RESEARCH REPORT
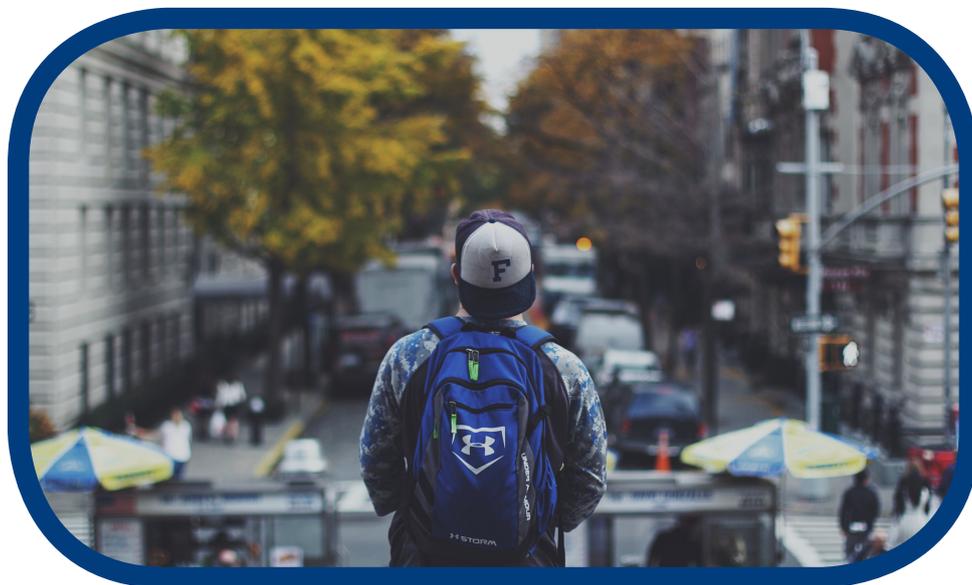
Summary

Harnessing the power
of digital media tools to
prevent the radicalisation
of vulnerable youth...

concordia

Contents

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1. Summary Research Report

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 radicalization 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.

In Austria the threat of radicalization is of growing concern and it is often expressed in the form of discrimination and racism. Activities to educate individuals on the causes of radicalization are integrated in the primary and further education. Nevertheless, to sustain these efforts these activities should be included in all levels of education and through different channels. In terms of actions that could be undertaken by trainers in case they identified a radicalized individual might include a personal conversation, or contacting the Extremism Information Centre. Currently, there are no efforts and measures observed concerning the prevention of radicalization.

The threat of radicalisation in Czech Republic is greater in big cities than in other places. This is often linked with the high concentration of ethnic groups and minorities in big cities. Individuals who are most at risk of radicalisation are mostly individuals with basic or vocational education such as Roma and other minorities. Social media and the internet are widely used in Czech Republic. The country has a strong network of youth organisations that work with youth in informal and recreational activities. These activities are not specifically developed to address radicalisation but could be adapted to include activities on radicalisation. In addition, the creation of programs for front line workers as well as teachers specifically focused on radicalisation could be used to address the issue of radicalisation.

Cyprus has moved from a conservative to a more accepting and tolerant society. However, the long political conflict in Cyprus which remains unresolved, along with the financial crisis, the war and in the Middle East and the arrival of migrants and refugees has contributed to the increase of radicalization. The increased number on social media usage is believed to contrubuted to the promotion of the ideology of organised groups in sports, nationalism and religion. Overall, many initiatives have been developed to support education and research for the promotion of democracy and active citizenship. Many NGOs and local organisations have joined efforts to promote collaboration among citizens and hence, tackled issues associated with radical behavior with some of these efforts being supported by the government.

The most common form of radicalization in Finland is radicalized nationalism and racism. However, radical incidents do not seem to occur often. Racism is a relatively new phenomenon in Finland, though the economic and the refugee crisis in Europe have gotten some extremist organizations activated. Social media such as Facebook, YouTube and website forums are being used by those who are most at risk. The project partner Innoventum and the director of the Youth services of

Joensuu identified the need to develop training material with activities for the youth came up, and the development of a technical support tool which could be used to address youth exclusion and the threat of radicalisation. In addition, the report suggests the importance of tracking how the youth use youth services in order to identify the gaps and develop provisions.

