RESEARCH REPORT

Ireland

CONCORDIA

Introduction

This research report has been produced within the framework of the CONCORDIA project which is funded under the ERASMUS+ programme.

The project focuses on harnessing the power of digital media tools to prevent the radicalisation of vulnerable youth and is being simultaneously rolled out in Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Romania, Cyprus, France, Finland and Ireland. The project will support key front-line workers to develop core skills to work with vulnerable youth to produce and disseminate counter-extremist narratives. It proposes bringing skills of front-liners right up to date where the production of digital media and the managing of social media platforms is concerned promoting high quality of youth work in response to the radicalization threat.

Name: Moira Cassidy
Organisation: Future In Perspective
Country: Ireland

Radicalisation Threat in Ireland

Over the past two decades Ireland has moved from a religious to a more secular state. Since the country gained independence from Britain in the early 20th Century, the Catholic Church has been the most powerful organisation in the country exerting enormous influence on people, politics, institutions, culture and the law. Globalisation, the Celtic Tiger, abuses within the church and migration have all led to the decline of the church's power and place within Irish society. Ireland's 2011 census showed the number of those identifying as having no religion increased by almost 50% since the previous census in 2006. There was also a significant increase in those identifying as practising other religions. This move towards liberalisation has caused divisions in society in particular around issues such as sexuality, abortion, contraception, marriage, divorce and education. These emotive issues have led to extremist and sometimes violent behaviour.

The conflict in Northern Ireland dates from 1921 when Ireland became an independent republic under the Anglo-Irish Treaty, with the exception of six northern counties which remained under British rule in light of their large Protestant population. In the late 1960s, tensions between northern Catholic Republicans and members of the pro-British Unionist majority spilled over into riots. British troops were deployed on the streets. Over 3,600 people were killed during four decades of violent unrest. 'The Troubles' continued until the Downing Street Declaration in 1993, which announced a joint Irish/British co-operation in search of a solution, and the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, which created a power-sharing assembly and government for Northern Ireland. EU cross border programmes and investment in tourism and industry has assisted in maintaining peace over the past 20 years but tensions still exist between Catholic Nationalist and Protestant Unionist communities.

In the past decade the threat of radicalisation in Ireland has risen significantly. Irish authorities estimate that in the region of 30 to 40 Irish people, many of them teenagers and young adults, have travelled to fight in Syria and Iraq. Dr Maura Conway of Dublin City University, a lecturer in international security, attributes this to the online campaign of the so-called Islamic State (IS) who are now reaching out directly to internet users who express sympathy with their position. Those targeted are "oftentimes young and searching for an identity and meaning in their lives".

IS will often "love bomb" such people, by having online supporters flock around the individual and "bombard" them with messages. (Cormac O'Keeffe, Irish Examiner Nov. 2015)

40,000 DAILY TWEETS BY ISLAMIC STATE SUPPORTERS

According to Shaykh Dr Muhammad Umar Al-Qadri, Imam of the Al Mustafa Islamic Centre in Dublin and founder of the Muslim Peace and Integration Council, "In Ireland the Muslim youth has been exposed to a number of radical and extreme preachers, belonging to the Wahhabi sect. Young Muslims are vulnerable to radicalisation due to their anger and frustration concerning dual standards of Western countries' policies in the Muslim world. Some members of the Irish Muslim youth have travelled to Iraq and Syria... These youngsters were radicalised by extremist preachers in person and through social media."

The potency of the threat was brought into sharp focus recently by the death of Dublin man Terence Kelly while carrying out an Islamic State suicide bombing in Iraq (Irish Times, 2016) and the death of Shamseddin Gaidan, who left from Navan, Co. Meath to go and fight with ISIS in Syria in 2013 (Irish Central, 2013). Outside the Muslim community in Ireland there are very few initiatives and programmes to educate young people about radicalisation or to counter radical ideology. There are no local, regional or national policies in place to deal with the threat of radicalisation and no Irish representation in the EU-supported Radicalisation Awareness Network.

In the EU publication, 'Inventory of the best practices on de-radicalisation from the different Member States of the EU', the only reference to best practise in Ireland is the following "The Government of Ireland continued its significant efforts to assist in the integration process of minority groups in Ireland. These measures included providing social benefits, language training, and the proactive advocacy work of an ombudsman's office." The threat of radicalisation touches political, social, religious and ideological spheres.

concordia

Causes of Radicalisation in Ireland

Those identified as being most at risk of radicalisation in Ireland include people who feel that their culture/beliefs or ideology is being threatened, young people who feel disenfranchised and are susceptible to peer pressure or manipulation and members of the Muslim community who feel isolated, anger and frustration or who have been exposed to radical and extreme preachers or rhetoric.

