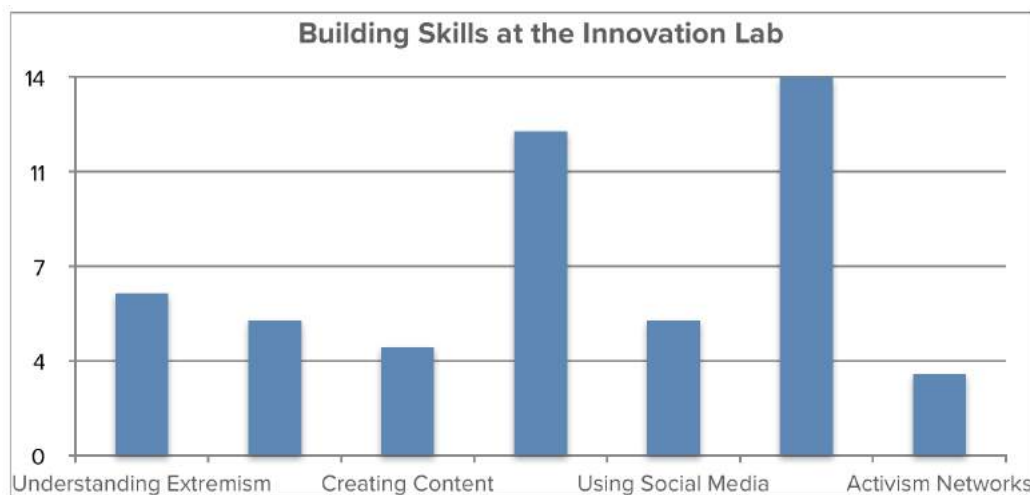
# Evaluating A Youth Innovation Lab

*Evaluating Youth Innovation Labs is vital to ensure that lab designs and approaches remain flexible and adapt to the feedback of participants. Evaluation of Youth Innovation Labs focuses on the skills and knowledge gained by participants, as measured through pre and post lab surveys, in addition to analysis and assessment of the campaigns that are created and launched from the labs.*

## Evaluating Participants' Skills and Experience

Pre and post-lab surveys include qualitative and quantitative questions, ensuring the collected data provides both breadth and depth. Pre-lab surveys focus on assessing participants' background and needs, while post-lab surveys focus on their experience at the lab and their perception of their own growth as a result of taking part. Both surveys contain a section where participants rank their own abilities and their level of comfort in creating and executing counter-narrative campaigns before and after the lab.

The results of the labs held between June 2015 and April 2016 can be seen in the graph below.



*This graph shows the combined results from four labs around self-assessment of skill levels gained, as calculated by participants' pre and post lab surveys.<sup>14</sup>*

<sup>14</sup> The higher the number, the greater the improvement in confidence for a given skill. Participants evaluated themselves on a scale of 1-4 before and after the lab and a single numerical increase or decrease in each skill for each participant is worth 1 or -1 point accordingly. The total change for all attendees was calculated and then averaged across the four Youth Innovation Labs.

From self-evaluation forms filled out by participants, figures reveal areas where the lab had the greatest impact. When combined with qualitative feedback, the data also reveals where the lab can improve in the future. In many cases activists were forced to think about their own work in new ways and the labs highlighted where they could develop skills. As expressed by a participant in Madrid:

*"I thought I knew a lot, but came to find out even more unknown. [It] was very enlightening."*

According to participants, labs challenge them to think of new alternatives for reaching wider audiences and shine new light on why previous attempts to reach audiences might have been unsuccessful.

## 1 Has this experience affected how you understand your role in countering extremism and hate speech?

*"The Lab made me realise that one voice can make a difference when it comes to countering violent extremism and peacebuilding"*

*(Alison, Sierra Leone)*

*"I understand that I can make an impact."*

*(Anna, Czech Republic)*

## 2 Has participating in the lab improved your understanding of extremism and how to counter it?

*"[It] opened my eyes to out of the box ways of countering hate speech...Making up creative campaigns seems like a possibility now."*