In France the threat of radicalization is political, social, religious and ideological environment. The country was originally a tolerant society but the recent tragic attack in Paris and Nice, have led to the increase of Islamophobia. The Internet and social media have changed the ways in which activists communicate, and the critical role given to ICTs in strengthening political and activist engagement are carefully assessed. In France, those most at risk of being radicalised include young people living a real frustration, anger and the feeling of not belonging to the national community as well as young people feeling disenfranchised and susceptible to undergo pressure and manipulation. Front liners are lacking new approaches /methodologies to create their own tools adapted to their target groups. Giving a positive image is fundamental for youth in distress.

In Germany, individuals who are most at risk of being radicalized are usually marginalized individuals who have being exposed to violent incidents related to racism and discrimination. The extremist groups are using the negative feelings and experiences of the marginalized group to promote radical behavior. Schools are called to address the challenges of radicalisation by including a variety of global learning elements in their learning approach. This includes increasing the empathy of the students towards the marginilised groups and their understanding towards the challenges faced by these groups. In addition, schools are also called to address the role of religion in shaping the radilisation.

In Ireland the threat of radicalisation is political, social, religious and ideological. While society is becoming more liberal and accepting, the threat of conservative and extreme right wing ideology is growing, particularly within marginalised communities. The political and ideological extremists are using social media to target vulnerable young people. Ireland has a strong network of youth organisations that are implementing social, sporting, educational and cultural activities. Supports for the front-line staff include: (a) targeted counter radicalisation programmes, (b) online resources and platforms to cultivating tolerance and positive behaviours around potential emotive issues with diverse viewpoints, (c) digital Skills development for front-line workers and (d) social Media Skills development for front-line workers.

In Romania the threat of radicalization is political, social, religious and ideological. As noted by the Romanian partner, the country has become less tolerant with the Muslim community and vice versa. Individuals that are most at risk to be radicalised in Romania include young people in single-parent or dysfunctional families, marginilised youth, young people are exposed to radical incidents and young people that feel that their beliefs or ideology are being threatened. In Romania radicalisation often starts online and hence the need to include programs that covers the digitalisation of radicalisation. The partner organisation proposes the creation of targeted programs to combat radicalization and the development of digital and social media related competences for front-line staff.

2. Country Summary Reports

2.1. Austria

In summary we can state that growing radical tendencies are present in Austria. Further examination showed that some form of discrimination often precedes these radical tendencies. Deradicalisation is being used in Austrian first and further education, but must, for sustainable success, be expanded significantly.

It is clearly evident that there are no quick fixes for the reduction of prejudices, fears and racism, and that the only solution is to build up people's knowledge about racism, and use it adequately in different situations, thereby transferring it to different target groups (Report Xenotolerance 2016, p. 26 EI Hill).

For educational trainers this means that they should take action, if they suspect that a participant could be radicalised. A private, personal conversation must be held in order to find out more about the situation. If the participant can no longer be reached, then the trainer concerned should consult the Extremism Information Centre. It must be made clear to everybody involved that the process of de-radicalisation is long and arduous, and that it is consequently even more important to focus on preventative activities (Report Xenotolerance 2016, p. 26 EI Schmidinger).

The political reaction in Austria to the rise of radical tendencies has primarily been to resort to criminal proceedings. At the moment Austria is neglecting to increase its use of preventative measures, intervention work, de-ideologising and de-radicalisation. This development cannot be assigned to any one party or group (Moussa Al-Hassan Diaw, 2015).

2.2. Czech Republic

The threat of radicalisation in the Czech Republic cannot be comprehensively defined. There is a great difference between large cities (e.g. Prague, Brno, Ostrava) and other places in our country.

The capital city is threaten by the danger of radicalisation the most – high concentration of people of various ethnic groups and countries (among them obviously immigrants from Islamic world, Russian-speaking countries – especially Russia, Ukraine, further we meet with Vietnamese, Chinese, etc.) Large number of people from the Islamic world and also Russian-speaking countries lives also in Karlovy Vary – a spa, further in Brno, Plzen, Ostrava and Hradec Kralove. In these places the people from previously mentioned ethnic groups create own communities.

