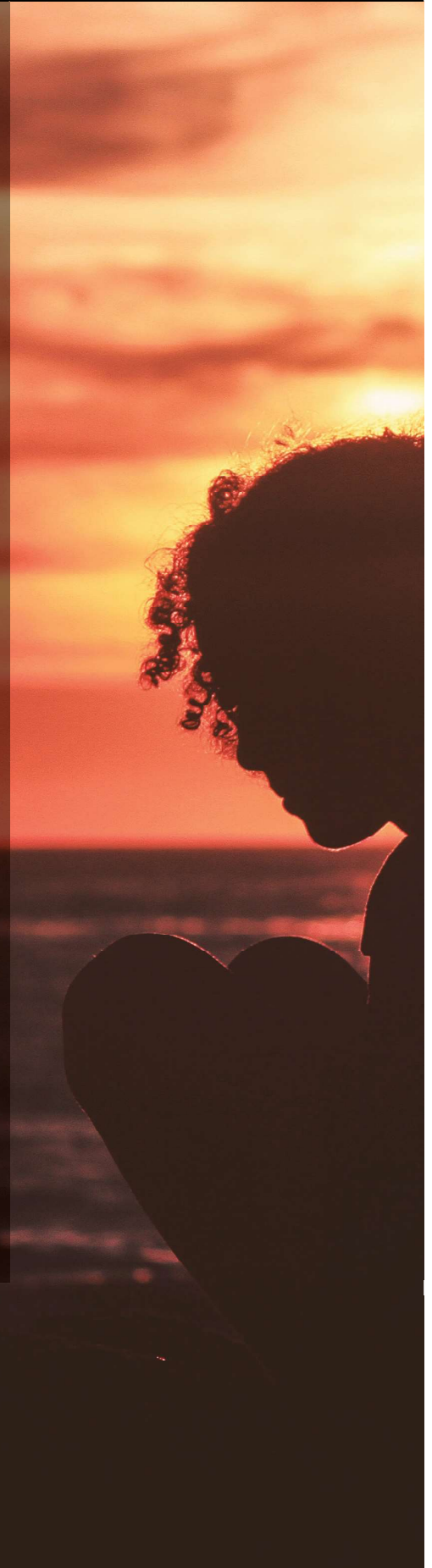


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Preventing crime and violent extremism by strengthening youth resilience: Implementation of the BOUNCE resilience tools in 10 European cities

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A new trend in prevention policies is the focus on resilience, which particularly for youngsters is said to lower their susceptibility to criminal behaviour and radicalization. To that end, the “BOUNCE programme” aims to strengthen youngsters’ resilience by means of a 10-session group intervention. Over the past year, ten European pilot cities have been introduced to the BOUNCE resilience tools and are now left to implement the youth training on their own. The case of BOUNCE confirms the need for integrated implementation strategies to obtain effective early prevention of youth delinquency.

Introduction

Could you lower youngsters’ susceptibility to delinquency and radicalization by making them more ‘resilient’ against adversities in their lives? Resilience seems to be a buzzword in the current prevention literature, and policy-makers have followed this shift to consider resilience as a promising prevention tool. A wide range of resilience trainings have been designed for many purposes: to prevent depressions, anxieties, or negative coping, but also with a view on preventing (youth) delinquency and recently even violent extremism. Yet, evaluation research of resilience trainings

is still very limited to date. As for any crime prevention programme, evaluation research is fundamental for enhancing the working methods of youth resilience trainings, but also for supporting their practical implementation in diverging local contexts.

One such youth resilience training is the EU-funded intervention called ‘BOUNCE’, an early preventative intervention for youngsters. The BOUNCE programme was developed in 2010 in the framework of “Strengthening Resilience against Violent Radicalisation” (STRESAVIORA), a project of Belgium’s Federal

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Public Service Home Affairs. It was funded by the Internal Security Fund of the European Union and conducted in partnership with Arktos vzw, RadarAdvies, the European Forum for Urban Security (EFUS), Thomas More University College and Ghent University.

