

14/12/2021

CSEP BRIEFING

COMMIT – Communication Campaign against extremism and radicalisation

Project description

The objective of COMMIT is to dissuade a susceptible and vulnerable audience from extremism, radicalisation and terrorism by providing them with the skills needed to co-develop and disseminate alternative narratives that promote democratic values, tolerance and cooperation, and also by equipping them with the competences needed to identify and resist online content of intolerance and violence.



The target audience of this project is young people (13-25 years), university students of communication, and civil society organisations (CSOs), media professionals and other stakeholders. The project consists of a Europe-wide campaign and campaigns specifically targeted at young people in Italy, Austria, The Netherlands and Greece.

This paper follows a briefing structure, in which it summarises the campaign, the main achievements of the project, the lessons learned on online campaigning in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), and includes links to several campaign messages.



Summary of the campaign

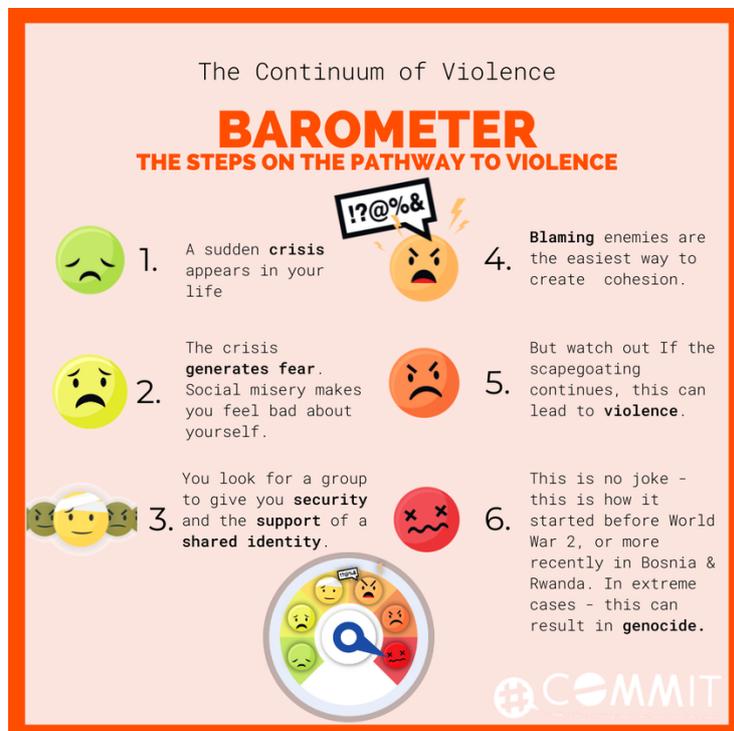
The COMMIT campaign aims to raise awareness about the basic triggers used to incite hate and to stimulate active bystandership to resist them. The campaign consists of three 'lessons' to discover the roots of hatred.

1. **Fear and hate: an intimate relationship.** This lesson is focused on showing how hate speech, fake news and populist propaganda thrive on fear and loss of positive identity, an easy hook to hate and violence.
2. **In-grouping and scapegoating: how we love our enemies.** This lesson is focused on reflecting on how fear and insecurity nurture the dynamic of "us vs. them" that justifies hatred and violence.
3. **Active bystandership: the "magic bullet".** This lesson is focused on inviting young people to act consciously, tackling problems rather than attacking people.

The campaign is developed on a European level with a more general message, but it has also national pages to reflect countries' specificities and targeting local levels.

All the contents of the campaigns are available on the project's website <https://commitproject.eu/campaigns/> and in social media (COMMIT EUROPE [Facebook](#) & [Instagram](#)). One specific example can be found via this [Facebook link](#).

The communication strategy of the COMMIT campaigns is based on the Continuum of Violence approach, with the aim of stimulating the audience's awareness of how the steps of this pathway can be easily experienced in the everyday life, increasing resilience against hate and violence.



