

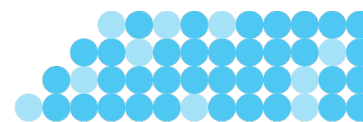
CONCLUSION PAPER

How and Why Minors and Youth are Attracted by Extremist Ideologies?

**Meeting of Thematic Panel 1: Ideologies &
Conspiracy Narratives**

27-28 March 2025 Brussels (Belgium)

Author(s): Isabel Pérez Pérez, Javier Ruipérez Canales, Vasileios
Theofilopoulos, and Fabian Wichmann



Introduction

Preventing youth radicalisation has become a central and evolving challenge for families, educators, mental health services, law enforcement authorities, and security services. Today's extremist groups utilise sophisticated digital strategies—gamification, hybrid ideologies, and targeted psychological manipulation—to exploit the vulnerabilities of minors and young individuals. This complex phenomenon is driven by a confluence of societal, personal, and technological forces.

Young people, in their search for identity and purpose, are drawn to extremist ideologies that offer a sense of belonging. The initial appeal often comes through seemingly harmless online content, which gradually indoctrinates them into radical worldviews. Importantly, youth are now active creators and distributors of radicalising content within their digital spaces, amplifying the problem.

The inaugural meeting of EU knowledge Hub Thematic Panel on Ideologies and Conspiracy Narratives took place in Brussels in March 2025, and addressed the critical issue of minors and youth being attracted by extremist ideologies and conspiracy narratives, including jihadist, right-wing, and far-left. This first meeting was attended by 37 members of the Thematic Panel, including a variety of policymakers, practitioners, and researchers from Member States. The meeting focused on understanding the "how and why" of this phenomenon.

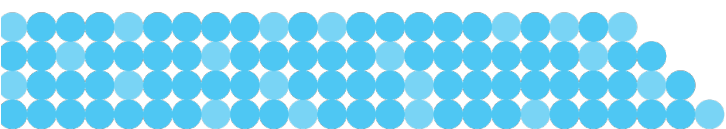
This Conclusion Paper summarises the key outcomes of the meeting's sessions, presenting first the highlights of the different presentations and discussions, and detailing some conclusions and specific recommendations derived from the event.

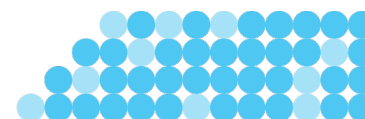
Highlights of the Discussion

This meeting focused on youth radicalisation across Europe. Day 1 involved expert presentations on the current situation (including EUROPOL insights), followed by interactive sessions such as breakout groups and case studies exploring online/offline factors and vulnerabilities. Day 2 concentrated on analysing these findings and planning the Thematic Panel's future direction, including its roadmap and objectives, culminating in an evaluation and conclusion.

The Current Status of Youth and Minor attracted by Extremist Ideologies: Reports and Analyses from MS

The session addressed the alarming trend of minors being increasingly exploited by extremists, particularly through sophisticated online campaigns that glorify violence and manipulate vulnerable youth or being exploited with extreme violence - like the 764 Network.





In this sense, equipping parents with digital and media literacy skills is crucial for them to effectively guide their children's online experiences and recognise potential risks.

This, along with the rise of "ideology mixers"- driven by personal grievances and contextual factors rather than well-defined belief structures-, the lack of clear ideologies, and customised online content – using gamification-, complicates traditional threat assessments. To counter this, a multi-faceted approach is needed, moving beyond a solely ideological focus to include broader violence prevention strategies, addressing root causes, fostering resilience, enhancing multi-sectoral cooperation, and developing effective online countermeasures, while navigating challenges like privacy concerns and legislative gaps, with EUROPOL playing a key role in information sharing and acknowledging the evolving nature of recruitment.

