



PREVENTION OF VIOLENT RADICALISATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE



FINNISH NATIONAL
AGENCY FOR EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

It is important that people working in early childhood education and care (ECEC) know what violent radicalisation and the phenomena related to it are and prevent and recognise them. From the point of view of ECEC, paying attention to children who have been exposed to the effects of violent radicalisation in their own living environment is central. What kind of action should we take for example when these children display different symptoms? How do we identify the guardians who are engaged in extremist movements and how do we cooperate with them?

This brochure has been compiled to support the work of the management and personnel in ECEC. It explains what violent radicalisation is and what kind of factors may lead to it.

VIOLENT RADICALISATION

What is meant by violent extremism and radicalisation?

Violent extremism means that violence is used, threatened with, encouraged or justified by a world view or ideology. Violent radicalisation is a process that may result in the person supporting violent extremist groups or joining them. In its most extreme form, violent radicalisation may lead to terrorist acts. It is also essential to distinguish between violence and violent extremism. When violence is used as a means of solving conflicting worldviews or a cultural conflict, for example in disputes, it is not extremism.

Hate speech, racism and violent extremism have been on the increase across Europe. The Ministry of the Interior estimates that the threat posed by violent radicalisation and extremism is still low in Finland. However, it has been increasing in recent years. According to the Ministry's situation overview for the year 2018, the violent extremist groups existing in Finland represent violent extreme right and violent extreme left radicalisation and violent radicalisation motivated by religious fundamentalism. Moreover, extremist thinking has contributed to acts such as the school massacres. Violent extreme right has been the most visible group in the statistics on suspected

The furthering of radical ideas loses its acceptability if the ideologies are not promoted through democratic, non-violent measures.

offences in Finland. As phenomena, the different types of violent radicalisation feed one another, whether justified with right-wing, left-wing or religious ideologies.

One of the most frequently asked questions is whether we want to prohibit radical thoughts altogether. When channelled in an appropriate way, radicalism may be a positive phenomenon and it may sometimes be required for changes to take place. Many good things have their origins in radicalisation. A positive societal change – such as women's right to vote in Finland at the beginning of the 20th century – sometimes requires radical views that challenge the structures of society. Problems arise if violence starts to replace democracy. On the other hand, violent radicalisation is a marginal phenomenon and the majority of those who become radicalised never resort to violence.



Photo: Nima Rodioyoff

The term “hate speech” shall be understood as covering all forms of expressions that spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance.

Recommendation No. R (97) 20 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

The Government has set itself an objective according to which in 2025, Finland will be welcoming and international, rich with different cultures and languages, displaying a positive attitude towards one another and the rest of the world. The challenging economic situation, uncertainties related to the rapid changes in society and the refugee crisis have, however, created a breeding ground for hostile use of language, extremist views and sharp polarisation in Finland and elsewhere in Europe. Hate speech shakes the foundations of trust and the sense of security. It also increases negative behaviour against groups such as immigrants and other minorities and strengthens social polarisation in society.

HATE SPEECH THREATS DEMOCRACY

Hate speech is a phenomenon that is at the moment increasingly limiting the multi-voiced, democratic discussion in Finland. Especially, it limits the right of women, girls and minorities to participate in the public debate. Hate speech was defined as one of the worst human rights problems in Finland in the periodic review of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

According to a report published by the Ministry of Justice in 2016, hate speech affects the sense of security and mental health of the people it is targeted at. It also affects their trust in the authorities and makes them avoid certain places. In Finland, hate speech is targeted especially at women and immigrants. Preventing hate speech will therefore essentially improve the position and the human rights of these groups in our country.

The measures taken to prevent and intervene in harassment and hate speech must be visible in the everyday life of citizens and included in the work carried out in early childhood education and care. The Ministry of Justice has set up a project titled Against Hate to develop the work carried out to prevent hate crime and hate speech.

What kind of factors may lead to violent radicalisation?

It is necessary to try to understand the causes and underlying factors when preventing and tackling violent radicalisation and extremism. Who gets interested in radical movements and why? Reasons for violent radicalisation can be sought at the global level and at the level of society, social interaction and individuals. Usually, there are many contributing factors in the background. There is no single pathway or a certain profile that leads to violent radicalisation.

Although we cannot distinguish a clear pathway to violent radicalisation or any clear signs in advance, it has been observed that experienced injustice and social relationships with persons already involved in extremist activities are central factors. Experiences and feelings of injustice, social exclusion, meaninglessness and sometimes bullying are factors that may contribute to hate speech and racist behaviour. It is therefore important to increase participation and interaction and to strengthen people's knowledge of the issue and their ability to put themselves in the position of another person. We must intervene in hate speech and racism both

by taking fast-acting measures and by working in ways that help to prevent negative phenomena.