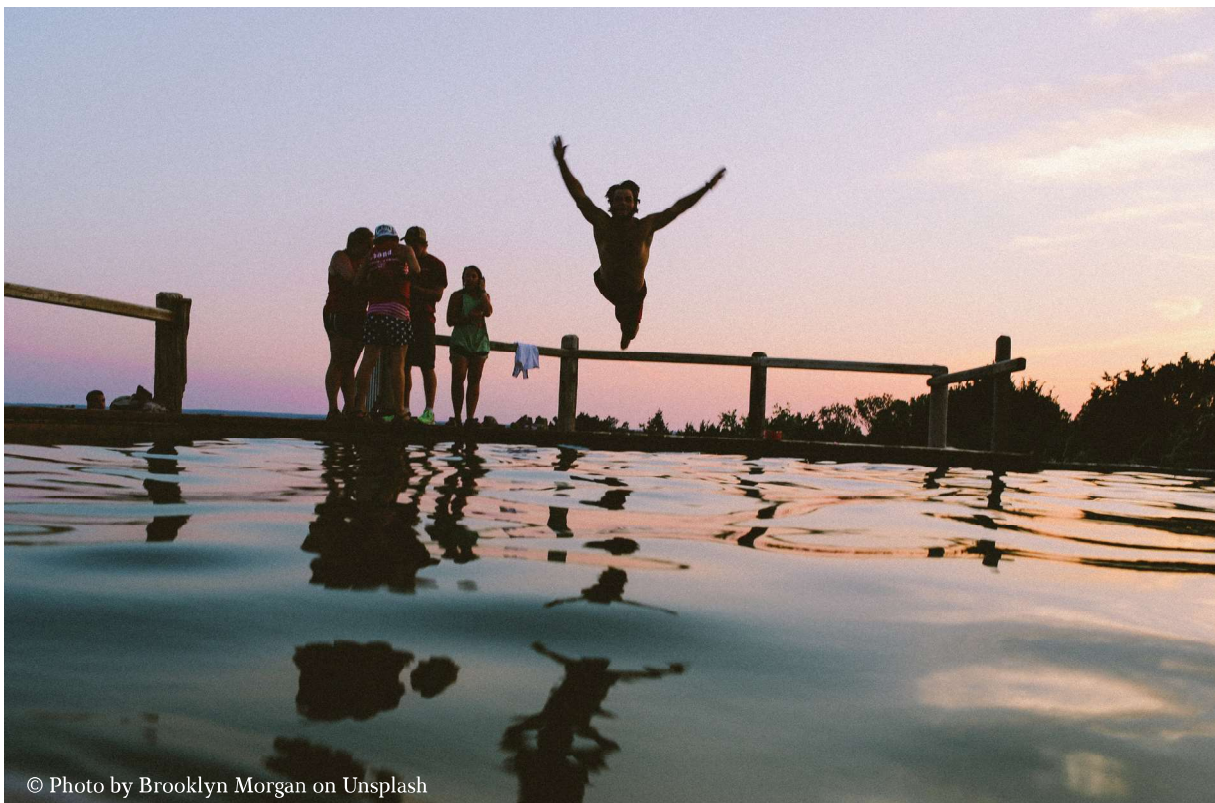
As for any crime prevention programme, evaluation research is fundamental for enhancing the working methods

BOUNCE consists of three interconnected tools: BOUNCE^{Young}, a 10-session resilience training for youngsters; BOUNCE^{Along}, an open awareness-raising tool for parents, teachers and first-line workers; and BOUNCE^{Up}, a train-the-trainer course for youth workers and first-line practitioners, teaching them how to work with BOUNCE^{Young} and BOUNCE^{Along}. Through this threefold model, the BOUNCE programme aims to make youngsters less vulnerable to violence and criminal behaviour but also to internalising conditions such as anxieties or depression.

Whereas its original focus was set on preventing violent radicalisation of youngsters only,

over the past two years BOUNCE has opened its emphasis towards general promotion of youth wellbeing. It has been established that many risk and protective factors for a wide array of negative outcomes (e.g. juvenile delinquency, troublesome youth group involvement, and extremist violence) are similar, so promoting youngsters' wellbeing is a form of general early prevention. To this end, BOUNCE^{Up} train-the-trainer courses were given in ten European cities in order to incite local stakeholders to implement the BOUNCE programme.

The question at this point is whether these newly-trained BOUNCE trainers will eventu-



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ally spread the BOUNCE tools in their city – and thus, make youngsters more resilient. A full-year evaluation was conducted to follow-up on every city, and our findings will be discussed in this article.



