



Contemporary manifestations of violent right-wing extremism in the EU: An overview of P/CVE practices

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Introduction

Right-wing violence is rising across the EU, illustrating the need for adequate measures to prevent and counter the threat. Yet, many existing preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) measures have been developed around Islamist extremism or in response to the wave of violent right-wing extremism (VRWE) three decades ago.

This paper explores whether measures to deal with previous right-wing extremist expressions are fit to counter current manifestations of right-wing extremism. It describes the modern (violent) right-wing extremist scene and how it has evolved from past manifestations. It also highlights a number of promising practices from previous programmes targeting right-wing violence. Several core concepts of these approaches remain highly valuable today. However, a more diverse “at-risk” group, increasing internationalisation and online presence demand for supplementary measures and a rethink of some aspects.

Violent right-wing extremism in Europe

The main ideological currents

Right-wing extremism is far from forming a monolithic block. This section provides an overview of the main ideological subcurrents in Europe.

Neo-Nazi movements. These groups advocate for the ideals of Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1945. They fight for a totalitarian state, call for racial supremacy, and are negationist and anti-Semitic. Europe has seen in recent years the resurgence of existing neo-Nazi groups. An example is Blood & Honour, which originated in the United Kingdom (UK) in the 1980s and has since spread to EU Member States. Also, the Nordic Resistance Movement, a pan-Scandinavian movement formed in 2016, is based on its Swedish antecedent from the late 1990s. Other neo-Nazi movements have been created more recently, such as the Sonnenkrieg Division (active in the UK) and the Feuerkrieg Division (active mainly in the Baltic States), European chapters of the U.S.-based Atomwaffen Division. These neo-Nazi groups form part of an online subculture called Siege Culture ⁽¹⁾.

Anti-Islam and anti-migration movements. These aim to preserve European or Christian identity from what they view as the Islamisation of Europe. Many movements in this category have emerged in the aftermath of the so-called 2015 migration crisis. An example is the political movement PEGIDA and its national chapters. In this category, we can also count anti-immigrant vigilant groups such as Soldiers of Odin. This group was founded in Finland in 2015 and rapidly saw sub-chapters emerge in other EU Member States.

Identitarian movements. Identitarians call for “ethnopluralism” — i.e. the promotion of the idea that different ethnic groups have the right to exist but ought to live in separation from one another and must not be mixed. They believe that white Europeans are falling victim to the “Great Replacement” ⁽²⁾ and seek to reverse this process by defending the European culture against Islam, neoliberalism and what they call cultural Marxism ⁽³⁾. The French-based youth movement Génération Identitaire was launched in 2012 and has since spread across the EU.

Ultrnationalist and neofascist movements. These want a totalitarian, traditionalist (often Christian) and ethnic-nationalist state. Examples are the Italian CasaPound, the French Bastion Social, the Hungarian Légión Hungária and the Polish National Radical Camp and All-Polish Youth. Interestingly, some decades-old groups in this category have recently shifted their purely nationalist agenda to an anti-Islam and anti-migration focus.

⁽¹⁾ The Siege Culture is inspired by the book called *Siege*, published in 1992 by American neo-Nazi James Mason. Throughout the book, Mason calls for leaderless resistance and deliberate terrorist acts to bring about a race war and the downfall of the global political system.

⁽²⁾ The Great Replacement theory is an ethno-nationalist theory warning that the indigenous European population is being replaced by non-European immigrants.

⁽³⁾ Cultural Marxism is a conspiracy theory holding that a small group of Marxist critical theorists have conspired to destroy Western civilization by taking over key cultural institutions.

Far-right sovereign citizen movements. Adherents in this category do not accept the legality of government authorities, including their laws and institutions. The most known example in Europe is Germany's Reichsbürger movement, a significant segment of its followers is considered right-wing extremist⁽⁴⁾. Similar movements also exist in other Member States, although some of them address in a more general sense the limited capabilities of the state and public policy.

Single-issue extremists. Some single issue-related violence is strongly linked to right-wing ideology. The Incel movement, a term short for "involuntary celibates", is a misogynistic internet community of men who define themselves by their inability to form sexual relationships with women. Originated in North America, where members have caused high-casualty attacks, the movement now spreads to Europe too⁽⁵⁾. Right-wing extremists have also capitalised on COVID-19 and 5G conspiracies and infiltrated related protests. The "yellow vests" movement as well has in some countries been in part appropriated by right-wing extremists⁽⁶⁾.

