DeRadicalisation
in Europe and Beyond: Detect, Resolve, Reintegrate

Toolkit 7.3: Using dual perspectives to explore concepts of radicalization, methods of enhancing social support and cohesion, and uncover the impact of online harms.

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About the Project

D.Rad is a comparative study of radicalisation and polarisation in Europe and beyond. It aims to identify the actors, networks, and broader social contexts driving radicalisation, particularly among young people in urban and peri-urban areas. D.Rad conceptualises this through the I-GAP spectrum (injustice-grievance-alienation-polarisation) to move towards measurable evaluations of de-radicalisation programmes. We intend to identify the building blocks of radicalisation, including a sense of being victimised, being thwarted or lacking agency in established legal and political structures and coming under the influence of “us vs them” identity formulations.

D.Rad benefits from an exceptional breadth of backgrounds. The project spans national contexts, including the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Finland, Slovenia, Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Israel, Turkey, Georgia, Austria, and several minority nationalisms. It bridges academic disciplines ranging from political science and cultural studies to social psychology and artificial intelligence. Dissemination methods include D.Rad labs, D.Rad hubs, policy papers, academic workshops, visual outputs and digital galleries. As such, D.Rad establishes a rigorous foundation to test practical interventions geared to prevention, inclusion and de-radicalisation.

With the possibility of capturing the trajectories of seventeen nations and several minority nations, the project will provide a unique evidence base for the comparative analysis of law and policy as nation-states adapt to new security challenges. Mapping these varieties and their link to national contexts is crucial in uncovering strengths and weaknesses in existing interventions. Furthermore, D.Rad accounts for the problem that radicalisation processes often occur in circumstances that escape the control and scrutiny of traditional national justice frameworks. The participation of AI professionals in modelling, analysing and devising solutions to online radicalisation is central to the project’s aims.

Executive Summary

This toolkit uses a holistic approach to investigate the concepts of extremism and radicalisation, and to examine the barriers to social cohesion, particularly in the context of digital spaces. To this end, we interviewed 30 young people across 15 countries in our consortium and 13 practitioners engaged in deradicalisation work in Germany, France, Israel, and the UK. The aim of the interviews with young people was threefold. First, we sought to investigate experiences of marginalisation, perceived injustices, and social identity as contributing to radicalisation. We also explored how young people make sense of these mundane interactions. Third, we explored lay-beliefs in youth around radicalisation, extremism, and political violence. Six themes emerged from our interviews. First, young people saw radicalisation differently to official state, political, and academic definitions, defining it as an attitudinal phenomenon. Young people reported many negative experiences with extremist content in digital spaces, perceiving these spaces as amplifiers of minoritising processes and as inevitable places of online harms (e.g., racism, hate speech). We also found that for some participants, LGBTQIA+ and feminist movements were experienced as threats. Finally, young people elevated education as a means of countering radicalisation and the dangers of online harms. We adapted a visualisation task to explore metaphors of marginalisation by asking young people to depict how they place themselves within society; our findings illustrate shared themes of exclusion and injustices. In our interviews with practitioners, we sought to explore how social workers involved in deradicalization programs for youth understand and use in their work the key concepts in the field: radicalization and extremism. We found that practitioners understand radicalization as a process that has relatively little to do with how authorities - both national and EU - understand it. Rather than a process that occurs mainly because of the spread of threatening religious beliefs and political ideologies, practitioners saw radicalization as the result of structural factors, the neglect of social policies and social issues in societies experiencing growing inequalities, decreasing political opportunities, increasing perceptions of minorities as cultural others, and the spread of conspiracy theories due to the deterioration of public education. However, while stressing structural factors, practitioners also underlined that these are beyond their control and expressed frustration over the lack of means at their disposal. Extremism as a concept was seen as particularly unhelpful because of its inherent normativity and adoption by law enforcement agencies, making it impossible to use in their day-to-day work with young people. Practitioners stated that rather than using "official language" in their daily interactions, they prefer to talk about hate and violence, racism, right-wing extremism, and other similar concepts that are clearer to their clients while still indicating problematic behaviour. Finally, best practices for deradicalization have most often meant for our practitioners building the alternative networks and especially the trusting relationships with young people that are typical of social work in general.

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1. Introduction

The 2022 survey we implemented among young people in our 16 consortium countries highlighted the importance of alienation for increased support for extremist attitudes (Rolon et al., 2024). To explore this relationship further, we designed an interview study which probed how individuals saw themselves and their important social groups vis-à-vis society. We also explored other components of alienation, such as disengagement from political and civic activities. Importantly, our survey findings show the importance of online group identity on experiencing greater social alienation (and, in turn, greater support for extremist attitudes). Having a stronger group identity was also linked to collective narcissism - or the perception that one's social group is superior to others but that this is unjustly unacknowledged or ignored. Altogether, online group identity was indirectly linked with supporting more extremist attitudes via these two factors.

Thus, we sought to deepen our understanding of lived experiences of social alienation and the importance of online contexts for radicalization and extremism by conducting interviews with thirty young people across Europe, focusing on our D.Rad consortium countries: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Italy, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. Second, we conducted interviews with practitioners working with youth in four consortium countries: France, Germany, Israel, and the United Kingdom. We first introduce the insights from the youth interviews, and then discuss practitioner perspectives on youth radicalization. The inclusion of these two perspectives provides a toolkit for understanding how extremism and radicalization are constructed amongst youth and how practitioners navigate these discussions, the lived experiences of mundane online harms and practitioner insights on the impact of online spaces, experiences of marginalization and practitioner best practices in building support and building affective terrains. The adaptation of a visualization task provides further insight into the importance of metaphor and how it can uncover experiences of marginalization, alienation, and exclusion to complement existing interview techniques.

2. Youth interviews: Radicalisation and lived experiences of mundane online extremism

Although EU RAN identified young people as being at a higher risk of online radicalization (and youth at a particularly high risk of radicalization in general, see Mattson 2016), there has been only little research on how online radicalization affects young people - and even less on youth reactions to online radical messages. The EU RAN's network dedicated to youth radicalization only started meetings in 2017 and policy discussions and recommendations in corresponding publications (EU RAN YOUNG 2018) did not deal with online radicalization specifically. Instead, it builds on scholarship that sees neighborhoods and local communities, not the Internet, as primary sites of radicalization.