Achievements

- Approximately 80 young people (university students and CSO members) have been trained in four different countries. Another 60 youngsters from secondary schools and youth centres will be trained by the end of the project.
- There were 10 social media pages created and the campaign was launched on social media in July 2021. It will run until June 2022.

Lessons learned

- **The message:** be provocative, stimulate reactions in the public for engaging them in further discussions and reflections; make appeal to emotions; refer to “hot” topics ongoing in the country.
- **The messenger:** it is important to use personal statements, referring to (well-known) people. Do not send general messages but give to the audience someone to identify with, or to relate to.
- **The action:** it is important to combine online campaigning with offline actions or follow-up.

What would you do differently next time?

- COMMIT is now analysing the results and impact of the contents published for adjusting our strategy and reaching a bigger impact of the campaign.
- Until now the main difficulties encountered were due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also on how to combine the need to create a common campaign for all partner countries, assuring a European added value to our intervention, with the need to take into consideration national specificities and the hyper-local level, required for an effective communication.
- COMMIT would seek and create possibilities of collaborating directly with social media organisations like Facebook.

Follow-up

What has been the added value of this project for P/CVE policies?

- The added value of the project is that it addresses both sides of the communication spectrum. On the one side you have the senders (university students studying Communication) who are trained on how to create alternative and counter-narratives for P/CVE with the aim to change the narrative on social media by offering different perspectives and combating populist propaganda and fake news. On the other side, the recipients (young people susceptible to sympathise with extremist messages and groups) who are empowered to resist hate incitement by stimulating their critical thinking for a conscious use of social media and active citizenship online.
- Both these sides (sender and recipient) are young people involved as creators and users. The COMMIT campaign is co-created together with youngsters, from youth for youth.
- Furthermore, COMMIT combines online activities with offline trainings that involve young people in the process of campaign development with a co-creation approach. University students and CSO members were involved in a Capacity Building initiative, and young people from secondary schools and youth centres took part in a series of workshops. The goal was to learn how to develop alternative and counter-narrative on social media for disseminating awareness about hate-incitement processes and how to promote resilience and active bystandership. Thus, they were the ones directly involved in the creation of the contents addressed to their peers, giving the best insight about language, medias, topics and messages that can appeal the target group of their age.

Do you have any strategic recommendations for policymakers?

- In our view, it is fundamental to work on training and awareness raising activities with young people, not only through campaigning but also through workshops, seminars and training activities in schools, youth centres, and where the young people are more at risk of radicalisation. This is essential for reaching the target group and acting at a preventive level.
- It is foremost important to offer up-to-date and relevant training opportunities to practitioners working in the field, providing ad hoc teaching materials and strategies for those who come into daily contact with the youth population (teachers, school managers, community workers, street educators, health workers, prison staff, etc.), as well as community workers, law enforcement personnel and frontline workers.
- It is important to create networks between practitioners and to support wider joint initiatives to explore different approaches and implementation methods. The key is to develop and share good practices, implementing more effective long-term interventions.
- To adopt a systemic and organic approach, to systemise individual prevention initiatives to pool knowledge, analysis of needs, good practices, exploiting the existing practices and giving them sustainability.

How can it be followed up on (in international, national and/or local context) or what could/should be the next step(s)?

- To give sustainability to the COMMIT activities, it would be important to continue to work on this field, exploiting the developed approach, disseminating it towards other youngsters through training and other face to face initiatives, maintaining the campaigns alive and connecting it to other strong initiatives already existing, for joining efforts and reaching a stronger impact. COMMIT would like to propose:
 - training opportunities for CSO members and practitioners working in the field, connecting them especially at local and national level for strengthening the impact of initiatives at a local level, but also at the EU level for exchanging good practices and exploiting successful initiatives.
 - training opportunities for young people in schools, youth centres, migrant reception centres, and disadvantaged areas.
 - promoting critical thinking, education to complexity, awareness about psychological triggers leading to polarisations and violence.