A heterogeneous scene

The above-mentioned categorisation is neither rigid nor exhaustive. First, some right-wing extremist groups can be placed in multiple categories, while others do not fit in any of the subcurrents. Second, groups can be closely connected across ideological divisions or highly adversarial within the same category (e.g. as a result of personal rivalries). Third, the diversity amongst right-wing extremists in Europe transcends ideological currents. Differences between and within the above-mentioned currents reflect, amongst others, strategies, tactics, and organisational structures. Some of the main differences are related to:

Definition of in- and out-group. Like other extremists, this dichotomy forms a crucial element of right-wing extremist narratives and actions. Violent right-wing groups define the in- and out-group differently, in accordance with their focus on cultural, ethnic or racial nationalism⁽⁷⁾. Cultural nationalists consider that a person with a migrant background can become part of the in-group, either through integration or assimilation. Other right-wing extremists pursue supposed ethnic and racial purity, and thus define their in-group in a narrower way.

Image. Right-wing extremist groups take on different images, which reflect their strategy and tactics. Identitarian movements strategically go about creating confusion about their extremist views. This translates to efforts to blend in with the general public, for instance with their clean image, terminology, and ambiguous propaganda means — all attempts to mainstream their extremist ideology. This is in stark contrast with neo-Nazi and ultranationalist movements, which showcase a physical appearance that is clearly distinct from mainstream society. In this case, typical features (e.g. Nazi symbols and tattoos, distinct clothes) serve to increase in-group identity and distinguish them from the general public.

Role of violence. Some groups are very cautious to stay in the grey zones between legal and illegal activities. Identitarian movements, for instance, cloak their ideas in mild terms and often preach non-violence. Yet, their extremist ideology and their alarmist rhetoric ("Get active or be replaced by migrants") have an inherent connection to violence⁽⁸⁾. Other right-wing groups are less ambiguous about the role of violence. Neo-Nazis, for instance, display high levels of violence both within their movements and with regard to the outside world. For them, violence serves to instil fear amongst opponents and hasten the collapse of the societal order.

Structures. European Violent Right-Wing extremist (VRWE) groups differ in terms of their organisational structures. Small cells are quite typical of right-wing terrorism, as this organisational structure was promoted through the leaderless resistance theory⁽⁹⁾. Many extremists also operate alone, which is demonstrated by the over-representation of offenders with right-wing motivations amongst European lone actors⁽¹⁰⁾. VRWE

⁽⁴⁾ Aerne, Growth of Reichsbürger movement in Germany triggers increasing security concerns, p. 2.

⁽⁵⁾ Hoffman et al., Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence.

⁽⁶⁾ Meleagrou-Hitchens & Crawford, 5G and the Far Right; Goßner, Anti-lockdown protests in Germany infiltrated by far-right extremists; May, The Yellow Vest Phenomenon and the Radical Right.

⁽⁷⁾ Bjørge & Ravndal, Extreme-Right Violence and Terrorism, pp. 3-5.

⁽⁸⁾ Murdoch & Mulhall, From Banners to Bullets, pp. 16-17.

⁽⁹⁾ The concept of leaderless resistance, developed by American white supremacists in the 1980s, refers to the need to keep the planning of terrorist attacks confined to individuals or small units to prevent detection and infiltration by law enforcement.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Ravndal, Thugs or Terrorists?, pp. 24-25.

lone actors are, nevertheless, often connected through online communities. In contrast, other groups operate in disciplined, hierarchical organisations, such as the Nordic Resistance Movement ⁽¹¹⁾.

Position towards politics. Some right-wing extremist movements approach their battle as a long march through the institutions. Identitarian movements engage in a metapolitical battle: they participate in the political process and try to place members or followers in strategic positions in public institutions to influence the wider political debate in society ⁽¹²⁾. Also, some neo-Nazi groups have been involved in electoral politics. The Nordic Resistance Movement is a legitimate political party in Sweden, where it stood in the 2018 national elections. On the contrary, other accelerationist groups, such as the Siege Culture neo-Nazi groups, reject the political (and societal) system as a whole and aim to overthrow it through violent actions.