Importantly, building on our survey results and also on the EU RAN YOUNG recommendations to see the young also as a possible solution to radicalization, we set out to study how young people conceptualise, understand, and define radicalization and extremism. Additionally, we explored how they react to online harm and bullying, and the impact of online harm - for instance, by strengthening among them feelings of being "minoritised". We first discuss how young people conceptualise radicalization and extremism, and highlight the key differences between these lay perspectives and academic and official policy and state definitions. We then outline the additional main five themes emerging from our interviews (see Table 1). We

conclude with a discussion of the findings from a visualization task which probed further at experiences of marginalisation by asking young people to draw themselves and their important social groups in relation to society.

Table 1. Six key themes emerging from interviews.

Theme	**Example extract**
Radicalization as an attitudinal phenomenon	"... excessively attaching oneself to something beyond criticism"
Reactions to online harm	"It creates pessimism. If things continue this way, people will stop loving each other. There can't be anything worse than this. We are actually going back to ancient societies. People will only associate with those who share their beliefs. They will be in conflict within the boundaries of the country. It is worse than division"
Online amplification of minoritisation	"As soon as I'm an influencer of color or whatever who seems to have succeeded, at least financially, economically or materially, there are a lot of people who go into the comments and make not very nice comments about origins, about color… Those are racist comments. We saw that at the last World Cup too. We saw a lot of Latinos and South Americans making comments about the French team players with monkey heads. And that, for me, is hate. That's hatred. So, no, hate is hyper-accessible. It's hyper accessible."
LGTBQ and feminist movements portrayed as threats	"I have the impression that it's now legal to be an extremist, because I can vote extreme right, I can vote extreme left, I can have a membership card for the feminists, for Femen."
Countering radicalization	"So… well, there should really be more discussion about it and especially young people… young people should be taught about how these things affect, because we have been taught quite, like, in a simplified way about what radicalization is."
Racist hate speech or bullying is inevitable	"He tried his best not to read those comments, but given our constant connection through social media, it was inevitable that he would come across them. Hate speech is shown to you, even if you consciously try to avoid it."

2.1. Perspectives on radicalisation

We found a stark contrast between the interviewees' understanding of radicalization and EU official definitions of radicalization. These official definitions see “radicalization as a political program” (Schmid 2018), with people “embracing radical ideology” (EU Commission) or “adopt[ing] extremist ideas [... that] serve to reject diversity, tolerance and freedom of choice and legitimize breaking the rule of law and using violence towards property and people” (EU RAN; for the full texts of these definitions and a critical discussion, see Schmid 2018). Instead, almost all interviewees agreed on seeing radicalization in more attitudinal terms, not – or less – as ideological conversion and more as an attitude of intransigence in opinion or pushing one’s opinions:

> [...] radicalization for me is, actually, when I have a goal and whatever I need for this goal, so that I get it through, these means, uhm, if they are perhaps morally questionable, or so. That's what I would call radical. (A1 2023)

> Extremism is… excessively attaching oneself to something beyond criticism, embracing it to the extent that one cannot see anything else. (T2 2023)

2.2. Reactions to online harm

When we asked about the young people’s reaction to online radical narratives, posts, imagery etc., we found that the most common reaction to harmful online messages is various forms of what we refer to as *withdrawal* from social media; only one respondent declared that he actually “tried to live” with the negative messaging (F3 2023). The others relied on algorithms to select the material they liked or withdrew from certain social platforms altogether. For instance, they perceived social media presences that they associated with the “other side” as having been “taken over” and abandoned reading them (Facebook and Twitter, for instance, for left-leaning respondents; G2 2023). They simply adapted their feed to avoid radical messages, with two interviewees reporting:

> I take great care in curating the content that Instagram shows me on my feed. I actively try to avoid upsetting or violent content, creating a bubble where I am shielded from such material. It’s not that these types of content make me anxious, but rather they genuinely make me feel very bad. (I1 2023)

> I think when the invasion of Ukraine first started, I first started getting those videos shot in Ukraine or in Russia. But I correctly blocked all those away because I still, like was watching TikTok and everyone got them at the time. But I quickly tried to like make my algorithm so that I wouldn't get anything like that anymore. (UK 1 2023)

On the other hand, most respondents reported that they also feel bad about “being targeted” by the “algorithms” that they themselves have helped target them better as to avoid unsettling material. This is not just about feeling a loss of control over algorithms but also about the sheer amount of material that platforms like TikTok target at them, despite the selection achieved by the algorithm:

> The [TikTok] algorithm picks up on your movements, and what's going on the web so much quicker than anywhere else, or any other platform. So you're able to consume so much more information. And the algorithm is so much more agile, to pick up on different things. And then often because it's such a free space, and everyone's able to post whatever, and it goes viral very, very quickly, because everyone's watching so

> much of it, it becomes very easily you are like you are exposed, and you get access very easily to things that you don't want to see. Or, or dangerous, for example, especially if you don't know how to manage it. (UK 2 2023)

2.3. The online amplification of feeling “minoritized”

The EU has focused on homegrown Islamist militancy after the Al-Qaeda’s Madrid bombings (2004) and London attacks (2005) (Bakowski 2022). According to EU’s RAN’s Policy Recommendations (2018), radicalization among the youth is mostly related to militant Islamic fundamentalist groups from the Middle East and North Africa, such as ISIS since 2013. In addition, Arab countries such as Libya and Syria have been dramatically destabilized by the conflicts since 2011, following the Arab Spring, the fall of Ghaddafi, and sectarian warfare in Syria (Musaro & Parmiggiani 2017). This has also caused migration flows from these countries to EU nations such as Italy, Greece, and Germany since 2015. From that point, the EU considered Islamist terrorism as the main cause of violent extremism within and beyond Europe. However, those migrants who sought to escape from the war zones were often labeled as “invaders” by the right-wing political parties in Europe, namely the UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party), AfD (Alternative for Germany), and France’s National Rally (Wright 2016; Musaro & Parmiggiani 2017; Regan & Delfs 2024). Therefore, this section first underscores how European respondents who had Muslim and immigrant backgrounds felt themselves as the “Others” due to their different ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

We discovered that respondents who had immigrant backgrounds felt “minoritized” due to racism and xenophobia online. In June 2020, the European Commission established a plan called “EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025” to fight against racism and achieve equality in the union (Gwiazda, 2021). According to this plan, for example, the EU was responsible for preventing discrimination against immigrants in the context of the job market and police searches. However, for respondents with immigrant backgrounds, it was a mundane experience to confront racism and discrimination via xenophobic online comments and posts which they attributed to far-right groups (Ekman 2019). For example, a male Italian respondent who had Muslim, Arab, and African background underscored his feeling of exclusion:

> [I feel] very bad, especially if the target audience was me. So when they were about ethnic minorities or people with an immigrant background, that is part of my identity. Or people close to me culturally e.g. immigration discourse. For example, when there was the migratory wave, the comments were like "They come from Africa, they do, they steal, they rape", all this discourse was very hurtful (Youth_Italy1).