The BOUNCE programme

As explained, the BOUNCE programme is built along three interconnected tools in order to reach the youngsters, but also their surrounding adults. First, the BOUNCE^{Young} training consists of ten sessions, each building towards a different aspect of resilience. The first three sessions focus on acquaintance in the group, creating trust and raising self-esteem by focusing on all children's talents. The fourth and fifth sessions focus on the youngsters' posture, how they can listen to their body clues and set their personal boundaries. The following three sessions focus on understanding feelings, prejudices, information from media, and group conformity. The aim of these sessions is to enhance critical thinking styles and raise awareness of their own preconceptions. The ninth session focuses on where youngster can find supportive resources, for example in their social networks. Finally, the tenth session

is targeted at setting a goal for the future. By means of kickboxing methods, the youngsters build up strength in order to break a wooden plank with their bare hand. The plank then represents their sense of purpose and their mental strength to reach their personal goals.

Second, the BOUNCE^{Along} training aims to assist parents and teachers in their communication with youngsters. The sessions focus on using positive language and open communication towards youngsters, on knowing when to worry and who to contact in case of concerns. Third and finally, the BOUNCE^{Up} training teaches first-line workers how to use both tools. In addition to the BOUNCE^{Young} exercises and the BOUNCE^{Along} sessions, participants receive additional theory on early prevention, resilience and radicalisation.

The BOUNCE programme is built along three interconnected tools in order to reach the youngsters, but also their surrounding adults

The emphasis on promoting *resilience* is interesting as this fits into general trends into psychology with a focus on personal strengths and positive attitude. BOUNCE makes use of sever-

al theories with regard to resilience and crime prevention, which are not entirely new, but rather a combination of existing youth training methods. The concept of resilience – i.e. the skill of positively adapting oneself to adversity – already arose in developmental psychology in the 1970s. However, only since the early 2000s was it applied into public health and prevention discourses. The shift occurred together with a general paradigm shift towards “positive psychology” at the time. Therapies and trainings started to focus less on risk factors and problems, and put a stronger emphasis on protective elements and positive emotions. The rationale is that, while risk factors remain important, prevention workers need to work with the individuals' capacities. Resilience is one application of this positive psychology discourse: by strengthening personal resilience, trainings hope to enhance positive, protective factors among the youngsters. Examples are assertiveness, critical thinking styles, self-knowledge, social skills and a sense of purpose. These factors are also part of youth interventions that aim at reducing all kinds of juvenile delinquency.

The theoretical assumption is that resilience might protect against and thus prevent certain behaviour, both internalising and externalising conditions. It is on this same theoretical basis that the (implicit) logic model of BOUNCE is founded: by strengthening youngsters' resilience and raising aware-

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ness among their surrounding adults (parents, teachers, practitioners), BOUNCE aims to prevent violent radicalisation at an early stage, through universal (primary) prevention.

By strengthening personal resilience, trainings hope to enhance positive, protective factors among the youngsters

During a first phase of the BOUNCE project (STRESAVIORA I, 2013-2015), relevant tools were disseminated in different Belgian cities. The second phase (STRESAVIORA II, 2015-2018) aimed to train more BOUNCE trainers on a European level, by providing 3-day BOUNCE^{Up} trainings in ten European pilot cities. This BOUNCE^{Up} training introduced the full BOUNCEYoung programme to local youth workers, complemented with additional theory on prevention, radicalisation and resilience. After approximately six months, all cities received three days of implementation support, mostly used to answer pending

questions and/or to try out the BOUNCE^{Young} exercises on a local group of youngsters. The BOUNCE^{Up} training was thus meant as a first step into local implementation of the BOUNCE tools.

Accordingly, the scientific evaluation of the BOUNCE^{Up} tool was intended to distinguish which *contextual preconditions* are recommended for successful implementation of the BOUNCE tools. It is highly useful to evaluate prevention programmes not only on their inherent programme characteristics, but also on the contextual preconditions that allow for programme success. The latter relates to the field of implementation science, which

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is a relatively recent topic in the prevention literature.

Finding such *promising* practices of the BOUNCE^{Up} programme is useful both for the continuation of the programme itself as well as for prevention strategies in general. By providing empirical data on BOUNCE^{Up}, we may guide policy-makers in their choice for adequate prevention plans, and youth workers in their practical application of the three BOUNCE tools. The ultimate goal is to enhance youngsters' resilience and wellbeing, and to prevent juvenile delinquency more effectively and more integrally.

