



PREVENTION OF VIOLENT RADICALISATION IN SCHOOLS AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS



FINNISH NATIONAL
AGENCY FOR EDUCATION

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VIOLENT RADICALISATION

What is meant by violent radicalisation?

Violent radicalisation and extremism mean that violence is used, threatened with, encouraged or justified by world view or ideology. In its most extreme form, radicalisation may lead to terrorist acts.

Hate speech, racism and violent extremism have increased 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. The types of radicalisation found in Finland are violent right-wing radicalisation, violent left-wing radicalisation, violent religious radicalisation and individual actors such as persons who carry out school massacres.

One of the most frequently asked questions is whether we want to prohibit radical thoughts altogether. When channelled in an appropriate way, radicalisation may be a positive phenomenon that may sometimes even be required for changes to take place. Many good things have their origins

in radicalisation. A positive change in society sometimes requires radical views that challenge the structures of society (e.g. women's right to vote, which was realised in Finland at the beginning of the 20th century). Violent radicalisation, however, is a marginal phenomenon and the majority of those who become radicalised never resort to violence.

The Government of Finland has set itself an objective according to which in 2025, Finland will be a welcoming and international country, rich with different languages and cultures and 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 attitudes and sharp polarisation in Finland and elsewhere in Europe. Hate speech shakes the foundations of trust and sense of safety. It also increases negative behaviour, for example, towards immigrants and other minorities.



Children's and young people's extremism must be faced in their own world, before it develops into networks and movements in the world of adults.

HATE SPEECH THREATENS 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 the report by the Ministry of Justice in 2016, hate speech affects the sense of security, mental health and trust in the authorities of the people it targets and makes them avoid moving in 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 Finland.

The measures taken to prevent harassment and hate speech and to intervene in them must be visible in the everyday life of citizens. This requires that citizens are encouraged to be active and their awareness is raised. It also requires courage to intervene, for example, by organising different campaigns. The organisation sector must play a strong role in defending human rights and in producing low threshold services. Different organisations should invest in human rights education and equality planning and these should be included in all work with children and young people.

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? The causes of violent radicalisation may be searched by looking into society and social interaction as well as the lives individual actors. In most cases there are many causes. There is no one path or profile leading to violent radicalisation.

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 and their ability to put themselves in the position of another person. We must intervene in hate speech and racism by taking both fast-acting measures and measures that help 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.

The Ombudsman for Children among others has expressed concern over extremist views of young people in Finland. Extremist views among young people must be faced and challenged. Without dialogue, the polarisation of society will increase. People may begin to feel that the rule of law does not provide security for them or meet their needs and start to look for solutions themselves. Children's and young people's extremism must be faced in their own world, before it develops into networks and movements in the world of adults.

NO EXHAUSTIVE EXPLANATION

Marginalisation, experiences of injustice, personal crises, idealisation of violence, disappointment with democracy or an identity crisis may push people towards extremism. The sense of belonging to a group, power, order, commitment, loyalty, love of adventure, heroism or an ideological duty may for their part attract people to violent extremist movements.

In other words, there is no exhaustive single explanation for why young people join violent extremist movements. Most young people in the world never resort to supporting violence, even if they come from challenging backgrounds. On the other hand, a young person from an entirely normal, even wealthy background may feel frustrated about society and



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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 young people without opportunities to make their voice heard are more vulnerable to the promises made by the recruiters than others. 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 young people more vulnerable to the messages, ideologies and influence of extremist movements. An extremist movement may be the first community that makes the young person feel appreciated and gives him or her a status. A sense of social exclusion, unemployment, dropping out of school or a lack of education creates a breeding ground for radicalisation. As regards immigrants, the success of integration and language skills also play a significant role. A perception of injustice fosters the phenomenon.

Distinctive signs of violent radicalisation

Although violent radicalisation is a very current subject, our awareness of it is poor. It is the responsibility of the entire society together to prevent violent radicalisation and extremism and to intervene in them.