In addition, a male French respondent who had a Muslim and Comorian background also underscored his grievance on hate speech or xenophobia against the Muslims in the country:

> There have been many attacks on women, for example, veiled women in the street, particularly Muslim women (Youth_France2).

Hereby, it was evident that youth with immigrant backgrounds experienced being “minoritized” online. This could also highlight that people are “othered” due to their experience of hate speech and politically motivated online bullying. Thus, we understood how immigrants from two different European countries could come to see themselves - or be continuously reminded - as being members of oppressed groups. This is particularly important when time spent online is increasing in Europe as is data consumption (in the form of videos, social networks, etc.) at a growth rate of 25% between 2018 and 2022 (GSMA, 2023) with 96.4% of young

people accessing the internet daily (Eurostat, 2023). Thus, individuals are at an increasing risk of being marginalised in the digital spaces that are part of their lives, or if they choose to withdraw, are likely to also lose out on the benefits of being connected online (e.g., Keum et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the media and politicians have played a critical role in discrimination against immigrant minorities. On the one hand, populist and right-wing politicians such as Marine Le Pen and Nigel Farage adopted the "immigration threat" to construct their securitization narratives at home (Korkut et al. 2020; Pitcher 2020; Dennison & Goodwin 2015). On the other hand, the media also used biased narratives about immigrants portraying them as "criminals" or "rapists" (Ekman 2019; Musaro & Parmiggiani 2017). The political and media debates thus point the finger of culpability to a particular religion - Islam - as the source of the use of violence (Murshed & Pavan 2011). In that context, a male French respondent who had Muslim and Indian origin underlined his grievance regarding a far-right attack on his immigrant friend:

> On her Facebook page and everything, she was insulted a lot by right-wing people who were pro- (Éric) Zemmour. She was mocked a lot. It's a bit like that, it's a bit like that … (Youth_France1).

Moreover, the same respondent also criticized the French media for the latter's prejudice against Muslim and non-White immigrants. In that context, he claimed that the media used racist narratives or headlines on immigration to appeal to the right-wing constituency:

> I feel that they choose their adjectives carefully, that they are careful to turn phrases to suit right-wing politics (Youth_France1).

From that point, the respondent felt himself as an "Other" due to the xenophobic discourses of the right-wing political parties and the media. As we understood from his narratives, he also considered himself as a part of an oppressed group.

Furthermore, the interviews that we conducted among young people underscored that being minoritised was felt not only by the immigrants but could also be experienced by young people from the majority population. Although the EU has mainly focused on the radicalization among Muslim immigrants, the D.Rad surveys explored that European citizens could feel turned into a minority among their nationally dominant group (Murshed & Pavan 2011; Mucha 2017). In that sense, this section contributes to the EU's research on radicalization by explaining the feeling of being "minoritized" among the majority population (Wingrove-Haugland, 2021; Lazëri 2023). In many cities in Europe inhabitants without a migration background have become a local minority group among many others in so-called majority-minority neighborhoods (Lazëri 2023, 1977). Indeed, these inhabitants were the numerical and cultural majority in their respective countries (Lazëri 2023). However, being a (local) numerical minority did not mean experiencing one's position as that of a minority, a position related not only to the numerical representation of a group, but also to the group's experience of (lower) status within society (Lazëri 2023). In other words, people without a migration background generally do not pose objective markers of ethnic disadvantage, given that they remain dominant at the national level. Therefore, this section highlights how some of the respondents felt themselves "minoritized" though they did not have an immigrant background.

We observed that some of the respondents did not feel themselves as "represented" by the media. Hazel Ateul et al. (2007) and Seed (2007) highlight that discrimination in the media could only be seen if minorities were depicted as the reason for social problems such as violence or crimes. Moreover, the respondents felt themselves "minoritized" due to the media's

false narratives (Lazëri 2023). For example, a female respondent from Turkey underscored her feeling of alienation due to the partisanship within the media before the Presidential election in May 2023:

> According to the media, I thought the opposition would win, and I prepared myself for that. I had hope. I was following the process on Twitter. I do not use any other social media platform. I was very wrong. I do not watch television because I definitely do not think that I am represented there. I definitely do not think that my concerns are addressed there (Youth_Turkey2 2022).

Furthermore, ideological preferences could play a certain role in terms of explaining how respondents felt themselves “Othered” due to the media’s narratives. From that point, a male respondent from the UK underscored his mistrust on the right-wing media which boosted ideological propaganda:

> But then again, there's a lot of, I've noticed that there's a lot of magazines in the UK, such as The Sun and other magazines that are more affiliated with a political party and stuff like that. And they do not represent [my voice] (Youth_UK2 2022).

Therefore, respondents from different countries felt themselves “minoritized” due to the lack of trust of the media outlets. In other words, the interview results from both Turkey and the UK reflected that the citizens from the majority could also feel discriminated against due to the media’s ideological stance and biased narratives (Youth_Turkey2 2022; Youth_UK2 2022).