Evaluating the BOUNCE^{Up} programme

When evaluating youth interventions, public authorities are in favour of the establishment of *evidence-based* actions. This means that a causal link between the aspired outcomes and the programme techniques should be present. A classical evaluation method to this end is the experimental design, whereby two randomised groups are compared (intervention versus control group). However, striving for such evidence-based working methods might overlook important contextual factors in the implementation of these interventions. It might also not

always be possible. For example, as no secluded BOUNCE^{Young} activities have yet been organised, it has not been possible to conduct an experimental study on their effectiveness. Similarly, the BOUNCE^{Up} training could not be evaluated through experimental studies as all participants received the intervention, so that there was no control group in place.

A more adequate research design would also take a deeper look at the situation and context in which the BOUNCE tools are implemented. As BOUNCE^{Up} is trialled in ten different pilot cities, this means ten different working

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contexts as well. It is more recommendable to focus on working elements of the training outline and implementation strategy. If we find patterns of working elements across cities, we can establish clear recommendations for BOUNCE projects in other cities as well. Hence, instead of evaluating solely *what works* through (quasi) experimental designs, we aim to focus on what's promising, within the framework of a realist evaluation. A realist evaluation wants to find out *what works for whom in what situation and in what respect (how)*. Its methods are of a more qualitative nature, to test linkages between contexts, theories, and outcomes.

BOUNCE aims to prevent violent radicalisation at an early stage, through universal (primary) prevention

This threefold structure means that a thorough evaluation of BOUNCE^{Up} should assess its training processes (descriptive), its working theories (theoretical) and its programme outcomes (indicative). Whether the outcomes are in fact caused by the training (causality) cannot be proved at this point. Hence the level of evidence of our evaluation will only be of descriptive, theoretical and indicative nature, but it may provide a basis for future research. Moreover, a

well-founded evaluation should first evaluate the preconditions and process patterns of a programme, before evaluating the outputs and outcomes. The better the process patterns, the better the results will likely be.

A realist evaluation wants to find out what works for whom in what situation and in what respect (how)

The BOUNCE^{Up} teaches first-line practitioners how to work with the BOUNCE^{Young} and BOUNCE^{Along} tools in their own city. Hence, evaluating BOUNCE^{Up} should mean checking whether the two other tools are clearly explained, whether the participants feel motivated to spread these tools, and whether they actually set up BOUNCE actions in their cities. The latter is the most important outcome to verify. However, much of this practical implementation will depend on the local context, the level of external support for early prevention and the inherent characteristics of the BOUNCE^{Up} training. This means that implementation support should go beyond the content of the training only.

Short and long-term implementation of the BOUNCE tools

Over the course of 2017, ten BOUNCE^{Up} trainings were giv-

en in different European pilot cities in the Netherlands (Amsterdam, Groningen), Germany (Düsseldorf, Augsburg), Sweden (Malmö, Landskrona), Belgium (Leuven, Liège) and France (Montreuil, Bordeaux). In total, this led to 101 newly trained BOUNCE trainers – being youth workers and social workers from all ten cities involved.

A well-founded evaluation should first evaluate the preconditions and process patterns of a programme

Participants have indicated that they enjoyed the training, particularly the open and equal training style by the two BOUNCE^{Up} trainers. Some participants also mentioned that the BOUNCE^{Young} exercises opened their own views as youth workers by making them aware of their own prejudices and attitudes towards youngsters. The sequence of the ten BOUNCE^{Young} sessions was described as a very effective way to work towards a more resilient personality. On the contrary, the BOUNCE^{Along} training did not have a similarly fixed training outline and is recommended to be developed including clear exercises.

The question at stake is whether these 101 new BOUNCE trainers will also start to organise their own BOUNCE actions in their respective cities. In the short-term, this year's project has not

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led to an immense outburst of BOUNCE actions in the ten involved cities. Only one complete BOUNCE^{Young} programme has been finalised, two others are planned in two schools. Two BOUNCE^{Young} youth camps have been organised as well. This seems little for a project that has been unrolled in ten cities, but interestingly, in all cities, participants are still enthusiastic about the BOUNCE rationale and many of them wish to organise BOUNCE actions in the future. As the motivations of participants (incited by the training outline of BOUNCE^{Up}) are likely not the problem, it is needed to evaluate what impedes the practical implementation of the BOUNCE tools on a contextual level. A long-term implementation strategy of preventative projects should look beyond the mere training outline of a youth intervention. Several preconditions for implementation are at stake.