*(Alek, Poland)*

## 3 Has participating in the lab improved your understanding of extremism and how to counter it?

*"Make it longer! :)"*

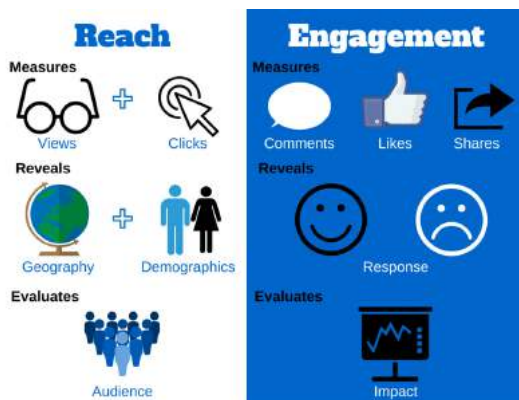
## Evaluating Youth Innovation Lab Campaigns

One of the primary shortcomings of many events is the lack of proactive follow-up and output continuation by both organisers and participants. Momentum can be built and harnessed when you have groups together in a room. However, it is much more difficult to continue that momentum once people have gone back to their daily lives. It is not enough to hold a lab and hope that finished, polished products will be ready to launch at the close of the event.

For this reason ISD has created a dedicated Innovation Labs and Counter-Narratives Development team. This team is dedicated to assisting and facilitating the projects created during a lab. If certain other skills or technical assistance is needed, the team can put the group in touch with other YouthCAN members that may have the skills or tools needed to finalise content. In having a touch-point that facilitates follow-through, YouthCAN has seen an increase in both output and impact from each event. It has also allowed for a more thorough analysis of impact and evaluation by giving participants a little extra time to consider how they would like to launch their counter-narrative campaigns.

Once a campaign is launched, the YouthCAN counter-narrative team works directly with participants to help promote the campaign and evaluate its progress. It can be challenging for civil society initiatives dealing with peacebuilding or counter-extremism to show a theory of change or impact. Often, activists know the incredible impact they can have on a community, but are unable to quantify their results. For example, it is relatively easy to assess the number of people convicted of terrorism, but almost impossible to quantify the number of individuals prevented from joining terrorism networks. The difficulty in measuring clear outcomes and impacts can negatively affect future funding or hinder attempts to attract partnerships. For this reason, Youth Innovation Labs share a range of tools and techniques for measurement and evaluation around different types of engagement.

Participants learn a great deal through this practice and can take the experience back to their own organisations or utilise it to create future campaigns. Campaigns are monitored and measured wherever they have a presence. The counter-narrative team collaborates directly with each group to develop unique strategy for evaluation that takes into account a campaign's content, platforms, target audience and stated goals.



Campaigns are measured using a mixture of reach and engagement metrics. **Reach** indicates the total number of people who have seen a campaign or its content. These metrics provide important demographic and geographic information that show whether a campaign is reaching the right audience. However, reach alone is not an indication of success. Content may reach an audience, but in order to be

successful it is important to measure impact. **Engagement** metrics offer some insight into impact by showing how an audience interacts with a campaign, including likes, shares, and comments. In measuring the quality of these interactions the content's effect on its audience can be assessed.<sup>15</sup>

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**15** For more information and guidance on developing methods and evaluation for counter-narratives see: Tuck, H and Silverman, T, The Counter-Narrative Handbook, (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2016), < [http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Counter-narrative-Handbook\\_1.pdf](http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Counter-narrative-Handbook_1.pdf)>.





**THE PRODUCT:  
COUNTER-NARRATIVE  
CAMPAIGNS**



# The Product: Counter-Narrative Campaigns

Counter-narrative campaigns are planned and executed by the participants at each lab and reflect the diversity of challenges faced by different countries and regions. Participants decide if their counter-narratives take the form of a one off campaign or a longer term initiative; they can target a wide audience or address a very specific group; they may be strictly online, or work to enhance offline elements. What is important is that the campaigns speak with a genuine voice. They are youth-led and youth-owned. YouthCAN staff offer help and advice throughout the lab, ensuring campaigns apply best-practices and follow a do-no-harm approach.