Respondents who had a LGBTQIA+ identity felt themselves as “minoritized” due to their gender preferences. In that context, they criticized the conservative media and politicians’ narratives on family or sexual-related issues such as same sex marriage. They considered the far-right discourses on the protection of heterosexual and Christian family values as discrimination (Jennings & Ralph-Morrow 2020). For example, the BNP (British National Party) published articles between 1982 and 1999 on ‘queer conspiracy’ to claim that homosexuality played a significant role in the decline of birth rates in the UK (Severs 2020). Within this context, a male respondent from the UK who had a LGBTQIA+ background emphasized his grievance on the conservative or right-wing media outlets:

> I just, because I think in the UK in particular, I get it's hard like Scotland and the UK, two different things, obviously, a lot of the time, but I think at large the UK media is very right-wing. So it's, yeah, and just stuff like newspapers. Yeah. Not at all. What I believe in, I don't think [it represents] (Youth_UK3 2022).

Furthermore, respondents who identified themselves as nationalist or conservative could also feel themselves as “minoritized” due to lack of political representation. That was why, conservative respondents adopted anti-establishment feelings for their mistrust of the democratic system (Youth_Poland1 2022). We could also call this issue as a “collective victimhood” that triggered a strong effect on intergroup bias, outgroup hostility and support for violence against the state (Boussalis et al. 2022). From that point, the respondents could portray dominant ingroups such as white men as being victimized by state pro-refugee or pro-LGBTQIA+ policies (Boussalis et al., 2022). As a result, they could lose their belief in political institutions and democratic systems. Within this context, a male respondent from Poland underscored his insecurity on the democratic system:

> Because I treat it (the action of voting) first in terms of duty. I certainly don't like the order that's been made. (...) We cannot say that we have a full democracy of

> any kind. Why? Because, unfortunately, we say that democracy is the best system. Well, yes, but it can also be a cool, hidden totalitarianism (Youth_Poland1 2022).

Here we can explore marginalization aspects of feeling like a minority by looking at experiences of social marginalization among people without a migration background (Lazëri 2023, 1979). In other words, feeling like a minority refers to the positionality of the individual within the ingroup as compared to outgroups (Lazëri 2023, 1979). In both two cases, the respondents felt alienated by the government and media. In addition, this feeling could reflect the experiences of disenfranchisement as for traditional minorities. Because of that, we could expect the processes of further polarization within societies. Indeed, research shows that when majority culture members perceive that their culture is changing due to the presence of minoritised communities they report more prejudice towards these communities and experience greater symbolic threat - that is to say, they perceive that their values, ideologies and beliefs are at threat (Lefringhausen et al., 2022). In turn, both prejudice and seeing migrants as a threat are both linked with aggression towards outgroups. In this way, online spaces which function as amplifiers of minoritizing processes further contribute to polarization between social groups for young people.

2.4. LGBTQIA+ and feminist movements are portrayed as 'threats'

This section discusses how some of our respondents considered LGBTQIA+ and feminist movements as "radicalized" or "extremist" in Europe. Indeed, far right and conservative ideologies have increased misogynistic and anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiments within European constituencies. Patriarchal politics is hardly new, and anti-feminism and homophobia have long been central to conservative politics, particularly advocacy associated with the Catholic Church, Evangelical and Orthodox Christianity, and Islam. In short, demonization of noncompliant women and members of LGBTQIA+ communities are increasingly central to patriarchal populist mobilization. Sanders & Jenkins (2023) state that

> "while patriarchy exists everywhere and is not new, and thus some patriarchal elements can be found in all populist formations, we conceptualise patriarchal populism as a virulent and increasingly dominant variant of contemporary right-wing populism that uses blatantly sexist and regressive tropes to mobilise mass support and undermine women's and LGBTQIA+ equality, as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights."[1]

In Europe, patriarchal populism's fear of changing gender roles dovetailed with anxieties over non-white and non-Christian migration, growing secularism, and cultural globalisation and homogenisation (Sanders & Jenkins 2023). According to patriarchal populism, family has a strong value, but at the same time appears vulnerable, in danger and in need of protection (Chojnicka 2015). In that context, European and right-wing populists such as Hungary's Viktor Orban, and Poland's Andrej Duda have cast feminists and pro-LGBTQIA+ groups as "threats" to the national identity (Sanders & Jenkins 2023; Walker 2020; Kijewski 2023). Meanwhile, they have sought to curtail women's reproductive and LGBTQIA+ communities' equality rights (Sanders & Jenkins 2023). In this way far-right politicians have claimed that advances in and advocacy for women's rights, in particular women's sexual and reproductive rights, undermine social cohesion, reduce national birth rates, and erode the centrality of the 'natural' (that is, heterosexual, nuclear) family (Sanders & Jenkins 2023; Gould 2021). In this vein, they have portrayed homosexuality as the "civilization of death" in order to demonstrate that the EU's liberal stance on LGBTQIA+ issues is heading for a cultural disaster (Chojnicka 2015).

In this way, they portray LGBTQIA+ groups as a "European invention" that does not belong to the in-group of the traditional nation (Chojnicka 2015). At that conjuncture, tolerance and acceptance of homosexuality, as well as the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ rights into the state-level legal frameworks, are seen as obligations imposed from Brussels (Chojnicka 2015). Thus, LGBTQIA+ groups become an embodiment of all that is wrong with modernization, and the EU is conceptualized as a space, symbolic and physical, from which all the dangers of modernization come from (Chojnicka 2015).

Furthermore, patriarchal populism pursues the people-versus-elite antagonism that characterises populism with exclusionary sexist and misogynistic rhetoric and policies. Hence, patriarchal populist parties such as Poland's Law and Justice Party (PiS) and the AKP aimed to appeal to especially white men and called to fight back against supposed feminist and homosexual threats to traditional values (Gwiazda 2021; Lendvai-Banton & Szelewa 2019; Arisan 2022). By using racist, sexist, and civilizational discourses, they sought to mobilize the "people" against "feminists" and "homosexuals" (Chojnicka 2015; Sanders & Jenkins 2023). As a culturally-ostracised and vulnerable minority, transgender people have become easy targets for conservative and nationalist populism (Sanders & Jenkins 2023). From that point, a male respondent from Poland highlighted his anxieties about the normalization of homosexual rights:

> If I want to say that homosexuality is unacceptable for me as a person, a thesis expressed in this way in public, I am in opposition to what the UN, the European Union, WHO say today and then we are dealing, for them it will be a speech hate, and they do not accept this fact, for example, as my opinion. (Youth_Poland1 2022)

