



AGENCY FOR  
PEACEBUILDING



# SUMMARY REPORT

*“Leading the Way to Peace”* Project Evaluation

**Agency for Peacebuilding**

February 2022



Funded by  
the European Union

## IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



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*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 Agency for Peacebuilding and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.*

## ABOUT THE AGENCY FOR PEACEBUILDING

The Agency for Peacebuilding (AP) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote conditions to enable the resolution of conflict, reduce violence and contribute to a durable peace across Europe, its neighbouring countries, and the world. AP is the first Italian organization specializing in peacebuilding. This allows us to occupy a unique role in the European landscape: on the one hand, we interpret and synthesize relevant topics for the benefit of Italian agencies and institutions working on peace and security; on the other, we highlight experiences, capacities, and resources specific to the Italian system, which can contribute to the resolution of violent conflict.

## ABOUT THE KOFI ANNAN FOUNDATION

The Kofi Annan Foundation is an independent not-for-profit organization, established in Switzerland in 2007 by the late former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The Foundation wants a fairer and more peaceful world, where no one is left behind, democratic principles and the rule of law are upheld, and divides are bridged through dialogue and international cooperation. The Foundation works closely with partners from international and regional organizations, foundations, universities and civil society. We channel expertise, convene all stakeholders around the table and forge coalitions of trusted influence, which can make change happen.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The evaluation team responsible for conducting the evaluation included Bernardo Monzani, Mikhail Silvestro Sustersic, Babur Ghani and Selahuddin Yu Hashim. Monzani and Sustersic also wrote the present report. The evaluation team would like to extend their gratitude to Sofia Anton and Maud Roure from the Kofi Annan Foundation, and to the country project teams, whose support was vital for realising interviews and focus groups discussions. Finally, the consultants' gratitude goes also to all those who took part in the evaluation. The views expressed in this report are those of its authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Kofi Annan Foundation, its partners or the European Union.

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# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This report presents the evaluation findings for the project “Leading the way to Peace – Youth Together for Social Cohesion”, funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented by the Kofi Annan Foundation and four co-applicants: the College of Youth Activism and Development (CYAAD) in Pakistan, the Kristiyano-Islam Peace Library (KRIS) in the Philippines, and the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) and Rupantar in Bangladesh. The project targeted urban areas in each country and was implemented from February 2020 to January 2022. The action’s overall aim was to enhance civil society organizations (CSOs) and youth capacities for youth-led prevention of violent extremism (PVE) through identification and comparison of different approaches and good practices to be shared and replicated in the region and beyond.

The Agency for Peacebuilding (AP) performed the evaluation between October and December 2021 using a participative approach based on mixed quantitative and qualitative methods and on principles of action research. The analysis consisted of a review of project documents and external material regarding violent extremism and radicalization in South and South East Asia, particularly in target countries. Then, a total of 25 key informant interviews and five focus groups with various stakeholders were conducted and a questionnaire was shared among former participants in all three countries, which was completed by 90 respondents. The overall purpose of the evaluation was to assess the progress, achievements and challenges of the project to provide recommendations for developing further action in the region, and also beyond it.