Trends in right-wing extremism

Internationalisation

Right-wing extremist individuals and groups have long been very well connected internationally. In previous decades, international contacts facilitated the spread of strategic and tactical concepts and inspired the creation of local chapters of organisations ⁽¹³⁾. Yet, recent technological advances have **accelerated and deepened the internationalisation** of the right-wing extremist scene. Web 2.0 tools fuel international connections and facilitate the exchange of strategies, tactics and know-how. International links exist in all different sub-currents of right-wing extremism: Neo-Nazi organisations, ultranationalist movements and Identitarian movements maintain extensive international links with other individuals and groups. This transnational VRWE movement is, for instance, connected through the participation in political marches and rallies (e.g. the Day of Honour in Budapest), violent sports (in particular Mixed Martial Arts, [see also the RAN paper on sports and P/CVE](#)), and music events ⁽¹⁴⁾. Also the current spiral of violence by lone-actor terrorists ⁽¹⁵⁾ is an example of the internationalisation of the right-wing extremist scene:

“The globalization of white supremacy extremism is evident when closely analyzing several of the high-profile attacks conducted by white supremacist extremists over the past few years, including by white supremacists in Norway and New Zealand, with each major incident serving to galvanize future attacks” ⁽¹⁶⁾.

Today’s interactive internet also enables right-wing extremists to **reach a global audience** and has created new means to radicalise and recruit followers and sympathisers. For instance, some right-wing terrorists showcase their attacks to a global community by livestreaming them and spread their radical narratives through online manifestos ⁽¹⁷⁾.

The internationalisation of the right-wing scene also takes places in the **offline world**. Extremists participate in concerts and rallies abroad to forge stronger personal and organisational links with other likeminded individuals ⁽¹⁸⁾. The conflict in eastern Ukraine, in which thousands of foreign fighters participated, constitutes a hub in the physical network of the VRWE scene ⁽¹⁹⁾.

⁽¹¹⁾ Bjørge, Right-Wing Extremism in Norway.

⁽¹²⁾ Metapolitics is defined by Nouvelle Droite theorist Guillaume Faye as the “social diffusion of ideas and cultural values for the sake of provoking profound, long-term, political transformation”.

⁽¹³⁾ See, for example, Koehler, The German ‘National Socialist Underground (NSU)’ and Anglo-American Networks.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Counter Extremism Project, Violent Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism, p. 6.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Lone-actor terrorists are not as isolated as the terminology suggests. They frequently have interpersonal, political or operational ties to larger networks. They also often radicalise both in online and offline radical milieus and sometimes receive concrete assistance in the preparation for their attacks. See, for example, Bouhana et al., Background and preparatory behaviours of right-wing extremist lone actors.

⁽¹⁶⁾ The Soufan Center, White Supremacy Extremism, p. 11.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Koehler, The Halle, Germany, Synagogue Attack and the Evolution of the Far-Right Terror Threat, p. 17.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Europol, European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2020, p. 18.

⁽¹⁹⁾ The Soufan Center, White Supremacy Extremism, pp. 29-30.

Use of the internet

Right-wing extremists have made use of the internet to communicate since the mid-1980s. However, the internet now plays a crucial role in almost all their organisational aspects, including operational coordination, recruitment, dissemination of propaganda and financing. For these purposes, they make use of a **variety of online outlets**, including encrypted chat apps (e.g. Discord, Telegram, Hoop), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Gab, and VKontakte), and unmoderated message boards (e.g. Reddit, 4chan, 8kun, Stormfront, and BitChute). Such fringe platforms, either dedicated to right-wing extremism or colonised by these movements, provide online safe havens for extremists ⁽²⁰⁾.

The internet facilitates their traditional operational aspects, but also provides innovative strategic options. For instance, financing operations have become more sophisticated and less risky through the use of **crowdfunding mechanisms and cryptocurrencies** ⁽²¹⁾. The internet also provides VRWE groups with virtual harassment and intimidation tactics against targets and opponents, such as online **stalking, trolling and doxing** ⁽²²⁾.

Like other violent extremists, right-wing extremists generally make use of a combination of on- and offline methods. Some right-wing extremist movements, however, operate predominantly online; for instance, some Iron March networks ⁽²³⁾, such as the Atomwaffen Division and its European offshoots, have been created on the internet and are organised almost exclusively in online closed groups ⁽²⁴⁾.

Mainstreaming

Much has been written about the normalisation of radical-right politics, but mainstreaming also takes place within right-wing extremism ⁽²⁵⁾. Some right-wing extremist groups engage in political activities or pursue a **metapolitical approach** to normalise their views. For the Identitarian movement,

“the most important route to political power is not elections or violent street combat, but in thoroughly changing the dominant zeitgeist and people’s acceptable ideas and worldviews” ⁽²⁶⁾.