Ireland is moving from conservative, Catholicism towards a more liberal-thinking society. This has led to changes in policies and law which have polarised some groups - particularly on issues such as abortion, sexuality and divorce. Fear and anger on both sides of these emotive issues can cause some individuals to take radical action.

The segregation of communities can lead to isolation and ghettoization fuelling distrust and sometimes militant behaviour. This has been evident in Northern Ireland and other parts of the country through the conflict between Nationalists and Unionists. Northern Ireland voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU. The Brexit vote now presents challenges as the reinstallation of borders could seriously impact on relations between the nationalist/Catholics and unionist/Protestants, thereby undermining the work of the peace process. It could also impact on the peace programmes administered by the EU.

The segregation of communities is not limited to those affected by the Northern Ireland conflict. While many Muslims have integrated well, particularly those who settled in Ireland pre 2000, many have become more isolated. For adults the social hub of the pub in Irish life creates challenges for interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims as alcohol is prohibited in Islam.

Admission policies of primary schools allow them to discriminate on the basis of religion when awarding places. As most Irish schools are run by the Catholic Church, Muslims often find it difficult to secure places in mainstream schools. As a result, children are not getting the benefits and opportunities of learning in a multicultural environment and Muslim children and their extended families are being further isolated. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment proposed a new topic, 'Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics', to be added to the primary school curriculum with the aim of discouraging intolerance and Islamophobia but were met with resistance from teachers who felt it would undermine the religious ethos of their primary schools felt that they were already overburdened with subjects and by Catholic school leaders

The lack of government policy has meant that very little has been done to educate young people about religious radicalisation or to try to counter radical ideology. Front line youth workers and teachers view Islamophobia as being a growing and greater problem than radicalisation at the moment. The Immigrant Council of Ireland reported incidents of Islamophobia up by 35% in 2015.

Earlier this year Muslim leaders in Ireland said there needed to be a much broader engagement by the Government with the wider Muslim community than there has been to date. Dr Al-Quadri said "I think we need awareness. We need de-radicalisation programmes and training programmes. We need the Government to sit with the Muslim community and discuss the threat of radicalisation. Until now, the Government has only been dealing with the largest mosque, the Clonskeagh mosque. But there are many more stakeholders. The community is not just represented by one particular mosque. They need to involve other members of the Muslim community also. Without liaising with the Muslim community, which is very diverse, you can't remove the threat of radicalisation." (Dr Al-Qadri, Independent.ie 25/07/2016)

The impact of Social Media on Radicalisation in Ireland

Social media has become a tool for radicalisation in recent years. Young people communicate through a combination of hardware and software which changes regularly with advances in technology and social trends. Dr Maura Conway, lecturer in international security in Dublin City University, has reported that Islamic State has input significant financial and especially human resources into their online campaign. They produce a large volume of contacts every day, targeted at a variety of audiences across a diversity of social media platforms.

Irish militant individuals and organisations, as well as extreme right wing groups, also target young people through social media platforms using images, blogs, podcasts, videos and appealing directly to sympathisers through messaging or comments.

Youth communication trends constantly change as new tools are regularly becoming available. Once popular platforms such as Myspace and Bebo are no longer widely used. The following information from http://www.emarkable.ie/ (August 2015) shows the most popular forums used by the general Irish population:

- 2.4 million (87% of whom regularly log on via mobile) Irish people use Facebook each month

- Approximately 700, 000 people log on to Twitter every day in Ireland

- As a country we send 1 million tweets per day. The age demographic in Ireland of 15-24 year olds is 53% of the audience. 26% of Irish people over the age of 15 use Twitter.

- 77% of Irish YouTube users access the site at least once a week. 1 in 3 people spend as much time watching YouTube as they do TV. 31% of Irish users view tutorial videos regularly.

- 15% of the Irish population is on Pinterest.

- 24% of Irish people are on LinkedIn.

- 18% of Irish people use Instagram with 43% using it every day.

- 22% of the Irish population has a Snapchat account and spends an average of 1 hour and 43 minutes using the app.

In 2015 The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland joined forces with the Digital Youth Council to research the media habits of Ireland's youth. The following breakdown of social media usage was collected by interviewing young people about their preferred platforms;

SnapChat (38%)

Users share photos, videos, text, and drawings which disappear from the recipient's phone after a few seconds. These messages are free to send and the app is free to download making it appealing to young people who are often using 'pay as you go' phones. Unlike other platforms, messages sent are not permanent but screen grabs of messages can be sent which can then be forwarded to other social media platforms.