This section spotlights some of the campaigns produced at Youth Innovation Labs. Each

**The Truth about Halal!**<sup>16</sup>



**Lab Location:** Amsterdam  
**Platform:** Facebook and YouTube  
**Language:** English  
**Ad Budget:** \$225 on Facebook  
**Ad Type:** Boosted Post<sup>17</sup>  
**Targeting:** Men and women aged 16-35 in the UK, Netherlands and Australia who have liked or followed far-right groups.

campaign highlights a different approach to tackling hate speech and violent extremism. Each example also showcases the various metrics available to help content creators recognise their reach and success.

‘The Truth about Halal!’ is a satirical video campaign that attracts audiences in its claim to show what really happens when a person eats Halal food. The short video depicts a young man seemingly transform into a Muslim after trying Halal chicken for the first time. It mocks far-right content which asserts that Halal meat is dangerous. The video was launched on Facebook and emulates nationalist propaganda in order to draw in far-right viewers who had been exposed to extremist content. Using paid advertising, the video was targeted to young people living in the UK, the

Netherlands and Australia who had previously liked or followed far-right groups.

In two weeks, the video was viewed over 38,000 times and shared – either on a person’s page or directly with another user – 222 times. Although the video was targeted at audiences who followed extreme figures, overall the video and was well-received. This campaign illustrated that humour is a powerful tool for disarming audiences and engaging those individuals who are often hard to reach.

<sup>16</sup> Link to the ‘Look What Happens When You Eat Halal!’ video, linked to YouTube but launched for metrics through Facebook:< <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6UYIgrzsa3Y&feature=youtu.be>>.

<sup>17</sup> A Boosted post is a posts or tweet that has been promoted to appear in selected audiences’ news feeds. For other definitions of terms refer to the Glossary at the end of this publication.

‘Links for Peace’ is an online resource hub that connects young people in Africa with existing volunteer opportunities in their region. This campaign works to help young people get involved with positive projects devoted to countering violent extremism, peacebuilding, and community-based support. This initiative counters extremism in three ways:

1. In increasing participation in peace-building initiatives
2. In offering young people valuable work experience to help them enter the work force
3. In connecting young people who want to become socially active with the right organisations


The campaign’s primary platform is its website, but a Facebook page offers a valuable platform for reaching young people and advertising opportunities, as well as sharing tips for employment.

In three weeks, the campaign reached over 40,000 people and created a substantial following with 3,049 page likes and considerable engagement with posted content.

The campaign’s creators continue to develop the programme by sharing several opportunities, as well as tips and resources for finding volunteering positions.

‘Humans of Tomorrow’ is a broadly targeted campaign that highlights modern human rights concerns by sharing individual’s stories and experiences. The stories vary; some examples include a young man who survived the 2011 terrorist attack in Norway, a young journalist weighing in on free speech and a student discussing her experience with gender bias in academia. All the people interviewed are young, which gives the<sup>18</sup> campaign a peer-to-peer element. The interviews are posted in a format that emulates the successful Humans of

<b>Links4Peace<sup>18</sup></b>
<b>LINKS FOR PEACE</b> Connecting Volunteers to Grassroots Peace organisations
<p><b>Lab Location:</b> Rwanda  <b>Platform:</b> A Website and Facebook  <b>Language:</b> English  <b>Ad Budget:</b> \$226.26 on Facebook  <b>Ad Type:</b> Boosted post and page likes  <b>Targeting:</b> Men and women aged 14-18 in Nigeria and South Africa</p>

<b>Humans of Tomorrow</b>

<p><b>Lab Location:</b> Madrid  <b>Platform:</b> Facebook  <b>Language:</b> English  <b>Ad Budget:</b> \$249.23  <b>Ad Type:</b> Page likes  <b>Targeting:</b> Men and women aged 18-30 living in several major US and European cities</p>

<sup>18</sup> Links For Peace Facebook Page: <<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=146348525748812&fref=ts>>.



New York Campaign.<sup>19</sup> The campaign targets young people interested in issues related to human rights and countering violent extremism.<sup>20</sup>


After posting the first interview, the campaign saw considerable organic growth<sup>20</sup>, reaching a large audience and gaining over 500 followers in a matter of days. The campaign has continued to steadily release interviews and its following has more than doubled with consistent interaction and engagement with the posted content.