Garnering the media’s attention is crucial to influence the public debate. Therefore, Identitarian movements set up media-savvy actions, such as the “Defend Europe” campaign in 2017. This campaign saw Identitarians from across Europe charter a ship and disrupt humanitarian NGO vessels in the Mediterranean. Another crucial tactic is presenting extreme ideas in a moderate way, often through a specific vocabulary. Examples are Identitarian attempts to inject terms like “remigration” and “genderismus” into public life ⁽²⁷⁾.

Several **online methods** are used to make fringe right-wing culture more acceptable. Right-wing extremists parade their hateful views on the internet through humour and sarcasm. This allows them to package their views for more mainstream consumption, while defending them as “just a joke” ⁽²⁸⁾. Other preferred online normalisation techniques used by right-wing extremists are the dissemination of fake news, conspiracy theories, memes, trolling and shitposting ⁽²⁹⁾. The ultimate goal of these methods is to distribute their ideas, extend the boundaries of what is acceptable, but also undermine expertise of other users and derail productive discussion.

Right-wing extremists also normalise their ideas within the mainstream public by **participating in intellectual structures**. Inspired by the European New Right in the 1960s, taking up a modern and

⁽²⁰⁾ Conway et al., Right-Wing Extremists’ Persistent Online Presence, p. 3.

⁽²¹⁾ The Soufan Center, pp. 20-25.

⁽²²⁾ The term trolling indicates intentionally inflammatory or proactive behaviour on the internet. Doxing means publicly broadcasting private or identifying information accompanied by implicit or explicit requests to use the information for online and/or “real world” harassment purposes.

⁽²³⁾ The online forum Iron March, taken down in 2017, acted as a hub for neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups around the world. The forum was known for its extreme content and calls for violence.

⁽²⁴⁾ Bellingcat, Transnational White Terror.

⁽²⁵⁾ For the distinction between radical right and extreme right, we refer to: Radicalisation Awareness Network, Far-Right Extremism, pp. 6-7.

⁽²⁶⁾ Murdoch & Mulhall, From Banners to Bullets, p. 8.

⁽²⁷⁾ The term “remigration” indicated the idea of repatriation of non-white people. The term “genderismus” aims at comparing gender-related discourses to Marxism and Leninism by echoing socialism (or *sozialismus* in German).

⁽²⁸⁾ See, for example, the RAN ad hoc paper ‘Extremists’ Use of Humour’.

⁽²⁹⁾ The term refers to posting ostentatiously contextless content to an online forum with the effect of derailing discussions.

intellectual image serves to legitimise and mainstream extremist ideas and, ultimately, influence society. Right-wing extremists operate a whole range of think tanks, websites, newspapers, publishers and pseudoscience forums⁽³⁰⁾. Examples are the journals *Mankind Quarterly* and *American Renaissance*, and the *Scandza Forum*, which is held annually in Scandinavian countries as a gathering of white nationalists from all over the world. Extremist ideologies also enter mainstream culture through **commercialised products and clothing**. Young members of some contemporary right-wing extremist groups have moved away from the skinhead style:

“Buying a bomber jacket, shaving one’s head, and donning combat boots are no longer the ‘entry points’ to the right-wing scene. Today’s far-right youth can express their own individuality and still be right-wing, and commercial entities are both capitalizing on this and acting as driving forces of the phenomenon”⁽³¹⁾

Extreme right-wing youth often wear sophisticated and fashionable clothing brands that fit into their surroundings, but include subtle racist and nationalist symbols to recognise each other.

Past approaches, new opportunities

Promising practices for dealing with right-wing extremism

Initiatives to prevent and counter right-wing extremism exist in various EU Member States. Some have been developed a few decades ago, others are more recent. This section presents a selection of promising practices derived from such initiatives.

Fight discrimination, racism and xenophobia. A specific focus in preventive initiatives lies on raising public awareness regarding xenophobia and racist violence. The Finnish EXIT project in the city of Joensuu, where problems related to right-wing extremism rose starkly in the 1990s, focused on addressing xenophobic attitudes amongst local youth. One successful method in this project was aimed at providing social arenas based on tolerance, where local and immigrant youth could mingle and engage in meaningful activities⁽³²⁾. Other promising practices in EU Member States counter discrimination and xenophobia at an institutional level. The creation of a specific committee or centre can exert influence on the public debate around the matter. Anti-racism regulations can also be imposed on civic projects and initiatives promoted by right-wing extremist movements⁽³³⁾.