Moreover, a male respondent from Turkey portrayed feminism as a "radical" ideology in order to cast feminism as a "threat". The Mor Çatı organization that the respondent refers to translates to "Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation" which was founded in Turkey in 1990 and opened its first shelter for women fleeing violence in 1994:

> There are also feminist movements, such as the Mor Çatı organization. These movements are not highly radical. They don't have actions that could cause harm or create social uproar. However, we see that they express their ideas in a radical or extreme way, whether it's on social media, newspapers, or magazines. (Youth_Turkey1 2022)

Hereby, it was evident that the two respondents criticized the freedom of LGBTQIA+ and feminist movements. Specifically, those respondents held contempt for those who did not fit the patriarchal model of cisgender heterosexual wives and mothers in domestic gender roles. Right-wing populism's embrace of sexism, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia were prevalent in the narratives of these respondents. Therefore, both examples from Turkey and Poland highlight the impact of right-wing and conservative ideas on the construction of anti-feminist, homophobic and transphobic reactions within our respondents.

Patriarchal populist messaging is increasingly vitriolic and sensational, framing leftist ideology as existential threats to families, communities, and nations (Sanders & Jenkins 2023). In addition, it also blames leftist politics for their "tolerance" on the LGBTQIA+ issues, women's rights and migrants (Gwiazda 2021; Lovenduski & Norris 1993). In that context, the conservative respondents also considered leftist ideology as the main culprit responsible for

the fall of traditional family values. For example, a male respondent from Poland underlined his insecurity about the left's so-called support to the LGBTQIA+ movements:

> You don't have to look far, because now there is a fashion for turning left, somewhere there is a strong lobby of LGBT communities, because it is known that it is a nice cool target for corporations, where you can earn some money by dedicating things to them somewhere. (Youth_Poland2 2022)
>
> Because in general, left-wing circles fight against the traditional model of the family, so they also fight against the role of a man, right? We have been promoting for years, if not metrosexuality, some other things were promoted, such effeminacy of men. (Youth_Poland2 2022)

Thereby, the respondent claimed that there was a strong connection between the left and LGBTQIA+ movements. In other words, "LGBTQIA+ groups are presented as progressive and leftist (and therefore foreign and dangerous, not 'pure'), but also elitist due to perceived extra privileges (Yermakova 2021, p. 6)." This might also explain why the LGBTQIA+ movement is perceived as such a problem in the populist worldview: it is seen not only as alien, the enemy "outside" (on the horizontal axis), but also, in a way, as "the corrupt elite", so the enemy "above" (on the vertical axis) at the same time.

2.5. Countering radicalization: education, online moderation and creating recreational activities or joining in a sport club

This section explores the respondents' counter-radicalization strategies in order to limit extremism on the internet. The internet has become a hotspot for radicalization and extremism. Winter et al. (2020) define "online extremism" as internet activism that is related to, engaged in, or perpetrated by groups or individuals that hold views considered to be doctrinally extremist. Winter et al. (2020) and Wiemann & von Knop (2008) state that the internet is no longer just one part of the spectrum of extremist activism - it has become a primary operational environment, in which political ideologies are realized, attacks planned, and social movements made. Ganesh & Bright (2020, p. 8) mention that "Extremists, meanwhile, seek to use social media to expand their reach, appear credible, and transgress this marginality." In that context, extremist groups such as ISIS use the internet for their propaganda, recruitment, logistics and planning, and funding (Winter et al. 2020). Moreover, those groups could use the Internet for social interaction, political activism and exchange (Winter et al. 2020). For example, the rise of ISIS and its appeal for thousands of Europeans have posed new challenges to the EU since 2014. This is one of the reasons why the EU has sought to challenge extremists' use of the internet (Martins & Ziegler 2018).

The EU established the "Internet Forum EU" to counter violent extremism on platforms such as Google, Facebook and Twitter in December 2015 (De Streel et al. 2020; European Commission 2015). This Forum led to an efficient referral mechanism in particular with the EU Internet Referral Unit of Europol, a shared database with more than 200,000 hashes, which are unique digital fingerprints of terrorist videos and images removed from online platforms (De Streel et al. 2020). Later (May 2016), the EU also introduced a "Code of Conduct" to counter the spread of illegal hate speech online. In that way, the European Commission (EC) agreed with Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube to counter illegal hate speech online. The EC helped internet users who were notifying illegal hate speech on social platforms,

supported civil society as well as coordinated with national authorities. Although the EU adopted mechanisms such as “Internet Forum EU” and “Code of Conduct” to prevent online extremism (Martins & Ziegler 2018; European Commission 2023), our interviews show that our European youth still felt the negative impacts of mundane online extremism and highlights the cracks in countering online extremism.

Our respondents felt injustice due to the extremist comments on the internet. Importantly, we discuss the alternative policies that our respondents gave, such as moderation, education and creating social activities in order to prevent the spread of extremism or politically-motivated online hate speech. Our interviews reveal how mundane online extremism could cause polarization and the feeling of grievance, alienation, and injustice for internet users, paralleling findings on increasing mundane right-wing extremism messages on TikTok (Ozduzen et al. 2021). For example, a female respondent from Finland underlined her insecurity towards anti-Semitic, homophobic, and transphobic extremism online:

> Well, it doesn’t feel good. Annoying, or, like, why do they have to churn out shit like that. (Youth_Finland2 2022)
>
> I think it’s harmful because it only spreads that kind of thinking further and further. So people who naturally or, like, initially wouldn’t have thought that way might then adopt this kind of (...). (Youth_Finland2 2022)

In this way, extremist comments triggered the feeling of alienation and injustice within the respondent. In that context, the respondent used certain words such as “annoying” and “harmful” to portray her insecurity vis-à-vis online extremism. In order to contain online extremism, respondents offered certain counter-radicalization measures such as online moderation. Martins & Ziegler (2018) argue that hate crime and hate speech specifically are identified as issues that required monitoring and reporting. In that way, content moderation seeks to reduce the presence of extremist narratives or suspend exponents of extremist viewpoints on an online platform (Ganesh & Bright 2020). Content moderation uses several strategies such as “blocking”, “filtering”, and “censoring” to prevent extremist content (Davies et al. 2016; Hussain & Saltman 2014). However, our interviews suggest that existing content moderation is not functioning effectively. For example, one female respondent from Finland suggested that there should be moderation in the context of extremist comments:

> Well, it has to be possible to discuss these issues from both sides. It’s not possible to take any stance so that only the voice of a certain political agenda would be allowed to get heard and, like, voices supporting that agenda but… it depends on how appropriate the discussion is, if it’s just like bashing and such then it can be moderated. (Youth_Finland2 2022)

In addition, a Comorian African male from France sought online moderation in order to challenge online racism:

> In some cases, no. I think there's some speech that you just can't hear, and that's why you have to be stricter and moderate, because hearing it often can almost normalize it. So I think that sometimes it's better to be fairly strict, even if it means blocking certain people. But not everyone has the right to express themselves with insults and racist remarks. (Youth_France2 2022)

Here, we can see how both the respondents sought online moderation in order to contain radical content on the internet. Furthermore, our interviews highlighted the significance of education in order to increase felt responsibility and limit extremist language on online platforms. Sjoen & Jore (2019, p. 271) state that “the common portrayal of perpetrators of extreme violence as vulnerable and deprived young individuals seems to have been an important factor in placing educational systems at the frontline of global efforts to prevent radicalization and violent extremism.” Ghosh et al. (2017, p. 120) mention that educational systems are crucial in “educating children for the development of life-long values, skills and behaviours that would be conducive to their economic, social and personal security by developing resiliency in students.” Hence, giving young people cross-curricular skills, knowledge and competency can enable them to participate as informed, responsible, and well-functioning members of society. From that point, a male respondent from Turkey emphasized the significance of education to prevent the rise of extremism:

> The personal education of people is the biggest factor here. (Youth_Turkey1 2022)

> That's why, instead of restricting social media, it is more important to emphasize individual education. (Youth_Turkey1 2022)

Moreover, another a male respondent from Italy with Arab and African cultural identities highlighted that education could protect people from adopting radical or extremist views online:

> We should work on an educational and pedagogical level, i.e. protect the victims of these comments by saying "it's a comment, it's words, it may hurt, but your life goes on, who cares, feel free to express yourself". Otherwise it would be like a cat biting its own tail, it is really difficult to intervene minutely with each person. There are already protection tools, which can be to report highly damaging content, for example, the law provides protection for insults. So here I would leave the law the space on its scope, I would work on the educational level, on tolerance. (Youth_Italy1 2022)

In this way, both respondents underlined the significance of education in order to prevent the spread of online extremism. At this conjecture, the teaching of civic values and citizenship education are critical elements to contain radicalization and violent extremism (Sjoen & Jore 2019).

Furthermore, recreational activities such as joining a social community could protect youth from being exposed to extremist views such as far-right ideology and increase feelings of belongingness and inclusion. Social practices such as political gatherings, families, youth groups, religious groups, workplaces, sporting and recreational events could enable socialization across group identities and boundaries and provide an alternate anchor for vulnerable individuals. These practices involve multiple participants, whether they include a few individuals or tens of thousands of persons (Knottnerus 2014). Such collective events are both quite common and varied in form, ranging from festivals, religious ceremonies, political rallies, sporting events, pep rallies or military celebrations, to community events, special dinners and other types of collective celebrations. Thus, as Knottnerus (2014, p. 46) states that “the greater the probability that all persons involved in the event are seen by and conscious of each other, the greater the actors’ awareness that they are part of the collective endeavour, and the greater the effect of the shared activity on them, especially in regard to their feelings about the collective experience.” As a result, this sense of social validation ultimately results in heightened feelings

of confidence and satisfaction about the collective event (Knottnerus, 2014). For example, a male respondent from Finland who felt alienated due to the right-wing online hate speech (Youth_Finland1 2022) identified himself with a music band in order to increase his belongingness and then self-confidence:

> Oh… yeah, I play in a band, that was also my choice, it wasn't forced," (Youth_Finland1 2022).

Moreover, a female respondent from the UK whose felt injustice due to the religious extremism, homophobia, and transphobia underscored her reasons for joining a LGBTQIA+ community in Scotland in order to feel more secure:

> Yeah, like, like I said, with the LGBTQIA+ youth Scotland. I'm not a young person. I don't go to their meetings, but I am aware of what they're doing. And I speak to the person who's in charge of them and go to their events. So like, I'm like an adjacent part of the group (Youth_UK1 2022).

These examples demonstrate how both respondents draw on membership to a social group in order to protect themselves from online extremism. Eubank & DeVita (2023) outline that participation in informal recreation could help young people to create, build, and maintain friendships, and improve participants' sense of belonging. Other group activities such as being a fan of a football group are crucial to battle the feeling of alienation and exclusion within European youth. Sporting events such as being a member of a football fan group could provide a sense of belonging in youth. This could in turn increase collective pride when young people identify with the triumphs of their favourite team as 'theirs' as an example of a stronger we-mode sense of collective emotion (Salmela 2014). In this way the collective emotions of a fan community appear as a continuation of the feeling of safety, a stretching to the extreme of the absolute safety that forms the starting point for our individual existence (Gebauer 2014). Weber et al. (2021, p. 5) state that "the concept of communities of belonging is used to understand how football fans perceive their 'sameness' within certain social groups and networks." In addition, these fan groups such as Poland's Raków Częstochowa football club seek to consolidate and strengthen the certainty of believing in the worth of one's own team's and the worthlessness of the opposing team (Gebauer 2014). In that effort, a fan community celebrates the worth of its players, team, and thus also its own worth; they believe in their superiority over their opponents and the opposing team's powerless fans (Gebauer 2014). For example, a male respondent from Poland identified himself as a supporter of a football club:

> I am a member of a group of supporters of Raków Częstochowa . I joined by my own choice. I was on the board of the association of these fans for several years, so I identify myself, yes, absolutely. Well, because ... belonging to this group gives me the honor of being able to wear a scarf in club colors. But I think if you've ever belonged to a group and felt proud of it, you'll know exactly what I mean. (Youth_Poland3)

Similarly, a female respondent from UK also underscored her belonging to a football club in Scotland:

> Sports groups, for example, I do briefly, I did belong to Sterling FC for a few years. (Youth_UK2 2022)

Here, it was evident that both respondents from Poland and the UK identified themselves with the football fan groups. The respondents used words such as "honour" and "belonging" in order to describe their affiliation with the fan groups, supporting Grove et al.'s (2012, p. 26) assertion that "sport also serves society by promoting social integration and bringing together the populace." In this way, a bond of solidarity is created among the fan groups (Grove et al. 2012; Legg et al. 2017). From that point, we could understand how both respondents felt secure, and self-confident due to their belonging to the fan groups. Importantly, identifying with certain social groups which meet all of our basic needs of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) but which do not endorse extremist ideologies may be one method of 're-anchoring' vulnerable individuals and ensuring that they do not lose the benefits of membership to a social group which may have been one of the catalysts for drawing them towards extremist communities and groups.