Facebook (33%)

Facebook allows users to connect with friends and strangers through a personal profile where they can post comments and share pictures, videos, articles and music. The contents of profiles can be viewed by anyone unless privacy settings are used to limit viewing. People are added to your "friends" section through sending friend requests. A private Messages function allows users to communicate by message or video to other users. Profiles can be personalised which appeals to teenagers. Facebook can expose users to cyber bullying and targeting by predators.

Twitter (16%)

Twitter is a free social media platform which allows registered users to communicate with other users using "tweets" which are 140 character messages. Hashtags (#) are used to connect conversations and, unlike Facebook, approval isn't needed to follow anyone.

Instagram (11%)

Instagram is a free app that allows users to share videos and pictures with their friends. Users "follow" friends and celebrities and "like" or "comment" on Instagram posts and post their photos/videos. The app has now also added a direct messaging function.

The study also found that Irish under-18 age group regularly watch videos on YouTube. This is a free, video sharing service giving users the option of watching videos or creating an account where they can share, comment on or like videos or even upload their own personal videos. It appeals to young people as it is a free app and allows users to learn about a variety of new things, watch their favourite comedians and musicians and subscribe to other youtubers. Vlogging has become a popular and growing activity where users upload videos on a diverse range of activities and subjects. YouTube has over a billion users and is open to abuse as an estimated 300 hours of footage is uploaded per minute.

Social media can also be used as an effective tool to counter radicalisation. Websites specifically targeting young people in Ireland in a positive way and addressing issues that impact on them include the following;

- www.spunout.ie is Ireland's youth information website created by young people, for young people. "We provide information to around 80,000 active readers each month. Established in 2005, our vision is help create an Ireland where young people aged between 16 and 25 are empowered with the information they need to live active, happy, and healthy lives. We aim to educate and inform our readers about the importance of holistic wellbeing and how good health can be maintained, both physically and mentally. We believe we should have easy access to relevant, reliable, and non-judgmental information and we are proud to provide our readers with a dynamic, responsive website full of up-to-date, factual information, free of any shame or bias."

- www.jihad.info was established by Dr. Al-Qadri is the Imam of the Al Mustafa Islamic Centre in Dublin and founder of the Muslim Peace and Integration Council. He has also written the Irish Muslim Declaration of Peace and Guide to Preventing Radicalisation within the Muslim Community with the aim of promoting peace and harmony within the Muslim community as well as with non-Muslims. The website, launched in 2015, contains articles and lectures from Muslim scholars on the authentic teachings of Islam and also gives people a platform to report extremist activities.

Addressing the issue of radicalisation in Ireland

Ireland also has a strong network of national youth organisations providing inclusive, mainly non-formal educational and developmental programmes and activities. These organisations are primarily staffed by volunteers, with statutory support from the Department of Education and Skills, the Youth Affairs Unit of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Education and Training Boards who are responsible for the provision of vocational education and training. Organisations engaging with young people include:

- Youth Reach
- Comhairle na nOg
- Jigsaw
- National Garda Youth Diversion Projects
- Youth Work Ireland

The issue of radicalisation should be a national priority in youth work but organisations lack specific skills and expertise to address the subject in a targeted way. While many organisations have websites, those interviewed during this research cited social media as the main threat of radicalisation and recognised a need for the development of further skills in this area in an effort to counter radicalisation. Supports identified as being needed by front line staff include:

Targeted counter radicalisation programmes. At present, the Muslim community in Ireland is trying to address radicalisation through their own religious curriculum in Muslim schools, website www.jihad. info and through promoting the publication 'Irish Muslim Declaration of Peace and Guide to Preventing Radicalisation within the Muslim Community'. The Guide outlines a series of actions which encourage positive interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims through events such as open days, seminars and workshops in the hope of counter-acting the threat of radicalisation and promoting harmony within communities (Irish Muslim Peace and Integration Council, 2016). This is a unique approach to countering radicalisation, as it hopes that by cultivating tolerance and positive behaviours among members of both Muslim and non-Muslim communities, there will be no space for radicalisation in Irish society. These

initiatives need to be developed further and promoted within all schools, youth groups and community organisations.

■ **More online resources and platforms** to cultivating tolerance and positive behaviours around potential emotive issues with diverse viewpoints.