Educational approaches. Preventive strategies often focus on educational work with young people, both through youth work and in-school and out-of-school education. Grassroots organisations can play a useful role in such educational programmes. The Fair Skills approach by the German NGO Cultures Interactive has recently also been implemented in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. This practice reaches out to young people from various at-risk communities to train them as youth-cultural workshop facilitators in a peer-learning setting. The educational activities focus on, amongst others, civic education, mediation exercises and self-awareness group work⁽³⁴⁾.

Support to victims of right-wing extremism. Right-wing violence and hate crimes target not only the direct victim(s) but also their surrounding communities. Supporting affected individuals and their communities in the aftermath of extremist violence can help them deal with such incidents. This can also play a role in the prevention of future incidents, as the lack of adequate responses to extremist violence can lead to revictimisation and radicalisation amongst victims and their surrounding communities. Promising practices also assist and encourage victims to report extremist violence: victims may decide not to report if they do not trust law enforcement or if they are convinced that it will not lead to any changes⁽³⁵⁾. In the UK, the Tell

⁽³⁰⁾ See, for example: Murdoch & Mulhall, *From Banners to Bullets*, pp. 10-12; van der Merwe, *The Fringe & the Far Right*.

⁽³¹⁾ Miller-Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, p. 2.

⁽³²⁾ Bjørge, *Exit Neo-Nazism*, p. 29.

⁽³³⁾ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *Strategies for Combating Right-Wing Extremism in Europe*, pp. 547-559.

⁽³⁴⁾ Weillböck & Kossack, *Prevention of group hatred and right-wing extremism in Germany and Central and Eastern Europe*.

⁽³⁵⁾ Ramalingam, *On the Front Line*, pp. 51-52.

MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) project has sought to enhance the evidence base on anti-Muslim hate speech and crime by reaching out to victimised communities on social media ⁽³⁶⁾.

Inter-agency task forces. Effective information sharing and cooperation between various actors has been crucial in the success of previous prevention initiatives. Norway's EXIT programme, engaged in extracting young members from neo-Nazi and skinhead movements, saw the involvement of police officers, youth and social workers, teachers and experts. The involvement of parents was also deemed crucial: they brought useful information to the table and played an important role in reorienting the behaviour of their children. Parental networks were useful to build knowledge and share information, both between parents themselves and with outsiders, such as police and social agencies ⁽³⁷⁾.

Involvement of former extremists. Former extremists can play a useful role in preventive and disengagement initiatives. Their personal experience within the VRWE scene can give them a powerful credibility and create possibilities for meaningful discussions with extremists willing to leave the scene.

Previous experiences have led to some useful **lessons learned** regarding the involvement of former extremists. First, it is necessary to take into account that not all formers are suitable to work in a P/CVE setting: they might not aim to do this work for the right motivations, suffer from traumas or haven't come to terms with their past. Involving formers in the prevention of (violent) extremism can also be difficult to accept from a societal point of view ⁽³⁸⁾. Second, professionalisation trainings have proven crucial to assist former extremists in their disengagement or preventive work ⁽³⁹⁾. Third, disengagement initiatives employing former extremists benefit from (risk) assessments and screenings. For instance, continuous assessments of the location of both client and former on a violent extremism spectrum are valuable. This can help to determine whether the engagement of a former, depending on their individual level of development or expertise to discuss certain aspects during the deradicalisation process, can be useful. An inaccurate assessment could be counterproductive or even backfire: it could further radicalise the client or have negative effects on the deradicalisation process of the former extremist self ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

Outreach opportunities for extremists. Members of VRWE groups can face significant difficulties if they want to quit the scene, because some of these groups are prone to violence and are driven by strong group pressure. For this reason, some EU Member States have set up activities to actively reach out to violent extremists. Other initiatives adopt a passive approach, whereby a person wanting to leave an extremist organisation can easily reach out. In Germany and Sweden, EXIT programmes have installed a telephone hotline, open at all hours to persons considering leaving the scene, with trained staff able to provide advice and support. Similar hotlines can also be useful to assist parents of extremists or children/teenagers who show signs of radicalisation ⁽⁴¹⁾.