The other places in the Czech Republic are not affected by this threat. Naturally there are also people from the ethnic groups mentioned above, however not in such rate. In most cases, these people have been already integrated in Czech society. They have jobs or their own businesses. Their children visit Czech schools.

The separate chapter is a Roma population. There is a problematic integration of Roma in the society, namely lack of interest in education and work. It is easier for them to use the Czech social system (various welfare benefits – housing benefit, child benefit, one-off social benefits, and pensions).

People who are the most at-risk of radicalisation in the Czech Republic are mainly individuals with basic or vocational education who are easily suggestible. These people who are attracted to the radical ideologies try to gain the sense of importance, power, and domination over others.

Internet and social networks certainly belong to the most widely used communication tools among the supporters of radicalisation. Internet mainly provides a quick access to information worldwide, greatly accelerates communication among radicals at a great distance and is a great tool to recruit young people. Some experts have concluded that people are not able to critically evaluate and process the great amount of information that the Internet and social networks offer that often leads to simplification and adoption of radical thoughts.

In the Czech Republic the most widely used internet communication tools are:
• Internet - Facebook (4.7 million users in the Czech Republic), Twitter (300 000 users in the Czech Republic), Instagram (924,000 users in the Czech Republic), YouTube
• Viber
• Votsap

The Czech Republic has a broad spectrum of organisations actively working with youth. These organizations are largely unprofitable and work with young people in informal and recreational activities (Junak, Skaut, leisure centres, school clubs, religious organisations, etc.)

The activities of these organizations are not directly focused on radicalisation. Bused on the development of the situation in recent years, it is appropriate to implement some activities concerning radicalisation into their programs.

It would be beneficial to create programs for front line workers as well as teachers which will be specifically designed to radicalisation and focused on youth work. The program should be used both in after-school activities and also during school hours.

The development of activities for youth workers in the field of digital skills and competencies is essential. It is necessary for them to improve their computer literacy because currently we are in the situation where young people dominate these new technologies - increasingly using modern technology such as smart phones, tablets, laptops, etc.

2.3. Cyprus

Over the past few years, Cyprus has moved from a conservative to a more accepting and tolerant society. However, the long political confict in Cyprus which remains unresolved, along with the the financial crisis, the war and in the Middle East and the arrival of migrants and refugees has contributed to the increase of radicalization.

Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots are living side by side for more than 40 years without a solution. This has contributed to the increase of radical behavior associated with the promotion of aggressive nationalism between the two communities. The events that took place during the military invansion of the Turkish Army in Cyprus have been shared from generation to generation and have contributed to racial and religious animosity between the two communities. However, the joint declaration which was signed in 2014 between the two leaders of the two communities has renewed the hopes for a solution but at the same time has increased the need to prepare the ground for collaboration and cooperation between the two communities.

Furthemore, the war in the Middle East and the instability in the wider region has increased the number of migrants and refugees arriving in the island. The hatred towards migrants and refugees could be linked with the belief that migrants are taking the jobs of the Cypriots. This is strengthen by the impact of the financial crisis in the job market and it is widely shared among Cypriot citizens. In addition, the entrance of ELAM to the Parliament has let society believe that there is an increase in the number of people who share the same ideology.

Aggressive incidents related to social issues such as sexuality have been observed over the years but studies show that the attitude of Cypriots towards same sex marriage has positively changed and the civil union bill being passed by the Parliament. In regards to football hooliganism, although the police has taken further measures to minimise incidents of radical behavior among the fans of the Cypriot Football clubs, violent incidents during and after football games are common. Thus, there is an urgent need to provide front-line youth workers and potential staff with the tools to combat any form of radicalisation.

Islam was introduced to Cyprus more than four centuries ago. Today, the minority of Muslim population in Cyprus consists of many different ethnic backgrounds and cultures; the majority of Muslims, however, are Turkish Cypriots. Over the past few decades, there are no documented incidents of behaviour associated with Islamic radicalisation. However, the current extremist acts committed in the name of Islam in the world as well as the Islamisation process of Turkey under the current Erdogan government (which to a large extent controls the northern part of the island) increase the risks of a religious-oriented radicalisation in the future.