■ **Digital Skills development for front-line workers.** The National Forum Digital Roadmap (2015a) identified the need for the development of digital skills and competencies, prioritising the development of "A co-ordinated, multi-level approach to foster digital literacy, skills and confidence among students at all levels of education" (Recommendation 4, priority 1). There are programmes, such as www.allaboardhe.org, developing a national digital skills framework for staff and students in the education system The youth and community sector is, for the most part, staffed by volunteers and often poorly funded. Most youth programmes in Ireland are activity and sports based and many of the staff working with young people are not equipped with the skills and resources to create content for social media platforms.

■ **Social Media Skills development for front-line workers.** It was forecast that by 2015 nine out of ten jobs would require e-skills and yet recent studies have found that 47% of the general European population don't have the basic skills to function in a digital society (European Commission 2015b). Young people are often a lot more experienced and comfortable with social media than those working with them. The increased use of mobile phones, tablets and other portable devices means that young people can engage with social media 24/7 which means that those wishing to support or influence need to be equipped with the knowledge to navigate and contribute to social media platforms.

Summary

The threat of radicalisation in Ireland is political, social, religious and ideological. The country has become an increasingly liberal and tolerant society as it moves towards a more secular state. However, the threat of conservative and extreme right wing ideology is a growing concern, particularly within marginalised communities such as disadvantaged youth and some members of the migrant population who have come from more conservative cultures.

Ireland has a history of politico-religious extremism due to the Northern Ireland conflict. Although the threat has decreased through political agreements and peace and reconciliation initiatives, the Brexit situation could reignite tensions between unionists and nationalists and lead to extremist activities.

Ireland has a growing Muslim population. Unlike many other European countries, this is a new community only dating back to the 1980's. Within the Islamic Community in Ireland some steps have been taken to promote a non-radical view of Islam, discrediting the rhetoric of the extremists and discouraging young people from getting involved in violent activities. Despite this, authorities claim that between 30 and 40, mainly young people, have travelled to fight in Syria or Iraq. (Irish Examiner Nov. 2015) Members of the Muslim community fear that segregation, distrust and media influence could lead to increased incidents of Islamophobia encouraging radicalisation of Muslim youth. Ireland lacks a national policy on integration and there are no targeted initiatives to counter radicalisation. Admission policies of primary schools allow schools to discriminate on the basis of religion when awarding places. Most Irish schools are run by the Catholic Church which has implications for Muslim families and the wider social sphere.

Abortion and sexuality are pertinent social issues in Ireland at the moment in relation to the recent Marriage Equality vote and the debate to repeal the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution Act, 1983 which was introduced after a referendum which asked Irish people to vote on the State's abortion laws. Although these are minor threats, there have been incidents of aggression, most recently involving vandalism to a pro-choice politician's offices.

In Ireland, those most at risk of being radicalised include:

Young people from the Muslim community who feel isolated, anger and frustration or have been exposed

■ to radical and extreme preachers or rhetoric

■ Young people who feel disenfranchised and are susceptible to peer pressure and manipulation

■ Young people who feel that their culture/beliefs or ideology is being threatened

Social media is being used by religious, political and ideological extremists to target sympathisers and vulnerable young people. The most popular platforms used by young people in Ireland are Facebook, Twitter,YouTube, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Instagram, Snapchat. These are accessed using Smart phones, Tablets, PCs, MP3 and multimedia players.

Ireland has a strong network of youth organisations working with young people through educational, social, sporting and cultural activities. Those interviewed during this research cited social media as the main threat of radicalisation and recognised a need for the development of skills in this area in an effort to counter radicalisation. Supports identified as being needed by front line staff include:

1. **Targeted counter radicalisation programmes**
2. **Online resources and platforms to cultivating tolerance and positive behaviours around potential emotive issues with diverse viewpoints**
3. **Digital Skills development for front-line workers**
4. **Social Media Skills development for front-line workers**

References

The following websites and articles were consulted in researching this text:

Colfer, Colette Muslims in Ireland: adaptation and integration (2009) Available at: http://repository.wit.ie/1436/1/Muslims_in_Ireland_adaptation_and_integration.pdf [Accessed: 2nd and 3rd November]

Lozano, Maria Inventory of the best practices on de-radicalisation from the different Member States of the EU: [Accessed: 2nd and 3rd November] Available at:
http://www.terra-net.eu/files/nice_to_know/20140722134422CVERLTdef.pdf

O'Keeffe, Cormac (2015) Irish Examiner: [Accessed: 2nd and 3rd November]
www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/is-online-radicalisation-and-recruitment-campaign-sees-people-love-bombed-with-messages-366839.html