Disengagement, rather than deradicalisation. Initiatives aimed at extracting individuals from the right-wing scene often focus strongly on providing assistance with rebuilding a new life. These programmes, set up within or outside prison, offer psychological and social assistance, practical support (e.g. finding employment and housing), and in some cases physical safety ⁽⁴²⁾. Combating the extremist ideology often comes in a second instance. This approach is based on the idea that people join extremist organisations not only for ideological reasons but also in search of status, identity, support or power ⁽⁴³⁾. It is also linked to experiences showing how challenging extremist ideology directly can backfire. VRWE groups school their members with relevant counterarguments. Therefore, engaging in ideological discussions can put a person in defensive mode or simply remain futile ⁽⁴⁴⁾.

Counter-narratives and alter-narratives. Some organisations have attempted to challenge or supplant right-wing extremist narratives, either online or offline. The German NGO Amadeu Antonio Foundation set up an initiative called No-nazi.net that focuses on monitoring, evaluating and combating hate speech and

⁽³⁶⁾ Proctor & Prior, Anti-Radicalisation Report 2019, p. 35.

⁽³⁷⁾ Bjørge, Exit Neo-Nazism, pp. 21-22.

⁽³⁸⁾ Radicalisation Awareness Network, Dos and don'ts of involving formers in PVE/CVE work.

⁽³⁹⁾ Davey et al., An Imprecise Science, p. 13.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Radicalisation Awareness Network, Exit Strategies, pp. 42-43.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Bjørge, Exit Neo-Nazism, pp. 27-29.

⁽⁴²⁾ Due to their proneness to use violence, leaving right-wing extremist scenes can involve risks for victimisation by the group and former enemies.

⁽⁴³⁾ van der Heide & Schuurman, Re-integratie van delinquenten met een extremistische achtergrond, pp. 16-17.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Butt & Tuck, European Counter-Radicalisation and De-radicalisation, p. 13.

right-wing extremism in social networks ⁽⁴⁵⁾. A creative method to counter the online presence of extremist narratives was used by the British online movement English Disco Lovers. In a Google bombing campaign, the group intended to replace the far-right English Defence League as the top search engine result for the acronym 'EDL'.

Challenges in dealing with modern right-wing extremism

Many promising initiatives to counter VRWE were developed in the 1990s and 2000s. Thus, it is worthwhile to question whether they are able to deal with current manifestations of right-wing extremism. This section identifies some potential challenges.

Reaching at-risk groups. P/CVE programmes for right-wing extremism were often developed around neo-Nazi and skinhead youth subcultures. They focused on young people, ranging from teenagers (some not even 13 years old) to young adults ⁽⁴⁶⁾. Today, right-wing extremism is no longer exclusively a youth problem: neo-Nazi organisations, anti-Islam movements and vigilante groups see a significant involvement of adults ⁽⁴⁷⁾. Some key actors in existing practices (such as parents, teachers and youth workers) are irrelevant to reach this older segment of right-wing extremist sympathisers. It might be worthwhile to extend existing practices to at-risk adults and engage actors able to reach out to them, such as unemployment, social and mental health services.

Detecting signals of radicalisation. The involvement of an individual in the above-mentioned youth subcultures was often relatively obvious for outsiders: members of such groups openly displayed symbols, tattoos and specific clothing as a means to distinguish themselves from the general public and strengthen their "in-group" feeling. Some contemporary VRWE groups, on the contrary, aim to blend in with mainstream society. This may complicate the detection of extremist behaviour or appearance. Initiatives may therefore want to focus on disrupting outdated stereotypes on VRWE among firstline practitioners. Trainings on how to recognise the new codes, symbols and tactics of right-wing extremists, in both the offline and online world, can be valuable ⁽⁴⁸⁾.

From offline to online monitoring? In 1995, local authorities in Oslo arrested 78 extremists after they were detected in their hangout called Nationalist House ⁽⁴⁹⁾. Today, a similar mass arrest in an offline gathering place seems difficult since extremist expressions and "get togethers" increasingly take place online. The increase in extremist activity on the internet can pose challenges to monitoring, prosecution and conviction of such offences. Challenges can be aggravated if it is unclear who the responsible authorities for online extremism are and which procedures for intervention should be followed. Some EU Member States have assigned online monitoring to a central agency that refers cases to local police for intervention. They can estimate whether extremists pose a real danger or if there is need for follow up by, for instance, relevant social services.