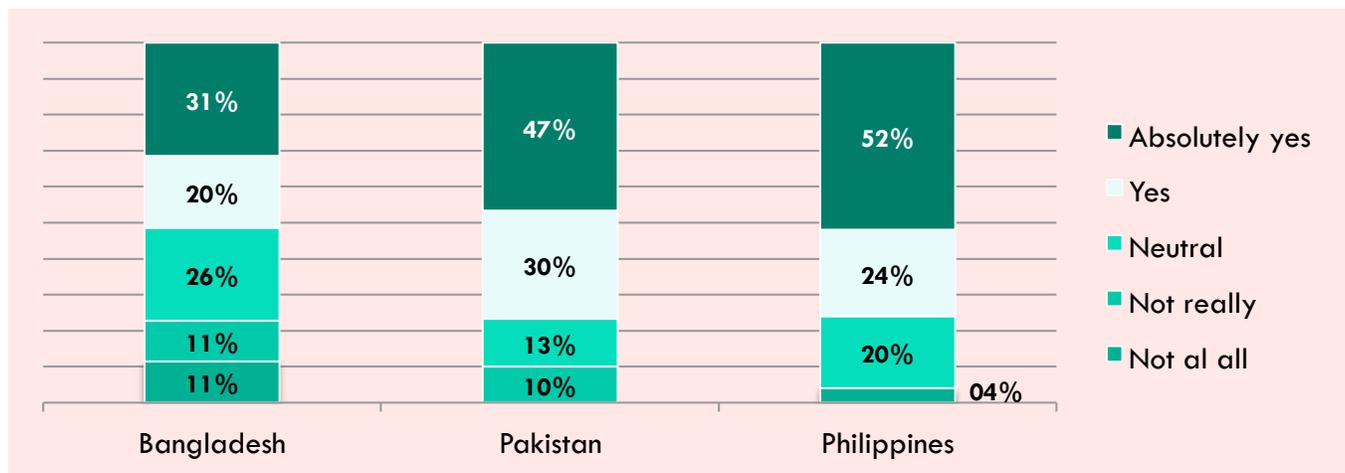
The project was evaluated against three broad criteria: relevance and added value, effectiveness and efficiency, and impact and sustainability. Findings under each of these are hereby presented.

## Relevance and Added Value

The evaluation found the project to be extremely relevant: all sources agreed that, also thanks to the preliminary research and needs assessments, which served as a robust foundation, the project responded to the dynamics and needs of youth radicalisation in each context of implementation. The action unlocked the unexpressed potential for youth to become powerful changemakers in relation to preventing violent extremism (PVE).

Engaging urban educated youth also responds to the regional needs, because recruitment is not anymore only targeting poor, excluded, less educated youth coming from traditional religious schools. Violent extremist organizations across the region are, instead, increasingly targeting urban middle and upper-middle-class youth. Universities have become hotspots for recruitment and among those who recently engaged in violent acts there are many educated urban youth from quite privileged backgrounds and with higher educational accomplishments. This is thus the right focus group.

**Figure 1: Answers to the question, “Does violent extremism affect you personally?”**



Source: Online questionnaire to training participants, “Leading the Way to Peace” final evaluation (December 2021)

The peer-to-peer approach employed by the project, when matched with capacity building activities, proved to be an effective method to engage youth in PVE. It responded to youth needs not only by increasing their engagement in PVE, but also by developing their self-confidence, communication and leadership skills, which are particularly useful to them as they grow up, enter the job market and play an increasing role in their communities.

The project put a strong emphasis on the importance of youth leadership in PVE and was geared towards facilitating interactions between diverse youth groups and accompanying them in implementing projects and campaigns. The action had internal coherence, and was also externally coherent as the project was strategically aligned with relevant regional and international policies, such as the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 and the Youth Peace and Security Agenda (YPS).