A changed circle of friends, changes in lifestyle or in the way 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 examine 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. Teachers and people who work with children and young people must know how to spot changes that give cause for concern in children's and young people's behaviour and must always refer the matter to student welfare services.

PREVENTION OF VIOLENT RADICALISATION

Preventive 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 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 and extremism.

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

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in wide cooperation with authorities, organisations and representatives of communities. The national action plan implements the same objectives that have been set at an international level 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 that are in danger of becoming radicalised. Its 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.



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In Finland, parties such as the police, teachers, social workers, healthcare professionals, youth workers, organisations and religious and other communities do preventive work at the grassroots level.

As part of the Meaningful in Finland programme launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture, training is organised for those who work with children and young people to provide them with competences for working in a multicultural environment. Teaching staff and other professionals are coached to conduct difficult discussions related to issues such as hate speech, racist behaviour and the signals of radicalisation.

What can schools do?

Schools play a central role in the prevention of violent radicalisation for a number of reasons. Basic education reaches practically all children and upper secondary education a large number of young people. School is one of the most important places for societal education and growing into citizenship. It can function as a forum for social debate, in which also solutions to social problems and phenomena can be developed. Humanity, general knowledge and

ability, equality and democracy belong to the core values in the new National core curriculum for basic education.

Schools can do a lot to increase the wellbeing and prevent the marginalisation of children and young people. Good self-esteem, a sense of belonging to a community and the experience that there are genuine opportunities to be involved protect children and young people from marginalisation. Schools are responsible for teaching the essential competences needed for one's development as a human being and for democratic citizenship, such as an open mind, curiosity, a willingness to understand others, intercultural understanding and the skills required in democratic debate and peaceful conflict resolution. Critical thinking skills like the ability to understand the difference between opinions and facts are essential.

Teaching in schools is based on scientific knowledge and school has an important role in teaching children and young people to discuss matters from various perspectives and to justify their own opinions by correct facts. It is important to be aware that all comments are not equally justified and to learn to justify one's own opinions with valid information.

The pupils need the model of adults, a supportive atmosphere and plenty of space for processing matters together. Pupils are guided to act in a pluralistic society that values diversity and respects human rights, equality and fairness in accordance with the values and principles of democracy.

Schools and teachers are free to choose how to reach the goals and contents set for learning and what materials and methods to use. Many human rights and peace education organisations as well as organisations that improve media literacy have produced support material related to resolving conflicts, living in peace, promoting empathy skills and for critical media literacy for the use of teaching staff.

Like the other Nordic Countries, Finland emphasises schools' fundamental task to provide children and young people with a safe place for high-quality learning and to ensure that all pupils' needs are taken care of as well as possible. Not a single pupil must remain unnoticed and every challenge must be tackled immediately, also when the pupil may be becoming marginalised or radicalised or drifting to other problems. Well-functioning multi-disciplinary pupil and student welfare has a central role in the prevention.

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Photo: Satu Haavisto



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SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE IS IMPORTANT

Violent radicalisation and extremism are relatively new topics in Finland. Schools may find these topics uncomfortable and feel that it is difficult to talk about them. They lack accurate information, experience and good practices. Some teachers and principals feel uncertain about how to react and respond to young people's comments that indicate extremist views. The personnel in schools may feel unsure of when they should contact, for example, the police about a young person. It is very important that no young person is labelled and that no misunderstandings take place and no overinterpretations are made. We do not wish to send teachers in Finland a message that schools should especially be looking for or identifying young people who are becoming radicalised.

Schools should be provided with enough of the most accurate information on violent radicalisation. Faced with new challenges, teachers need support and tools to be able to carry out difficult discussions about controversial issues with young people, including discussions about extremist views. It is important to make young people feel safe and accepted in the school environment and allow them to express their thoughts without adults feeling uncertain or

being provoked by it. Interaction must be open and non-judgemental and it must be based on honesty and trust.