2.6. Racist hate speech or bullying is 'inevitable' on online platforms

Our final theme discusses how social media has become a dangerous network due to the spread of hate speech or politically-motivated online bullying. As Ozduzen et al. (2023, p. 834) state, "radicalized individuals and groups produce and/or use different types of images to depict perceived injustices and grievances and share them online in hyper-visible, ephemeral, easy-to-consume and anonymised formats." Racism on social media could indirectly trigger radicalization by enabling its ideological causes to become tangible, easy-to-use, consumable, and shareable for its sympathisers and onlookers, and hence help the visual narratives spread throughout mainstream spaces (Ozduzen et al. 2023). For example, organised far-right groups in Europe such as For Britain, Pegida, Les Identitaires and CasaPound Italia effectively use legacy social media platforms like Facebook or YouTube (Ozduzen et al. 2023; Rauchfleisch & Kaiser 2020; Gattinara & Bouron 2020). Moreover, TikTok has become a crucial platform to underscore the mainstreaming of far-right ideologies due to its popularity amongst young adults, adolescents, and children, due to the app's convenient and accessible image-based design (Ozduzen et al. 2023; Weimann & Masri 2020). The videos on TikTok are less likely to be a product of following a trend of the day; rather they are part of a consistent and systemic ecosystem of right-wing, white-supremacist, and racist ideologies (Ozduzen et al. 2023). Thus, users could mix different types of popular and subcultural media objects in their videos to appeal better to their audiences (Ozduzen et al. 2023).

For example, in the case of the UK, TikTok videos are used to identify whiteness and Christianity as the main descriptors of British culture, thereby erasing multiculturalism and freedom of identity (Ozduzen et al. 2023). Although the far-right hashtags such as 'defendbritain' and 'generationidentity' have been banned by TikTok (Ozduzen et al. 2023), other racist hashtags, namely 'rulebritannia' and 'unitetheright', became prevalent among users. From that point, we argue that the use of extremist language could not be prevented on online platforms. A female respondent from the UK who has Finnish background underscored her insecurity due to the presence of online far-right posts:

> Yeah, definitely, I think, especially coming back to the example about like, right-wing activists on social media, I think every time I see anything associated with that, or any of the platforms that I know they're using, or any of the, what do you call them, like, if I see a profile that I know is associated with them, I'm automatically gonna skip that. (Youth_UK2 2022)

Like the British case, we observed the prevalence of far-right extremism in our French interviews. Benveniste & Pingaud (2016) report that the racist and far-right Front National (FN)

has become very active on online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Dailymotion. In that case, far-right users shared ultra-secular, Islamophobic, and anti-immigrant posts in order to cast Muslim immigrants as “outsiders” or “internal enemies” (Mondon 2015; Froio 2018). This also increased alienation and the sense of injustice within Muslim French immigrants. In that context, a male respondent from France who had a Tunisian background found online platforms unsafe due to the spread of far-right propaganda:

> I couldn't choose a platform because I'm attacked on every platform. (Youth_France3 2022)
>
> I think we see something upsetting every month, every year. There's something upsetting. (Youth_France3 2022)

Both respondents criticized the presence of right-wing extremism on online platforms and highlighted their prevalence by using words such as “every platform”, “every time” and “every month”. This also tells us that not only far-right groups such as the FN but the individuals who may not be affiliated with the groups can nonetheless anonymously spread racism on the internet (Weimann & van knop 2008).

Furthermore, respondents also complained about right-wing people’s negative comments on LGBTQIA+ communities. Ozduzen & Korkut (2020) mention that online platforms such as Twitter could facilitate conservative, homophobic, and patriarchal reactions that harnessed deep political polarization between the far-right and those that declared solidarity with LGBTQIA+ issues. In general, sexist or homophobic language is prevalent among the far-right internet users (Olivia et al. 2021). For example, a male respondent from the UK portrayed his insecurity on mundane online sexism or homophobia:

> Just angry. And I think one of the worst things is sometimes you can become like, kind of like those days when you realise I don't actually feel anything because you just get so used to seeing a lot of the time. It's not like, it's not like saying Oh my God, that's appalling. Like you just unfortunately become numb to it. (Youth_UK3 2022)

The respondent felt alienated by society due to the latter’s masculine language. He used certain words such as “not feeling anything” and “getting used it” in order to portray the commonality of homophobia and transphobia in online spaces and highlight a desensitization to the mundanity of extremist and harmful content.

2.7 .Exploring lived experiences of marginalisation through visualisation: Using drawings to understand how young people place themselves within society

In the second half of the interview, respondents were invited to make a drawing of their place in society and discuss it with the interviewer. Using a visualisation task can provide a starting point from which to discuss how individuals experience their identities and their place in society. In this way, we can probe deeper into participants’ perceptions by encouraging the use of metaphors. Metaphors are shaped by social contexts (e.g., power relations) and experiential differences (Kövecses, 2005). Indeed, metaphors are powerful vehicles of cultural memories (Aksan & Kantar, 2008). The purpose of this task was twofold. First, it encouraged participants to actively reflect on how they envisioned themselves and their social groups vis-à-vis society. By guiding participants to reflect and select the most appropriate metaphor, we

were also able to capture the process by which they came to visualise themselves in the social context. Second, this task allowed for a more spontaneous conversation where the interviewer could probe further at interviewee's perceptions of marginalisation and intergroup dynamics.