No to Terror is an online media campaign that uses digital comics to raise awareness about violent extremism in Africa. The comics are eye catching and deliver emotionally charged messages that dispute the idea that those who take part in terrorism are heroes. The campaign addresses varying issues, such as organised terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and Al Shabab and the recruitment of child soldiers. Although the campaign is conducted in both French and English, the comics are primarily in French and are carefully targeted to French-speaking African countries.

In showcasing the consequences of violence on a personal, regional, and international level, the campaigns reframe the issues invites followers to be a hero by saying no to terror.

After being live for one week and boosting one comic, the page gathered a large following with 2,675 page likes and the content is continuing to receive sustained interaction. The boosted post received 18,586 likes and was shared 398 times.

**No to Terror**



**Lab Location:** Rwanda  
**Platform:** Facebook  
**Language:** French and English  
**Ad Budget:** \$100  
**Ad Type:** Boosted post  
**Targeting:** Men aged 13-30 in Cameroon, Mali, Chad, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria

<sup>19</sup> For reference see the Humans of New York Facebook Page: <<https://www.facebook.com/humansofnewyork/>>.

<sup>20</sup> Organic growth refers to audience reach or engagement on websites or social media platforms generated from searches and/or as a result of unpaid campaign strategies and tactics. For other definitions of terms refer to the Glossary at the end of this publication.



# **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

# Conclusions and Recommendations

In facilitating an ongoing sequence of Youth Innovation Labs, YouthCAN's team have been able to develop a model for the implementation of these events and a series of lessons learned. Our hope is that by sharing this model and recommendations, other organisations will be able to adopt and develop their own programmes.

As explored in various sections of this publication six key lessons can be drawn from this model:

- 1 Size matters:** The point of a Youth Innovation Lab is to allow people to feel comfortable, meet new people and work in smaller productive groups. Smaller and medium sized events (between 25 and 35) seem to produce better results for targeted outcomes.
- 2 Everyone is equal:** Labs host a variety of participants with a range of experience and expertise. The format of a lab and content should not assume previous knowledge or bias. This also means looking at a range of extremisms young people encounter since they are the experts on the ground.
- 3 Make it local:** Violent extremism affects different localities and regions. It is important to tailor your event to the community or region you are working with.
- 4 Give time for ideas to materialise:** One day is often not enough to have ideas turn into tangible projects. Model your event in a way that allows you to keep intensity and engagement high while allowing time to produce and finalize campaigns and initiatives.
- 5 Follow up is crucial:** Not all of the content or counter-narrative campaigns might be complete at the end of the lab and many participants will need a little more time. Having someone dedicated to following up with participants leads to higher quantity of output and better quality outcomes.
- 6 Do no harm:** Not all of the content or counter-narrative campaigns might be complete at the end of the lab and many participants will need a little more time. Having someone dedicated to following up with participants leads to higher quantity of output and better quality outcomes.

Young people continue to be the frontline of global efforts to challenge extremism. They are exposed to violent extremist content – with groups such as ISIS and the resurgent far-right dominating international headlines and the online sphere. However, youth activists are

best placed to confront this. They are the first to see new trends develop and have the ability to create innovative initiatives and creative content to prevent and counter violent extremism. Rather than young people simply being reduced to the problem, their voices can be harnessed to develop the solutions.





# **BIBLIOGRAPHY, ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & GLOSSARY**



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# Additional Resources

## COUNTER-NARRATIVE TOOLKIT

ISD's Counter-Narrative Toolkit is an educational resource that provides simple, step-by-step guides to help organisations navigate through the stages of creating effective counter-narrative campaigns. The toolkit teaches its users best practices for planning a campaign, creating great content, and promoting their counter-narratives online to their target audience. It also features one of the largest collections of counter-narrative case studies to give its users examples of effective content from across the globe. This is so that they can get inspired, take action and, more importantly, make the first steps into releasing content that competes for the hearts and minds of vulnerable youth. This resource demystifies what effective campaigning is through guided videos and written tutorials, as well as a comprehensive set of FAQs to make the journey more fun and interesting whilst answering all the questions that organisations have. See: <<http://www.counternarratives.org/>>