Breakout groups "Challenges and Strategies in Addressing the Radicalisation of Minors

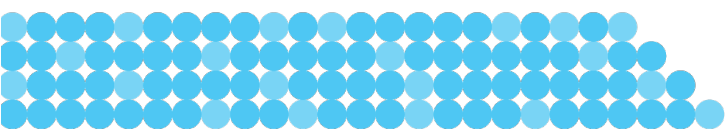
Breakout groups revealed that minors are uniquely vulnerable to radicalisation due to their search for belonging and identity, which extremist groups exploit through tailored online narratives and recruitment through social media and gaming platforms. Contributing factors include exposure to misinformation, criminal contacts, the search for authority, and the influence of unregulated AI. Strategies to address this vary across countries, including reintegration programs, security-focused approaches, and school-based dialogues, while the effectiveness of age restrictions on social media platforms remains debated due to potential circumvention.

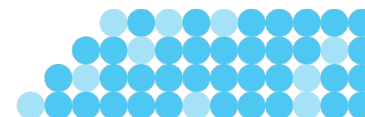
Online dimension & vulnerabilities of young people

Young people's psychological vulnerabilities, such as identity crises and the search for belonging, coupled with online echo chambers and distrust of traditional news, make them highly susceptible to online radicalisation, where extremists exploit these vulnerabilities through tailored narratives and community building. This evolving threat is further driven by conspiracy and changing ideological narratives, leading to "salad bar extremism"¹ where youth construct personalised belief systems.

Before more nuanced understandings emerged, the initial conceptualisations of radicalisation often presented it as a straightforward, linear progression towards extremism, neglecting the diverse individual pathways, underlying vulnerabilities, and complex social contexts that

¹ **RAN LOCAL** - Emotional Governance: deconstructing local P/CVE strategies in the face of 'salad bar' extremism and understanding needs and grievances, 30-31 May 2024: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/whats-new/publications/ran-local-emotional-governance-deconstructing-local-pcve-strategies-face-salad-bar-extremism-and_en



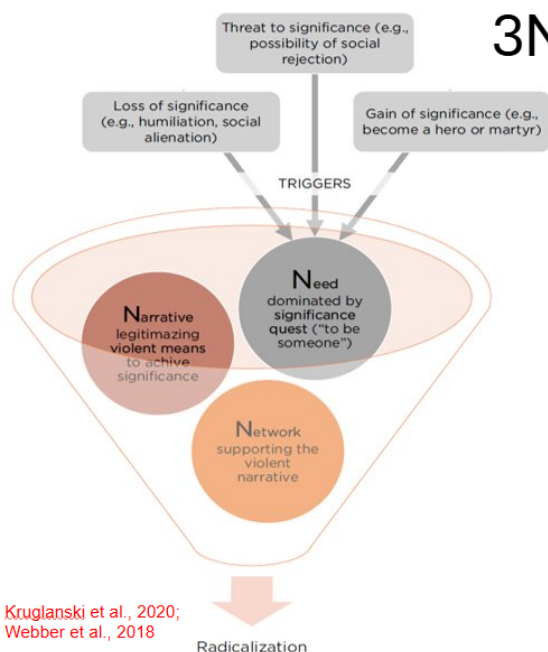


contribute to this phenomenon. This simplistic approach failed to capture the heterogeneity of radicalised individuals, and the multifaceted nature of the radicalisation process itself.

To combat this evolving threat, which utilises fluid, ambiguous narratives, and attention-grabbing tactics like "memefication," an analytical methodology using AI provides a key strategy. This AI-driven analysis aims to understand and counter the strategic patterns – the methods and tactics extremist groups use – as well as their online influence, focusing on the "3N model" of needs, narrative, and network. The 3N model posits that extremist influence operates by identifying and exploiting individuals' unmet *needs* (e.g., belonging, purpose), crafting compelling *narratives* that resonate with these needs and offer solutions within the extremist ideology, and leveraging online *networks* to disseminate these narratives and recruit new members. This empirical analysis, leveraging AI tools, offers a powerful lens through which to dissect the practices of extreme influencers. By employing quantitative mapping alongside qualitative unpacking, we can reveal the strategic patterns and, crucially, the hybrid tactics they employ. This methodology is particularly insightful for understanding how these actors leverage algorithmic systems to normalise extremism at scale through sophisticated hybrid grooming tactics. Ultimately, this methodology illuminates the often-hidden dynamics of ideological influence within today's platformised environments.