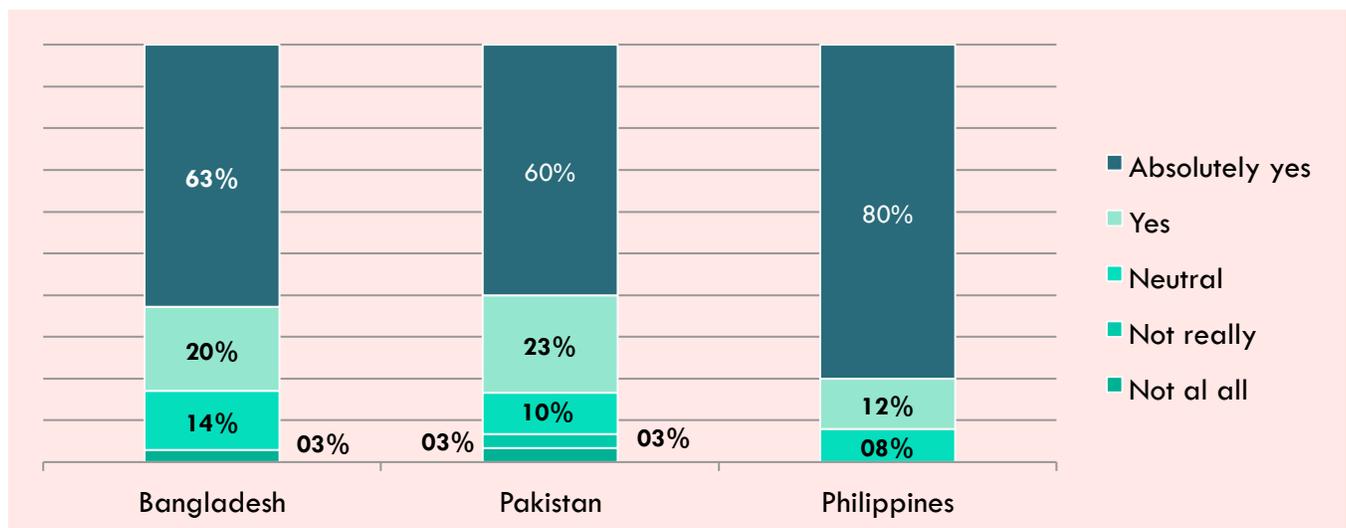
Lastly, the project has added value since it complements existing efforts by filling a void: programmes rarely focus on the above-mentioned specific target group and on the exchange of knowledge and best

practices between civil society organizations (CSOs). The project was overall inclusive in terms of diverse religious, ethnic and sectarian background and gender balance. However, there is space for further improving gender mainstreaming in the future, which would then make the action even more relevant. Importantly, despite delays, difficulties and uncertainty, the project managed to remain relevant and to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic and partners showed great resilience and resourcefulness.

## Efficiency and Effectiveness

Overall, findings concerning efficiency and effectiveness are positive. The most positive achievements are that the project increased youth exposure to violent extremism and their interaction with diverse peers, including minorities, and created a safe space able to include marginalized communities, giving everyone the opportunity to speak up and share their perspectives without fear. The project also ensured to participants an increased understanding of PVE, critical thinking and deeper knowledge of other groups and minorities. Even if the online engagement did not always maximise participants' experience, it often allowed local partners to reach a greater number of youth, who could afterwards act as multipliers. Thousands of people were thus directly and indirectly exposed to the content of the trainings.

**Figure 2: Answers to the question, “Do you feel that the training taught you skills and knowledge (on violent extremism and how to prevent it) that you did not have before?”**



Source: Online questionnaire to training participants, “Leading the Way to Peace” final evaluation (December 2021)

Project participants saw an improvement in their knowledge and capacities on PVE and are now more self-confident and able to engage their communities whereas parents, peers and representatives of educational institutions show an increased and demonstrated interest in the topics. Moreover, by recognising the fundamental role of young people in PVE and empowering them through capacity building, the intervention gave them the opportunity to resort to what they learned to implement local interventions and campaigns, strengthening their voices in the community. The last important result concerns the increased capacity of national partners and knowledge sharing and exchanges among The Kofi Annan Foundation and all partners involved.

Importantly, the project was youth-led: young people were given skills and support to come up with ideas and implement them. Trainings were designed to be action-oriented and encourage youth to put in practice their newly acquired skills and understanding of PVE through projects and campaigns for the benefit of their communities. This approach has been extremely motivating for young participants. This strategy also meant that activities were effectively adapted to the different project locations and stakeholders: there was no one-size-fits-all solution and, especially working with youth in PVE, it was of the utmost importance that partners and sub-grantees remained adaptive and their initiatives context-based. Lastly, as a strategy, the project created effective partnerships, for example with government agencies, religious and community leaders, esteemed professionals and university representatives.