Overall, many initiatives have been developed over the past two decades to support education and research for the promotion of democracy and active citizenship. Many NGOs and local organisations have joined efforts to promote collaboration among citizens and hence, tackled issues associated with radical behavior with some of these efforts being supported by the governement. The comments of the Minister of Education on the role of education have created a positive ground for social and attitudinal change in Cyprus.

The increased number on social media usage is believed to contrubuted to the promotion of the ideology of organised groups in sports, nationalism and religion. However, there are no studies that show the link between the use of social media and radicalisation.

2.4. Finland

The most common form of radicalization in Finland is radicalized nationalism and racism. However, the threat of radicalisation and extremism in Finland is still relatively small compared other places around the world. Although racism is a relatively new phenomenon in Finland, the economic and the refugee crisis in Europe have led to the appearance of extremism.

In Finland the political and social conditions have been the source for religious and ideological radicalisation. In turn, this has contributed to the negative political atmosphere that is currently influenced by the immigration following the refugee crisis.

One of events that fall under radicalisation is the appearance of "foreign fighters" which refers to individuals leaving Finland to join conflicts in other parts of the world. Statistically, the number of foreign fighters is amongst the largest in Europe.

In regards to the actions taken to address radicalisation, there is currently a legal initiative about banning violent radical organizations and is currently being dealt at the moment by the Parliament. Furthemore, the Ministry of Interior has created a National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism in 2012, which was updated in 2016.

Social media such as Facebook, YouTube and website forums are being used by those who are most at risk.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs has established a curriculum aiming to prevent violent radicalization extremism in Finland. The curriculum is implemented through trainings that are aimed for workers in teaching, youth work, social work, health work, the police and the local co-operation groups in basic and in higher education levels.

The project partner Innoventum and the director of the Youth services of Joensuu identified the need to develop training material with activities for the youth came up and the development of a technical support tool which could be used to l in address youth exclusion and threat of radicalisation. In addition, the report suggests the importance of tracking how the youth use youth services in order to identify the gaps and develop provisions.

2.5. France

In France, the threat of radicalization is regarding all the components of the society: political, social, religious and ideological environment. The country is originally a tolerant society but caused to the recent tragic attack in Paris and Nice, the society is becoming a little bit more tensed, favouring the increase of islamophobic feeling.
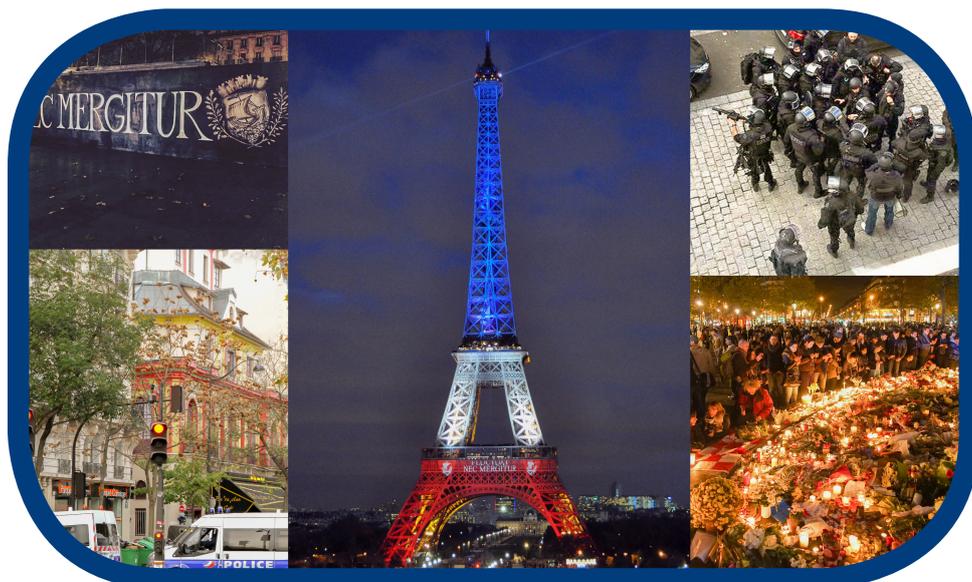Even if France is a secular state since the beginning of the 20th century, it becomes more and more difficult to apply this law in today societal environment.