Violent radicalisation is based on an ideology that divides people into us and the others and justifies violence against the others. Violent extremist movements and their members do not acknowledge the human rights or the equality and equal value of all people regardless of their background, religion, personal qualities or other similar factors. Another typical feature of violent radicalisation is that fear of punishment does not prevent the act of violence. These people are often so convinced of the justification of their actions that they are ready to sacrifice their own life. There is also evidence that possible acts of violence can be prevented by discussing their consequences.

THERE IS NO EXHAUSTIVE EXPLANATION FOR VIOLENT RADICALISATION

Geographic conflicts, social exclusion, experienced unfair treatment, an identity crisis, other personal crises, idealisation of violence or disappointment with democracy may serve as factors that push people towards extremist movements. The sense of belonging to a group, power, order, commitment, loyalty, love of adventure, heroism or an ideological duty may for their part attract young people to violent extremist movements.

In other words, there is no exhaustive single explanation for why people join violent extremist movements. Most people in the world never resort to supporting violence, even if they come from challenging backgrounds. On the other hand, people from entirely normal, even wealthy backgrounds may feel frustrated about society and social injustices and resort to violence as a means of bringing about a change. However, social integration seems to play an important role in the prevention of extremist movements and violent radicalisation. Marginalised children and young people without opportunities to make their voice heard are more vulnerable to the promises made by the recruiters than others.

Preventing violent radicalisation and extremism and intervening in them are the responsibility of the entire society, including early childhood education and care.

Finland, too, should therefore pay increasing attention to measures that prevent marginalisation both among immigrants and the native Finnish population.

In the West, experiences of discrimination, racism and exclusion make children and young people more vulnerable to the messages, ideologies and influence of extremist movements. An extremist movement may be the first community that makes the child or the young person feel appreciated and valued. A sense of being excluded, unemployment, dropping out of school or a lack of education create a breeding ground for radicalisation. As regards immigrants, successful integration and language skills also play a significant role. A perception of suffered injustice fosters the phenomenon.



Distinctive signs of violent radicalisation

Although violent radicalisation is a very current subject, people know very little about it. It is the responsibility of the entire society together including ECEC to prevent violent radicalisation and extremism and to intervene in them.

A changed circle of friends, changes in lifestyle or in the ways of spending free time, stricter opinions and an unusual interest or strong opinions in certain topics are among the signs that may indicate violent radicalisation. The individual signs as such are not necessarily something to be concerned about. Instead, it is more important to look at their role in the different stages of the individual's life and in relation to one another.

There is no exhaustive list of distinctive signs of violent radicalisation. Early childhood education and care personnel should recognise changes that give cause for concern in children's or a guardian's behaviour or in what they say. It is important that the personnel and the ECEC provider agree on an operating model for taking action if signs of violent radicalisation are noticed. It should also be remembered that many things can be clarified by asking the person concerned directly.

Multiprofessional cooperation is especially important with children of pre-primary or early childhood education age. To enable trusting cooperation and an atmosphere that enables seeking support, the guardians must be included in this cooperation as early as possible. The cooperation conducted with different authorities in ECEC is discussed with the guardians. If the child's guardians have recently moved to Finland or have an immigrant background, it should be taken into consideration that corruption may be common in their country of origin and the authorities are generally not trusted.

PREVENTION OF VIOLENT RADICALISATION

The objective in Finland is that there is always someone to turn to if a community has concerns about a person who has become radicalised. The aim is that we could act the same way as when we see an accident: if someone falls in the street, we check how the person is and do what we can to help, but call an ambulance if necessary. We do not start to diagnose or repair the possible injuries ourselves but react by calling professional help.

The responsibility of supervisors should also be remembered in early childhood education and care. Special needs teachers, child welfare clinics and child welfare authorities may also help by assessing the situation and contacting the police as necessary. The police ensure that the person is directed to the services offered by the municipality or non-governmental organisations if necessary. It is important that people at the local level know who to contact and act as agreed.

When children are concerned, it is also important to remember that they cannot be held responsible for the activities and ideologies of their guardians. For example, children whose guardians have participated in terroristic activities or children who have lived in war zones have not been able to choose their circumstances.

Prevention is always more effective than dealing with the consequences.

Preventative measures

Violent radicalisation and extremism can best be tackled through preventative work. Prevention is always more effective than dealing with the consequences. Prevention increases people's safety and their sense of safety and reduces confrontation of different population groups and the polarisation of society.