Phelen, Shane (2016) www.Independent.ie: [Accessed: 2nd and 3rd November]
www.independent.ie/irish-news/politics/irish-muslim-groups-wants-talks-with-the-government-34908943.html

Kane, Claire (2015) Irish Consumers On Social Media – The Stats:
[Accessed: 2nd and 3rd November]
http://www.emarkable.ie/blog/2015/08/irish-consumers-on-social-media-the-stats/

www.bai.ie (2015): [Accessed: 2nd and 3rd November]
http://www.bai.ie/blog/2015/01/28/bai-digital-biscuit-2015/

http://www.digitalyouthcouncil.com/about.html
[Accessed: 2nd and 3rd November]

info-radical.org: [Accessed: 2nd and 3rd November]
 https://info-radical.org/en/radicalization/types-of-radicalization/

impic.ie: [Accessed: 3rd and 4th October]
impic.ie/report-anti-extremism-seminar-declaration-launch.html

wikipedia.com: [Accessed: 2nd and 3rd November]
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Troubles

webwise.ie: [Accessed: 2nd and 3rd November]
https://www.webwise.ie/parents/5-apps-and-websites-teens-love/

Irish Central (2013): [Accessed: 2nd and 3rd November]
http://www.irishcentral.com/news/teenager-from-ireland-killed-fighting-with-syrian-rebels-192849471-237567941.html

www.digitaltimes.ie: [Accessed: 3rd and 4th October]
http://www.digitaltimes.ie/media-habits-of-irish-teenagers/

allaboardhe.org (2015) Towards a National Digital Skills Framework for Irish Higher Education- Review and comparison of existing frameworks and models : [Accessed: 2nd and 3rd November]
allaboardhe.org/DSFramework2015.pdf

Comhairle na nÓg (2016): [Accessed: 3rd and 4th October]
http://www.comhairlenanog.ie/who-we-are/

 Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2016): [Accessed: 3rd and 4th October]
http://www.dcya.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=3146&nID=1

www.foróige.ie:[Accessed: 3rd and 4th October]
http://www.foroige.ie/our-work/youth-participation-and-advocacy

www.islamiccentre.ie {2015): [Accessed: 2nd and 3rd November]
http://www.islamiccentre.ie/irish-muslim-cleric-launches-anti-radicalisation-website/

Pollak, Sorcha (2016) www.irishtimes.com : [Accessed: 2nd and 3rd November]
http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/islamophobia-on-rise-in-state-claim-monitoring-groups-1.2657894
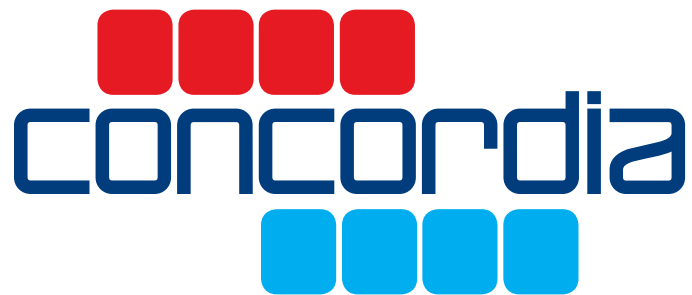
www.spunout.ie: [Accessed: 3rd and 4th October]
http://spunout.ie/about

www.jihad.info: [Accessed: 3rd and 4th October]
http://jihad.info/guide-to-prevent-terrorism-on-your-soil.html

Dorney, John (2015} The Northern Ireland Conflict 1968-1998 – An Overview
 [Accessed: 2nd and 3rd November]
http://www.theirishstory.com/2015/02/09/the-northern-ireland-conflict-1968-1998-an-overview/

www.seupb.eu: [Accessed: 3rd and 4th October]
http://www.seupb.eu/AboutUs/about-us.aspx
http://www.seupb.eu/Libraries/PEACE_IV_Programme_Guidance/PIV_ProgrammeFactsheet.sflb.ashx

glencree.ie: [Accessed: 2nd and 3rd November]
http://glencree.ie/religiously-motivated-violence/

concordia

Erasmus+

JUGEND
für Europa

Jugendförderverein
Parchim/Lübz e.V.

die kärntner
volkshochschulen

Centrum Inspirace, z.ú.

SYNTHESIS
CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

f.i.p
Future In
Perspective

études ET chantiers Corsica
STUDII E OPERE

Association for Education and
Sustainable Development

innoventum