Cross-border cooperation. The VRWE scene is internationally strongly connected, yet it has often been analysed through the frame of national or domestic contexts ⁽⁵⁰⁾. European and international cooperation and coordination is crucial to tackle VRWE. For instance, a coordinated effort is necessary to counter online and offline gatherings by right-wing extremists. Right-wing groups simply bypass regulations in one EU Member State by organising concerts or rallies in a neighbouring country. Similarly, only through a coordinated effort can Member States continue mounting pressure on tech and social media companies to remove extremist content on the internet.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Radicalisation Awareness Network, Delivering Counter - or Alternative Narratives, pp. 49-50.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Daugherty, Deradicalization and Disengagement, p. 230.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ For instance, a recent study on right-wing extremism in Norway demonstrated that the average age of radicalisation has significantly increased from 22,4 years in the 1990s to 30,9 years in the 2010s. Source: Politiets Sikkerhetstjeneste, What is the background of right-wing extremists in Norway?, p. 5.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ See for example, Radicalisation Awareness Network, Far-Right Extremism in the Classroom, p. 7.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ Daugherty, p. 226.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ The Soufan Center, p. 11.

Recommendations

Right-wing extremism has evolved significantly since the 1990s. This paper has outlined the increasing internationalisation of right-wing movements, their use of the internet, and efforts to mainstream their hateful and violent narratives. Today, right-wing extremism has become a more diversified, diffused and truly globalised threat.

Some measures adopted to deal with past manifestations of extreme right-wing violence have been quite successful and present promising practices. Yet, they were often developed around a youth subcultural expression of neo-Nazi and skinhead movements. Modern right-wing movements see the involvement of adults and often make use of more sophisticated means and more ambiguous measures of expression. This paper has provided some reflections on how P/CVE programmes can readapt to counter current manifestations of VRWE. In the meantime, some practical recommendations can be useful to help frontline practitioners in their daily work:

- **Broaden the target audience.** VRWE is not a predominantly young phenomenon. Therefore, approaches must be adapted to better reach adults.
- **Reach out to online audiences.** Online preventive measures are necessary to act against toxic but legal VRWE expressions that are not subject to legislation or companies' moderation policies. Youth workers, educators and mentors should consider increasing their online presence.
- **Create online and offline safe spaces** where genuine grievances and frustrations (e.g. regarding migration, diversity) can be expressed and acknowledged. These concerns are often manipulated by VRWE rhetoric or reinforced in echo chambers. The presence of space for debate and dialogue can help break the echo chamber effects of closed physical and social networks.
- **Engage in decoding** the ideological meaning and strategic dimension of **VRWE online content and tactics.** Right-wing narratives often seem "innocent" because they are hidden in mainstream narratives or humour. Right-wing extremist narratives are not a marginal phenomenon that takes place only in fringe platforms but also appear in certain mainstream media outlets (e.g. the comments sections of online newspapers).
- **Teach people how to navigate the contentious culture of online debate.** Media literacy initiatives can help people form and express a digital opinion with respect for the boundaries of democratic debate and discussion. Media education should also teach people critical thinking skills and enable them to detect fake news.
- **Reinforce implementation of regulations against online hate speech** and harassment. It is equally important to increase awareness on these regulations amongst victims and the general public.
- **Support and empower victims** of hate crimes as well as their communities with access to justice and other types of assistance. This is crucial to avoid revictimisation and potential radicalisation, but also to increase the reporting of VRWE crimes.
- **Apply a multi-agency cooperation to detect and disengage VRWE.** This is fundamental to address the various facets of the life of a radicalised individual and respond adequately. Involving former extremists is a potentially effective practice, if the former is deemed suitable for this type of work and is adequately trained and supervised.
- **Extend existing P/CVE measures in the penitentiary system** to right-wing extremist inmates. Some Member States have detected how right-wing extremists actively spread propaganda, recruit followers and create networks in prisons. It is crucial to prevent right-wing inmates from forming influential subcultures within the prison system that can attract other inmates, for instance, by offering protection, material advantages or a group identity. It can be useful to separate charismatic right-wing extremists from the general prison population to avoid the possibility that they radicalise other inmates.
- **Increase coordination and cooperation with stakeholders across borders** to tackle the growing transnational dimension of VRWE. Improved coordination between local, regional and national

authorities of the different MS can be useful, for instance, to counter the VRWE scene online and their offline gatherings, such as marches, rallies, music festivals and sporting events.

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