Violent radicalisation is not a challenge faced only by Finland, the Nordic countries or Europe. It concerns the entire world. Extremism also constantly transforms itself. The prevention of violent radicalisation and extremism is carried out at local, national and international levels. Finland also participates actively in international cooperation. Through international activities, countries not only exchange knowledge of experiences and good practices, but also collectively reflect on different measures for the prevention of violent radicalisation.



It is particularly important for the future of children who have grown up in the sphere of violent extremism that they are not excluded from the pathway to growth and learning.

The Ministry of the Interior uses the National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism to coordinate the nationwide work to prevent radicalisation. The action plan has been prepared in wide cooperation with authorities, organisations and representatives of communities. The National Action Plan implements the international objectives that have been set by the European Union and the UN. Nordic cooperation develops research and practical measures for the prevention of violent radicalisation and extremism.

The target group of the action plan is groups and individuals at risk of being radicalised. The aim is to ensure that the capacities and permanent structures for the prevention of violent radicalisation and extremism are in place everywhere in Finland. The aim is especially to enhance the ability of children and young people to recognise messages and influence that incite violence and protect themselves from them.

In Finland, parties such as the police, teachers, other personnel in early childhood education and care, social workers, healthcare professionals, youth workers, organisations and religious and other communities do preventative work at the grassroots level.

There are children in ECEC whose guardians support some kind of violent extremist ideology. At the same time, the guardians may pass on to their children their values and attitudes towards linguistic and cultural diversity, ethnic or religious groups or sexual minorities. It is particularly important for the future of children who have grown up in the sphere of violent extremism that they are not excluded from the pathway to growth and learning.

It is important that the personnel in ECEC understand the situation of families and children who have lived in conflict zones and know how to work with these children, for example, when they display different symptoms. Some of these children and guardians may be severely traumatised and their symptoms may therefore include threatening behaviour or violence. Not only men, but also women have often actively supported terrorist activities. Violent propaganda and indoctrination have been targeted at children and ideologies and views that encourage violence have been hammered into their heads. Boys may have undergone military training from a very early age and girls have sometimes been considered to be old enough to marry at the age of nine.

The importance of early childhood education and care in preventative work

Early childhood education and care is a service that promotes equality and equity among children and prevents their social exclusion. Like child welfare clinics, ECEC plays a central role in the prevention of violent radicalisation for several reasons. ECEC personnel meet children's guardians on a daily basis and work in close cooperation with them, providing the children with continuity and safety. Bringing up issues directly in conversations helps to develop the relationship between the personnel and the family towards openness instead of speculations. The National core curriculum for ECEC and its underlying values, work methods, objectives and contents also create a natural starting point for reducing the risks of violent extremism.

The task of ECEC is to protect and promote children's right to a good and safe childhood.





The underlying values of the National core curriculum for early childhood education and care (2018) govern all of the activities in ECEC. The task of ECEC is to protect and promote children's right to a good and safe childhood. The aim is to enable all children to feel valued and understood just the way they are. Children are guided in expressing themselves, their opinions and thoughts. The personnel's responsibility is to create an atmosphere that respects everyone to enable children to feel that they are listened to. The most important thing for children is to have a reliable adult to whom they can tell or express things. Small children often do not use only words but also other means of expression to express their thoughts, concerns and what has happened at home.

The personnel are responsible for steering children to respect human rights and to support them in their growth as a person. Growing up as a person involves taking others into consideration, friendliness, fairness and the ability to feel joy for oneself and for others. It also involves learning to do the right thing and act fairly. It is important that the objectives and contents of Me and our community, one of the learning areas in the National core curriculum, are discussed in teaching.

Good self-esteem, a sense of belonging to a community and the perception that there are genuine opportunities to participate and get involved are factors that protect children and young people from marginalisation. ECEC personnel ensure that all children have the opportunity to participate and influence matters that affect their own life. At the same time, the personnel lay a foundation for competences related to equity, equality, cultural and linguistic diversity and other democratic values.

Children's thinking and learning skills develop in interaction with other people and the environment, forming the basis for the development of other competences and lifelong learning. Acquiring and structuring information and creating something new require creative and critical thinking. Education and teaching can be used to guide children in forming their own opinions and critically evaluating different ways of thinking and acting. In ECEC, children are encouraged to ask questions and challenge things, but they also practice the skill of listening to, recognising and understanding different views.

It is important to discuss ethical and moral issues such as good and evil, friendship, telling right from wrong, justice or causes of fear, sadness and joy with children. Ethical questions are discussed with the children so that they feel safe and accepted.