Inclusion of youth from diverse backgrounds was deemed of the utmost importance, but gender mainstreaming could be further improved. Besides this, the project also faced a few challenges, the first and most significant being the duration of the intervention. The project was, in fact, considered by almost all informants too short to ensure a lasting change in attitude and behaviours. The COVID-19 pandemic also represented a huge challenge, which caused serious delays, especially in Bangladesh. The pandemic also forced all partners to shift several activities online, which made it difficult to keep participants' focus and motivation high: the incentive of attending events in person was lost and bad Internet connectivity often made it challenging and demotivating to attend activities for some participants. The events that were organized in person also had to be partly modified to align with pandemic-related restrictions, like social distancing, which reduced the number of participants.

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*“The project taught us how to dissent, to be critical, and yet encouraged us to be open and have a common understanding on issues that matter to us.”*

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Project participant, Tegum City, Philippines

## Impact and Sustainability

Findings concerning impact and sustainability are generally positive, but in some cases the evidence was not enough to validate this assessment. The project successfully expanded young participants' leadership skills and contributed to giving participating young people a greater role in their communities, encouraging them to be diverse and develop their own voice and way of doing things. Those involved registered a qualitative leap in their commitment as young leaders and the vast majority of those young people who took part to training events is still using the skills and knowledge learned in that context. Furthermore, local groups of young people formed under the project have seen the establishment of an independent leadership and now plan and implement localized interventions in their communities.

Increased interaction and trust between youth coming from different groups have also been found. In addition, strategic partnerships with relevant stakeholders have been established and organizations involved positively changed as a result of their engagement in this intervention. Throughout the action, partners and sub-grantees have created a constructive and mutually nurturing relationship: they were able to create a broader network for a more sustainable engagement in this field and a more fluid and frequent sharing of expertise among organizations has been reported, also thanks to the encouragement by the Kofi Annan Foundation to connect with each other and exchange on mutually relevant topics.

Yet, the short duration of the project also casts some doubt as to the sustainability of these changes. It is undeniable that in every target country the organizations directly or indirectly involved developed good practices in youth-led PVE and that many young participants now have the capacity to engage in future PVE actions. What remains to be seen is whether these are enough to counter the societal impulses and incentives to return to the pre-project status quo.

## Lessons Learned

The evaluation identified a set of useful lessons learned. First, changes in attitude and behaviours, especially when it comes to violent extremism, require a longer engagement and thus the project would benefit more from a longer duration.

Flexibility is one of the main features of an effective implementation, especially in PVE-related initiatives engaging diverse youth targets. In each city or area, the context, demographics, perceptions, and needs are different, and the more tailor-fit the activities are to the specific audience, the better. The feedback from participants, partner organizations and targeted communities has been very positive, highlighting the need for more opportunities to learn, share and cooperate.

The intervention is thus seen by all informants as replicable, but with a geographical and demographic expansion. Strategic partnerships are an asset, especially when it comes to the localization of such interventions. Having them helps in implementation, enhances the interest of participants, increases visibility and access to international support, and helps the sustainability of the initiative. It is also a great learning opportunity to have formal or informal partnerships with other organizations.

Lastly, it is important to let youth take the lead: in order to truly sustain their active participation, youth must be given space, support and trust to express their own voice. They must be constantly informed, consulted and heard, and implementers should not be afraid to innovate and they should always trust youth potential as changemakers.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The evaluation concludes with the following recommendations:

*To donors:*

- Continue supporting the project and similar endeavours.
- Increase flexibility, especially in exceptional circumstances.

*To the Kofi Annan Foundation, CYAAD, KRIS, and GCERF and Rupantar:*

- Replicate activities in other sensitive areas of target countries.
- Continue using, and indeed expand, the integration of life skills in the project's capacity building activities.
- Integrate gender analysis in research activities.
- Increase gender mainstreaming.
- Encourage youth to act as multipliers in their social circles.
- Continue promoting youth ownership.



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