Some important decisions have been taken by French government and religious authorities in order to promote a non-radical view of Islam, fighting extremism and jihadism and discouraging young people from getting involved in violent activities.

Since the terrorist attacks led in Paris and Nice, French government has launched monitoring unit and specific measures to monitor very closely the situations of radicalization and to be able to avoid the emergence of new cases.

It appears that violent action is unlikely to originate from purely virtual ties if they are not sustained by previous face-to-face interaction. Indeed Internet and social medias has changed the ways in which activists communicate, and the critical role given to ICTs in strengthening political and activist engagement are carefully assessed in France.

In France, those most at risk of being radicalised include young people living a real frustration, anger and the feeling of not belonging to the national community as well as young people feeling disenfranchised and susceptible to undergo pressure and manipulation. All popular social networks used by young people in France as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat allow to the radicalized reel to connect with vulnerable young people.

Front liners are lacking new approaches /methodologies to create their own tools adapted to their target groups. Giving a positive image is fundamental for youth in distress. The discourse of terrorist groups is based on ideas and on emotions, a feeling generally not conveyed by government campaigns.

We could include a more "positive" narrative instead of a "negative "one. We shouldn't say "don't do this", we should say "do this instead". (Alberto Fernandez - Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications of the U.S. Department of State).

2.6. Germany

It depends on many factors why young people follow radical and extremist groups and movements. Individual blows of fate in the childhood play a role as well as experiences of non-acceptance in a foreign society, of no perspectives and powerlessness.

This comes upon the need of outbreak, dropping out and provocation on the one site and security and belonging on the other site. Thereof resulting and sometimes contradictory emotional states are enforced through growing up in a global and only hard to understand world.

Young people often look after (too) easy answers and clear guidelines. Besides all differences the approaches of extremist groups and movements all connect to the negative feelings, experiences and perceptions of the young pupils.
The methods of addressing, the propaganda and the manipulation are similar in political extremism and religious fanaticism. That's why the school besides the family and the environment of the young people is asked as an outrageous learning space to deal with these challenges.

Sensitivity for the daily life of pupils as well as factual information and clarification are to be considered. Global learning can make an important contribution – since we are talking about a better understanding of our world in general and the role of religions in particular. In-depth knowledge about the (religious) situation of the young people on one hand and about misuse of religion for extremist aims on the other hand are requirements for a better understanding of radicalization of young persons and for useful pedagogical prevention concepts.

2.7. Ireland

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

2.8. Romania

In Romania radicalization threat it is political, social, religious and ideological. This country, although she lives with Muslims for centuries, in recent years becomes less tolerant with the Muslim community and vice versa.

Amid a general crisis in society, both system and values, young people are most vulnerable. Showmanship seems to be the answer to rebellion against family or youth system. Most people feel marginalized, are full of anger, sadness or frustration and they revenge on their families or on the society which refuses to accept them. Acute lack of shared values leads many of them to no longer identify with their own nation. Left without an alternative, they try to find common ground, however small that may be, could be religion. Most often, however, this "refuge" coincides with a radicalized form of religion.

"It's about certain individuals who associate for the pleasure to be part of something great. It is a subculture of young people (…) and social groups play an important role" says Rik Coolsaet, expert in political Islamist militants.

In the group with most risk of radicalization in Romania are included
• Young people from single-parent families,
• Young people from dysfunctional families,
• Young people marginalized by society or the community they live in,
• Young people from the Muslim community who are exposed to radical sermons,
• Young people who feel that their beliefs or ideology are threatened .

Shares potentially radical Islamic and proselytism, most often begin online. Social networks and large Internet providers, that allow circulation of powerful extremist messages, plays an important role. Hence the need to develop skills in this area in an effort to combat radicalization. Supports identified as necessary by front-line staff include:

1. Targeted programs to combat radicalization
2. Developing digital skills for front-line staff
3. Developing social media for front-line staff

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