Matters that enhance children's well-being, such as the importance of rest, nutrition, physical activity and mental well-being, are discussed with the children. The sense of security lays the foundation for all learning and growth. Jointly agreed rules and operating methods help create a learning environment with a safe atmosphere that encourages showing respect for others and sharing responsibility. A safe atmosphere allows showing different kinds of emotions. The task of ECEC personnel is to help children in expressing their feelings and in self-regulation.

The teachers are free to choose their work material and work methods. Many human rights and peace education organisations as well as organisations that improve media literacy have produced support material related to topics such as resolving conflicts, living in peace, promoting empathy skills and critical media literacy for the use of the personnel.

Supporting children and families is important

Violent radicalisation and extremism are not new phenomena in Finland. Through the ages, extremist activities have been used in Finland in order to change society through violence. Violent extremism as a phenomenon has been highlighted by the media particularly strongly after the 9/11 attacks and it has stimulated societal debate and caused fear. ECEC personnel may find it uncomfortable and difficult to talk about these topics. They lack accurate information on the phenomena as well as experience and good practices. It is not always clear how we should react and respond to comments that indicate extremist views. For example, personnel may feel unsure about when to contact the police or child welfare authorities about a child or a guardian. The operating practices of child welfare authorities should also be explained

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to the child's guardian as the guardian may be under the false impression that involving the child welfare authorities will always lead to the child being taken into care. It is very important that no one is stigmatised, no misunderstandings take place and no overinterpretations are made.

To be able to support children in an appropriate way, ECEC personnel need to know which of the children in their care have lived for example in a war zone. The work community should together consider how it can support a child that has been exposed to violent extremism. The child will want to be loyal to the parents, so it is important that the personnel have a sensitive attitude and way of speaking when dealing with the matter. The child needs time, an opportunity and a lot of support in adjusting to normal everyday life. The child also needs a sense of belonging to a group and being accepted. Measures are required in ECEC to reduce the child's sense of exclusion and to influence the possible violent features in the child's thinking and behaviour in such situations.

Enough information about violent radicalisation and extremism should be provided for ECEC centres and family daycare providers. Faced with new challenges, the personnel need support and tools, also regarding extremist views, to be able to carry

out difficult discussions about controversial issues with the child's guardians. What is meaningful is that the child feels safe and accepted in his or her living environment. The child should be allowed to express his or her thoughts freely, without the adults being provoked or feeling uncertain in the situation. Every effort should be made to include a child who displays symptoms or gives cause for concern and not exclude the child from the community because of the threat he or she poses. Instead, the child should be given support in using constructive ways of self-expression. Interaction in ECEC should be open, non-judgemental and based on honesty, empathy and trust.

The personnel in ECEC need an understanding of different concepts, information on the possible signs of and reasons for radicalisation and information on the influence of the media and social media. Above all, they need practical tools and confidence to have discussions with children also about issues that cause disputes. Children want to feel listened to, understood and supported. Small children must be able to feel as safe as possible instead of having the possibly threatening emotions they have had before.



The importance of discussion

Our current and future societal and global challenges are also reflected in children and young people. For example, climate change will probably increase the number of refugees arriving in Finland. Trust and mutual respect between citizens as well as the institutions maintaining them have been the pillars of wellbeing in Finland. Today's Finland has been built through cooperation. This unity is a strength that will help us tackle problems. We should be proud of this. If matters such as immigration and issues related to it are discussed in a constructive manner in the work communities of ECEC, it will be possible to develop the pedagogical discussion and understanding in them. It will also help to develop the operating culture based on the National core curriculum for ECEC. The work communities of ECEC constantly develop structures that ensure professional discussion practices.

There are currently many difficult conflicts in the world causing displacement, terrorism and other suffering and far-ranging consequences. Conflicts, suffering and their consequences cannot be ignored



in ECEC, either. It is important to ensure that children learn to understand diversity and similarity and, above all, learn to live in peace, respecting one another. In ECEC, the personnel should give the children a positive model for attitudes to diversity. The personnel's professional approach, attitude and operating practices are important factors in maintaining children's sense of security when issues related to violent radicalisation and extremism are discussed.

DON'T GIVE IN TO FEAR

Terrorists aim at causing fear of terrorism. Fearful people act differently from people who trust each other and feel safe. Fear awakes a need to find someone to blame. Fear increases polarisation and the need to divide people to us and the others. Fear fosters fear and has a wide-ranging impact on society.