First, there should be an adequate level of *external support* in the city, corresponding to the provision of financial means, staff and organisational support. The level of support will likely depend upon the framing of the BOUNCE project: if a city has a high political agenda to prevent violent extremism, and BOUNCE is framed as an early preventative project to this end, the city may provide more financial support for BOUNCE^{Young} trainings. Similarly, cities with strong early prevention services might finance BOUNCE from a general wellbeing promotion perspective. This will also relate

to the existence of similar prevention projects, in sum, to what extent BOUNCE might provide an added value in the city.

External support also depends upon organisational factors at the policy-level. Cities with strong continuity of (policy) staff will likely be more involved in the BOUNCE project. Switching project partners has proven to slow down the implementation of the BOUNCE tools. Another governance factor is the level of cooperation between youth services in the city. When the work of youth services is very fragmented, the opportunities for multi-agency cooperation are lower and thus organisational support for BOUNCE as well. Secondly, when external support is present, it should be decided who will *facilitate* the BOUNCE projects. A project coordinator with clear tasks should be appointed to inform the participants, communicate to the relevant stakeholders, ensure that the end objectives of the local BOUNCE project remain clear, and generally keep the BOUNCE participants organised after their training as well. The facilitator is recommended to be a member of the city's prevention services, however, he or she may also be a participant of the BOUNCE^{Up} training (bottom-up). Third, when a local facilitator is assigned, the participants of the BOUNCE^{Up} training may be selected and informed about the expected commitment to the programme. The participants of the BOUNCE^{Up} training are expected to become BOUNCE^{Young} and/or BOUNCE^{Along} trainings after their 3-day training, and

accordingly should be in a position to implement the tools afterwards. This means that they should ideally be experienced with youth work in a group setting, that they should work in a setting that allows for the implementation of the tools, and that they should be supportive of the open, early preventative approach of BOUNCE^{Young}. Only with such adequate selection of participants may the continuation of the BOUNCE tools be guaranteed.

A long-term implementation strategy of preventative projects should look beyond the mere training outline of a youth intervention

Consequently, only once these three first steps have been taken, should the BOUNCE^{Up} training be introduced. In the past pilot project (2015-2018), it has been too often the case that cities were not correctly informed about the required external support, facilitation and selection criteria for participants. It is thus needed to reinforce this required commitment from all stakeholders in order to come to long-term implementation of the BOUNCE tools. After the BOUNCE^{Up} training has been given, participants should receive *ongoing implementation support* from their BOUNCE^{Up} trainers. This support can be given in the

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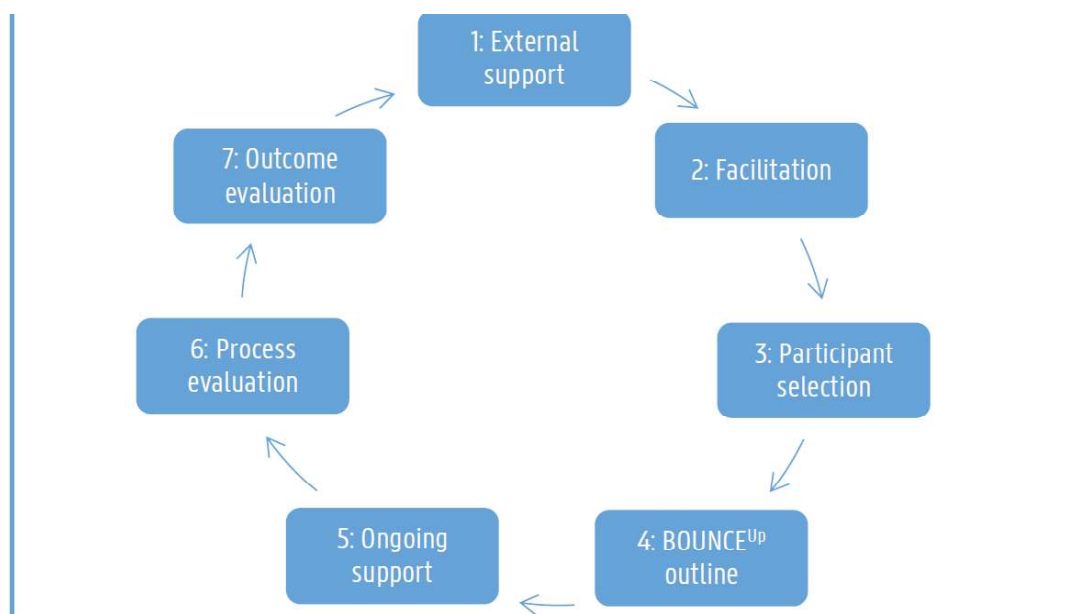