3N Model



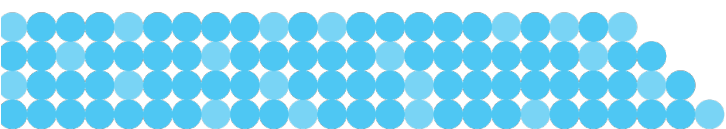
Needs (Psycho-social needs):

Personal Significance (the desire to matter, to merit respect, to be someone)
Then, a quest for significance can be activated

Narratives

Cultural elements, ideologies, attitudes that embody the quest for significance. Aimed at restore significance, empowering and rewarding. Identify grievances and enemies. Provide the objectives and valid actions, normative values, the need to bring about change and legitimise violence

Networks: Peers that support the narrative and that will value the individual's sacrifice for the cause





Graphic representation of the 3N model of radicalisation²

Breakout groups “Understanding and Preventing Youth Radicalisation”

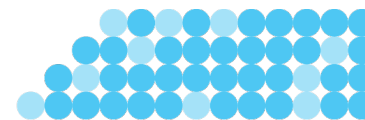
The case studies of *Hassan*, *Rune*, *Nick*, and the *Feuerkrieg Division* illustrate the diverse pathways to youth radicalisation, driven by factors like social isolation, mental health issues, the absence of tailor-made support by public services and online exposure. What is required are tailored interventions ranging from family support to legal frameworks and digital literacy programs. Although the cases involved different ideologies, many similarities were found in the process of radicalisation of the involved young people. Recommendations emphasise collaborative, evidence-based approaches, treating radicalisation as a public health concern, and focusing on resilience building, early detection, and adapting strategies to individual circumstances and the evolving online landscape, with a call for increased funding and research-practice integration. A full list of recommendations is included at the end of this document.

The Future of the I&NC Panel + Breakout groups “RoadMap for the Thematic Panel” Topics

The I&NC Panel's roadmap outlines future meetings on: the nexus of organised crime and extremism (including online exploitation and transnational links); countering hate speech and disinformation (online control and violence triggers); and the evolving extremist profile (spiritual dimension and system manipulation), all emphasising the need for better understanding and targeted strategies against radicalisation.

² Moyano, M.; Lobato, R. M.; Bélanger, J. J; and Trujillo, H. M. (2021). *Preventing and countering violent radicalization: a guide for first-line practitioners*. UCO Press, CIFAL Málaga, UNITAR, Fundación Euroárabe.



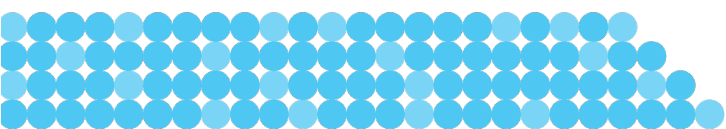


Recommendations

To effectively combat radicalisation, policymakers, practitioners, and researchers must adopt a comprehensive, multi-faceted, interdisciplinary approach by following the next recommendations.

Policymakers:

- 1. Addressing Root Causes and Strengthen Local Prevention:** Policymakers must proactively invest in community-level initiatives that prevent the radicalisation of minors and youth.
- 2. Enhance Funding and Cross-Sectoral Collaboration:** Increase PCVE funding, foster robust cross-sector collaboration by establishing clear mechanisms for information sharing and joint initiatives between relevant stakeholders, including law enforcement, education institutions, community organisations and medical/psychological experts, and establish regular support systems for children and minors within social work.
- 3. Strengthen Legal and Structural Frameworks for Digital Safety:** Strengthen content moderation laws, mandate age verification, enforce stricter rules against extremist content, promote "Safety by Design," and invest in resilience and collaboration for safer online spaces. Exploring further regulatory frameworks – such as regulating age restrictions for child protection, as seen in Australia- could be valuable.
- 4. Framing violent radicalisation as a public health concern:** Akin to cognitive and emotional "poisoning" like drug addiction, this recommendation suggests a primary prevention strategy that proactively targets risk factors before ideological exposure. This approach necessitates strengthening protective environments, promoting critical thinking, and implementing strategic communication campaigns to build "social antibodies" and foster resilience against extremist narratives
- 5. Utilise Digital Architecture for Early Detection and Intervention:** Implement "Safety by Design" principles and nudging for positive user behaviour, analyse networking and interaction patterns, and establishing early warning systems for high-risk content to proactively identify and mitigate online radicalisation threats.
- 6. Strengthening cooperation with the private sector:** The collaboration with the private sector, particularly with the internet and gaming industries, is crucial for identifying effective online narratives. By working together, we can uncover innovative strategies for crafting and disseminating impactful messages in the digital space, and leverage the private sector's expertise in user engagement and online trends.



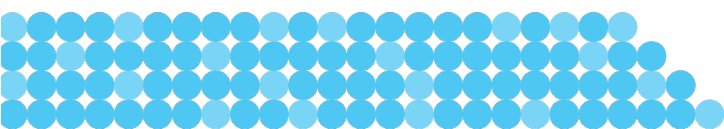


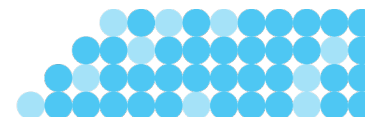
Practitioners:

1. **Personalised Intervention & Early Detection:** Implement tailored interventions based on individual needs and identified signs, including digital grooming and hybrid ideologies, and establish robust early detection systems and signalling structures.
2. **Digital & Media Literacy & Resilience:** Integrate media literacy, critical thinking, and digital resilience into education from an early age, and raise awareness about online manipulation and exploitation, fostering a better understanding of the life world and interplay of on and offline world and what this means for young people.
3. **Secure Spaces and Youth Engagement:** This approach envisions the internet as a potentially safe space, not necessarily a negative one to be avoided, achievable by equipping individuals with the necessary skills and tools for secure online engagement. Similarly, in the offline world, the goal is to transform negative and obscure radical spaces into prosocial alternatives or, at the very least, non-extremist spaces.
4. **Parental & Family Support:** Develop programs to enhance parental skills in navigating digital environments and addressing radicalisation risks and implement family-centered prevention and intervention programs.
5. **Collaborative, Holistic Approaches:** Forge strong collaborative relationships and networks, adopting holistic, community-focused strategies, including community policing principles.
6. **Practitioner Skill Development & Capacity Building:** Enhance practitioners' knowledge and skills in identifying and responding to radicalisation, including gender-sensitive approaches, and focus on evidence-based practices, avoiding assumptions, and improving intergovernmental cooperation, which includes sharing best practises.

Researchers

1. **Understanding the Roots of Radicalisation:** Focus on individual grievances and triggers (including mental health and substance use), not just ideology, to understand the evolving "breeding grounds" and spread of radicalisation among youth through their networks.
2. **Individualised Analysis & Case Variation:** Delve into individual case variations to understand the diverse pathways to radicalisation. Recognise that there is not one single profile of a radicalised individual.





- 3. Prevention System Evaluation & Improvement:** Evaluate the effectiveness of current prevention measures. Periodically re-evaluate and improve prevention concepts and systems.
- 4. Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Foster interdisciplinary cooperation between extremism research, developmental psychology, social sciences, and education.
- 5. Knowledge Sharing:** Bridge the gap between researchers and practitioners to translate findings into actionable strategies, using real case studies from practitioners and the comparison between them could help to better understand the current challenges.
- 6. Developing Practical Tools & Structures:** Contribute to the development of effective signalling structures for early detection. Aid in the development of practitioner knowledge and skills through research-based insights.