It is difficult to control the fear of terrorism with facts. Comparing the number of casualties does not make it easier to control fear. Instead, it may increase the suspicion that the fear and insecurity are not taken seriously. For example, approximately 2,500 people die in accidents in Finland every year and a large proportion of accidents take place at home or in an environment that is familiar in some other way. Still, accidents do not cause fear. It is also important to realise that the media does not run impressive and dramatic stories about serious accidents that could happen to any of us.

We should be aware that we may cause unnecessary fear in children's minds by not talking about or not discussing matters

Because almost every child has to witness different national and international crises, conflicts or terrorist attacks at least through the media, it is important that the facts related to them are discussed in a safe environment. The fear of terrorism deeply undermines our fundamental sense of security and weakens our sense of being able to control our own life.

Although it may feel difficult to discuss terrorism, we should be aware that we may cause unnecessary fear in children's minds by not talking about or not discussing matters. If children do not get support for discussing the topics truthfully, there is a risk that their understanding becomes fragmented and they may include in it their own interpretations of what could have happened or what they imagine happened in the situation. For example, it was discovered in the United States after the 9/11 attacks that many small children imagined the twin towers had been hit by a large number of aircraft as the different media were repeatedly showing recordings and pictures of the crashes.

It is the adults' responsibility to put what has happened into the right perspective and help children understand shocking events in a way that is suitable



Photo: Nima Rodionoff

It is the adults' responsibility to put what has happened into the right perspective and help children understand shocking events in a way that is suitable for their developmental level.

for their developmental level. Matters should be discussed truthfully with children as they will inevitably hear about them from somewhere else.

Propaganda, conspiracy theories, fake news and all types of manipulation are the challenges we face today. We can all participate in the prevention of violent radicalisation and extremism by challenging and mitigating social polarisation. Conversations in the work community about assumptions that lead to violent radicalisation play a central role. Through joint discussions, it can be noticed how assumptions influencing in the background may affect preventative activities and whether prevention has the desired effect.

MORE ON THIS TOPIC

Topical background information on violent radicalisation, information on preventing it and different sets of material have been compiled on the website of the Finnish National Agency for Education.

The guide Constructive interaction has been published by the Finnish National Agency for Education to support educational institutions. The guide can also be used in ECEC. In addition, two entities of material published by the Council of Europe on this theme have been translated into

Finnish and Swedish. The website also has links to ongoing personnel training projects and to international channels for project financing.

The Council of Europe, UNESCO and the Nordic Council of Ministers are among the international cooperation partners that have developed web-based material. The website of the RAN network (Radicalisation Awareness Network) offers a wealth of examples of good practices in different countries.



ONLINE MATERIAL

Material for the prevention of violent extremism in the edu.fi online service (in Finnish)

http://edu.fi/yleissivistava_koulutus/hyvinvointi_koulussa/ekstremismin_ehkaisy/

National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism

<http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/80731>

The situation of women and children is reviewed in Violent extremism in Finland – situation overview 1/2018

http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/160892/SM_17_2018.pdf

Material concerning the measures (returnees and their families): Proposal for Arranging Cross-sectoral Cooperation on Managing Returnees from Conflict Zones

<http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/79612>

Meaningful in Finland: Action Plan

<http://minedu.fi/en/publication?pubid=URN:ISBN:978-952-263-415-3>

Report: Hate speech affects the victim's sense of security (link in Finnish)

https://oikeusministerio.fi/artikkeli/-/asset_publisher/selvitys-vihapuhe-vaikuttaa-uhrin-turvallisuuden-tunteeseen

Against Hate project (link in Finnish)

<https://oikeusministerio.fi/hanke?tunnus=OM005:00/2018>

What is hate speech? Website of the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman (link in Finnish)

<https://www.syrjinta.fi/vihapuhe>

PUBLICATIONS

Jamieson, A. and Flint, J. (2017) Talking about Terrorism: Responding to Children's Questions

Constructive interaction. A guide to reinforcing democratic participation and preventing hate speech and violent radicalisation

https://www.oph.fi/english/publications/2018/constructive_interaction

Kiistanalaisia aiheita opettamassa (translation of a publication of the Council of Europe: Living with Controversy: Teaching Controversial Issues Through Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights (EDC/HRE) Training Pack for Teachers)

http://www.oph.fi/julkaisut/2017/kiistanalaisia_aiheita_opettamassa

Kiistoja hallinnoimassa (translation of a publication of the Council of Europe: Managing controversy: Developing a strategy for handling controversy and teaching controversial issues in schools.

A self-reflection tool for school leaders and senior managers)

http://www.oph.fi/julkaisut/2017/kiistoja_hallinnoimassa

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