Figure 1: Implementation cycle for long-term implementation of the BOUNCE tools

form of supervision, coaching-on-the-job and an (online) platform to discuss implementation ideas and answer pending questions. The new BOUNCE website¹ will provide such a platform for knowledge-exchange across cities and trainers.

Subsequent steps in the long-term implementation relate to continuous *registration and evaluation* of the newly implemented BOUNCE actions. Moreover, as no evaluation research of BOUNCE^{Young} has been conducted, it is needed to evaluate these youth interventions based on their process patterns and their outcomes in different cities. It is also needed to continuously register the outcomes of the BOUNCE^{Up} trainings, mostly emphasising the number of participants who still undertake

BOUNCE actions after one, two or three years, and the specific set-up of these BOUNCE actions.

In sum, a long-term implementation strategy for the BOUNCE programme should include a supportive policy-basis, a facilitating actor and a well thought-out selection of new BOUNCE trainers. The train-the-trainer sessions and the additional implementation support should only be given after these first three steps. Later, all subsequent BOUNCE actions should be continuously registered on their processes and outcomes, with the aim of informing the external supportive climate and adapting the prevention strategies in order to provide locally suitable BOUNCE^{Young} activities for youngsters. This 'implementation cycle' of seven core steps is depicted in figure 1.

When the work of youth services is very fragmented, the opportunities for multi-agency cooperation are lower

Discussion: Lessons learnt for implementing early prevention projects

The evaluation of BOUNCE^{Up} does not only bring us lessons for the implementation of the BOUNCE tools, it also builds upon previous research findings from prevention science and adds content to the policy choices concerning resilience trainings.

The pilot project of ten BOUNCE^{Up} trainings has shown that

¹ <https://www.bounce-resilience-tools.eu/>

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a promising training such as BOUNCE^{Up} will not lead to practical implementation of its two preventive tools BOUNCE^{Young} and BOUNCE^{Along} without a coherent implementation strategy, embedded in the city's prevention plan. In line with previous research, durable prevention will depend on multi-agency cooperation, which requires a stakeholder analysis and clear communication about all partners' commitment. The integral approach of projects such as BOUNCE is of high importance, as a single prevention project cannot prevent youth delinquency and radicalization on its own. Rather, prevention should be ensured by a variety of societal actors, going from public agencies, police, civil society actors, youth organisations and

schools. A combination of interventions is needed in order to enhance social cohesion and collective efficacy at the neighbourhood level, to strengthen youngsters' protective factors so as to lower their chances of engaging in criminal activities.

In order to conclude such assumptions we recommend the framework of resilience to be researched more in-depth by means of practical case studies of BOUNCE^{Young}. During this year's project, a long-term evaluation tool was developed for the BOUNCE^{Up} tool, allowing cities to register their own BOUNCE actions and follow-up on the results. Such continuous registration of youth resilience trainings and their outcomes is needed so that policy-makers can be informed in their

search for adequate prevention strategies. Still, whereas more evaluation research is required, previous studies have shown that resilience trainings may indeed be a first step into the prevention chain. By focusing on positive and protective factors, early resilience trainings may counter-balance more repressive discourses on crime and extremism, allowing for a shift from fear to openness.

References

The full evaluation study of the BOUNCE^{Up} tool can be consulted via:

Christiaens, Hardyns & Pauwels (2018) *Evaluating the BOUNCE^{Up} Tool: Research Findings and Policy Implications*. Retrieved from www.bounce-resilience-tools.eu/research.

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