## COUNTER-NARRATIVE HANDBOOK

ISD's Counter-Narrative Handbook was created to help anyone looking to proactively respond to extremist propaganda with counter-narrative campaigns. It is intended as a beginner's guide for those with little or no previous experience of counter-narrative campaigning. It takes readers through the process of creating, launching and evaluating an effective counter-narrative campaign. It can also be used alongside ISD's freely available online Counter-Narrative Toolkit. The advice featured in the Handbook is based on ISD's experiences in creating, running and evaluating campaigns such as Extreme Dialogue, and collaborating with independent content-creators, from civil society and NGO campaigners to young activists, to amplify their counter-narrative messages through training, networking and campaign support. The Handbook therefore focuses on civil-society, youth or NGO-led online counter-narrative campaigns. See: <[http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Counter-narrative-Handbook\\_1.pdf](http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Counter-narrative-Handbook_1.pdf)>.

## ISD WEBSITE

ISD specialises in creating unique networks and partnerships to innovate and hypercharge countering violent extremism (CVE) efforts both online and offline. As a think tank, all of ISD's research is action-oriented, leading to the development of project pilots, which in turn have rigorous methods and evaluation processes to assess what is working and what might be re-tailored or shifted. ISD's website includes in-depth and up to date information about the think tanks projects and research. See: <<http://www.strategicdialogue.org/>>.

## YOUTHCAN WEBSITE

The Youth Civil Activism Network is a programme run by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue and is designed to upscale and optimize grassroots efforts to combat violent extremism of all forms. The YouthCAN website includes information on the programme, instructions on how to join the network and links to their social media pages. See: <<http://youthcan.net/>>.



# Glossary<sup>21</sup>

**Boosted posts:** posts or tweets that have been promoted to appear in selected audiences' news feeds.

**Clicks:** the number of times people have clicked on your ad or a link in your posts.

**Counter-narrative:** a message that offers a positive alternative to extremist propaganda, or alternatively aims to deconstruct or delegitimise extremist narratives.

**Counterspeech:** an online message that offers a positive alternative to extremist propaganda, or alternatively aims to deconstruct or delegitimise extremist narratives.

**Downstream:** a counter space that includes those already engaging with violent extremist material, or actively participating in online extremist communities or networks.

**Impressions:** the number of times content or adverts appear on a user's screen online. Avoid over-relying on impressions as a metric of impact, people don't necessarily take notice of every ad that appears on their screen.

**In-built analytics:** analytics services available on social media platforms that allow you to monitor your campaign's reach and levels of audience engagement, and help determine whether your online objectives were met.

**Meme:** a combination of image, video, text, or other content, often comical, that is copied and shared online. Many memes take on a life of their own and evolve over time as they are shared with slight variations to react to a particular topic or trend.

**Metrics:** Different social media or website analytics services will offer different types of data or metrics. There are a vast range of different metrics that can help you understand who you reach, how well you engage your audience, and the impact your campaign is having.

**Organic growth/reach:** audience reach or engagement on websites or social media platforms generated from searches and/or as a result of unpaid campaign strategies and tactics.

**Reach:** the total number of people that received an impression of your post or ad on their screens or newsfeeds.

**Sustained engagements:** on-going interactions between audience members or with campaigners themselves, these could be positive or negative and help provide an insight into reactions to a campaign.

**Upstream:** a preventative space that includes a broader, but loosely at risk audience. Upstream content has the intension of building resilience to extremist narratives or propaganda, or increasing knowledge and awareness of radicalisation, recruitment or online safety.

<sup>21</sup> Tuck, H and Silverman, T, *The Counter-Narrative Handbook*, (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2016), <[http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Counter-narrative-Handbook\\_1.pdf](http://www.strategicdialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Counter-narrative-Handbook_1.pdf)>.

**Vanity metrics:** metrics that provide impressive sounding numbers but do not necessarily give a true indication of how effective your campaign was or much impact it had.

**Views:** the number of times a video is watched or played.

**YouthCAN:** the Youth Civil Activism Network is a programme run by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue and is designed to upscale and optimize grassroots efforts to combat violent extremism of all forms.

**Youth Innovation Lab:** YouthCAN events that facilitate capacity building to ensure young people have the skills and knowledge they need to create effective counter-narrative campaigns.





The **Institute for Strategic Dialogue** (ISD) is a London-based ‘think and do tank’ that has pioneered policy and operational responses to the rising challenges of violent extremism and inter-communal conflict.

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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