The starting point for the development of solutions is to enhance empathy and interaction skills and to do things collectively. The young person about whose situation there are concerns must be included in everything and an attempt must be made to include the person in the community instead of, for example, excluding the person because of the threat he or she may pose. Shared views and decisions with which everyone can live spring from a dialogue. For example, we can ask children and young people what we would want Finland to look like in five years' time.

Teachers' task is to provide the opportunities for learning, but they also have to have basic knowledge of violent extremism. Teachers need an understanding of different concepts, information on the possible signs and reasons of radicalisation and on the influence of the media. Above all, educators must have practical tools and confidence to have discussions with children and young people also about controversial topics. A young person wants to feel listened to, understood and supported – and not feel threatened.

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The new National core curriculum, its underlying values, work methods, objectives and contents also create a natural starting point for reducing the risks of violent radicalisation.

Schools that encourage a dialogue

Schools must pay attention to ensuring that every young person feels seen and heard. It is one of the fundamental needs of all human beings to feel meaningful. A large number of good practices and participatory operating methods that include pupils are available in Finland and across the world.

In the future, we are likely to be facing new challenges that will also be reflected on children and young people. For example, as a result of climate change, more refugees will probably come to Finland. Trust and mutual respect between citizens as well as the institutions maintaining them have been the pillars of wellbeing in Finland. Present day Finland is built with co-operation. This unity is a strength that will help us tackle problems.

We should be proud of this. If we openly discuss issues such as immigration and matters related to it in educational institutions as well as in other contexts, we can move in a more constructive direction. Through a dialogue, we can form a shared view and make decisions on the direction in which we are going.

There are currently many difficult conflicts in the world causing suffering and far-ranging consequences, such as displacement and terrorism. We cannot afford to close our eyes to that in Finland, either. It is important to ensure that children and young people in educational institutions learn to understand diversity and similarity and, above all, learn to live in peace respecting one another.



Photo: Hannu Piirainen



DON'T GIVE IN TO FEAR

Terrorists aim at causing fear of terrorism. Fearful people act in a different way from people who trust each other and feel safe in their environment. Fear awakes the 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 people's fear and insecurity are not taken seriously. For example, about 2,500 people die in accidents every year and a large proportion of accidents take place at home or in otherwise familiar environments. 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.

The fear of terrorism deeply undermines our fundamental sense of security and weakens our sense of being able to control our own life.

Finland's aim is to have an actor available to take responsibility for the matter whenever there is

a concern that a person is becoming violently radicalised. We should be able to act the same way we do in the case of an accident: when we see a person falling to the ground we check the situation and do our best, but if needed we call an ambulance. We do not by ourselves make diagnoses or medicate injuries, but instead we summon the professionals to help.

In schools, this may be the pupil welfare group, which assesses the situation and contacts the police if necessary. The police ensure that, if it is not possible to or there is no reason to take any police measures, the person is directed to the services provided by the local authority or organisations. It is important that everyone at the local level knows who to contact. The police are currently clarifying the instructions and practices concerning this. The Ministry of the Interior is also going to launch a project with the aim of ensuring the functionality of the procedure in question.

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 making sure that we do not spread propaganda or fake news, not even by accident.

MORE ON THIS TOPIC

Up-to-date background information on violent radicalisation, information on how it can be prevented and different material to support teachers and school managements have been collected on the Edu.fi website of the Finnish National Agency for Education. Information is available in Finnish and Swedish.

To support educational institutions, the Finnish National Agency for Education has published "Raken-tavaa vuorovaikutusta", a guide for constructive inter-action. 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 staff training projects and to inter-nation al 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/10024/75040>

Meaningful in Finland: Action Plan

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

PUBLICATIONS

Rakentavaa vuorovaikutusta. Opas demokraattisen osallisuuden vahvistamiseen, vihapuheen ja väkivaltaisen radikalismien ennaltaehkäisyyn. ['Constructive interaction. A guide for the strengthening of democratic participation and the prevention of hate speech and violent radicalism']

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

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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