One emerging pattern is that respondents highlighted a feeling of pessimism, using terms such as "exclusion" or "injustice" to depict their feeling of alienation by society. They also used "us vs them" or "self-other" oppositions to describe the polarization and distrust in their society. Most felt pessimistic about the structure of their societies, underprivileged, and underrepresented - irrespective of their political views. For example, a male respondent from Turkey summarized his grievance regarding his country's political system by underscoring the privileges of people close to the ruling coalition AKP (Justice and Development Party) and MHP (Nationalist Action Party), such as receiving financial aid and protection from the state (Gurpinar, 2022). That was why he felt alienated by the government as someone not supporting the AKP-MHP Coalition:

> My own profile is a profile that does not have an equivalent in Turkey; a society based on my own thought system, which does not have an equivalent in Turkey and will never reach good points. But if I had identified myself as a nationalist or an Islamist, for example, I could have found a better place in this country (Youth_Turkey1, 2022).

Moreover, our respondents expressed worries about the high polarization within European society in the context of religious, cultural, and ethnic diversities, perceiving "white" and "Christian Europeans" as strongly prejudiced towards Muslim immigrants (Solivetti, 2023; Jikeli, 2012). Our respondents often connected these perceptions to the popularity of parties such as Belgian Vlaams Belang and the Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia) (Van Spanje, 2011; Belgan, 2023; Noble, 2018; Baldini et al, 2023). In that context, a UK female respondent of Belgian descent explained her pessimism about polarization among Belgian people in the context of migration:

> So Flemish and Wallonian differ in their language, but the thing that they've got in common is that they're both, would classify as Belgian and which then differentiates them from the immigrants because then they, even though some of them are completely Belgian, like have Belgian parents they would, most are most likely to say that they are Moroccan or Turkish because that's where their heritage lies, which is you know, completely up to them. And then that is kind of where they sometimes, where we can, or they get alienated from. (Youth_UK1, 2022)

In a similar way, a female respondent from Italy who had a South Tyrol background explored the self-other problem between "Europeans" and immigrants:

> In this drawing, I have represented the three language groups present in South Tyrol, German, Italian, and Ladin. I know that I belong to one language group, the German one, but I also want to be close to and understand others, to be open to others. In my opinion, we should then add smaller circles because it is not true that there are only the three of us as language groups, but there are so many of us thanks to immigration, for example, Arabs, Moroccans, Pakistanis, and all the other minorities. There are no longer only these three big groups, but

> on a political and legislative level, only the three of us are recognized. (Youth_Ita2, 2022)

The two respondents highlighted how racism and discrimination can weaken migrants' identification with the mainstream culture (Acim, 2019, Siebers & Dennissen, 2015) and strengthen beliefs among migrants that the government and the media do not represent them (Dawes, 2021). The majority group respondents did not necessarily feel like they were part of the majority, discussing, for instance, gender-based discrimination as a source of personal alienation and societal polarization (Channing & Ward, 2017). One UK respondent shared his insecurity about being stigmatized as an "other" by British conservative politicians on the grounds of identifying as homosexual while praising the Scottish government for its more tolerant LGBTQIA+ policies (Youth_UK3, 2022).

Respondents with Muslim and migrant backgrounds also underscored their experiences of exclusion and racism, feeling stigmatized on the grounds of ethno-religious differences but also addressed economic differences (Adida et al. 2014). A Muslim and Sub-Saharan portrayed French society as a "monster" to explain his grievances regarding racism and xenophobia, a "monster" of a "white" and "rich" privileged majority group (Youth_France2, 2022). In contrast, he felt part of an oppressed minority:

> You can't see very well. So, I imagine that there are groups behind this monster, who are somewhat protected. And then there are the other groups who are quite small, in the end, and who are somewhat excluded from society. I get the impression that there's a lot of violence towards groups that are ultimately small and don't represent a large part of society. There are others who are somewhat protected and privileged groups (Youth_France2, 2022).

Other respondents with migrant backgrounds emphasized that the perceived polarization is less about cultural or confessional differences, and more about poverty and inequality. An Italian-Muslim respondent, for instance, drew a pyramid to describe the social and economic inequalities which he faced in Italy. He criticized "bourgeois politics" for its indifference to the discrimination targeting immigrants. (Youth_Ita1, 2022). He considered himself part of an "oppressed" group without political representation:

> It is the same pyramid concept, the masses gravitate around smaller groups of people who are more at the center of the world, because they are the ones who make the decisions, who are influential, or have the means to make the economic-political decisions. In this vision here I identify very peripherally, and not even with much regret, even in a relieved manner and as a matter of pride (Youth_Ita1, 2022).

2.8. Conclusions

Our interviews provide important insights into how extremism and radicalisation are understood, encountered, and made sense of by young people. These meanings differ to those in use by state, legal, and academic institutions and can contribute to meaningful conversations about best practices and novel interventions to help identify and counter radicalizing and extremist content. Our findings also highlight the challenges of navigating online spaces, and their impact on behaviour, including engagement or withdrawal from online places of conflict, psychological well-being, identity, and social cohesion. Importantly, our findings reveal that online spaces can function as amplifiers of intergroup divisions and

polarisation through minoritisation. These minoritizing processes can impact people with identities which have been traditionally minoritised, oppressed, and discriminated against (such as migrants), but also those people with identities which are traditionally represented and align with the majority culture. This is reflected in our theme of LGBTQIA+ and feminist movements being perceived as external movements which are a threat to 'traditional' culture, beliefs, and ways of life.

Online spaces provide an additional risk for being exposed to racism, hate speech, and xenophobia, sometimes vicariously, and often in mundane ways. Relatedly, the narratives of our participants revealed desensitization to extremist content which further underlines the mundane nature of extremism which was seen as inevitable and often insufficiently addressed and monitored by existing moderation practices. The importance of joining recreational activities which are group-based was raised as a method of countering radicalization through enhancing felt belonging and social cohesion. Additionally, education as a means of combatting the impact of online harms and decreasing their prevalence was raised by our participants, suggesting that current practices do not meet the evolving challenges unique to online spaces in terms of the prevalence, impact, and mundanity of online harms, which include extremist content. Instead, most of our participants withdrew from particular online spaces or curated their content. The latter poses risks in terms of contributing to the solidification of echo chambers which can further feed into experiences of injustices, grievances, alienation, and polarisation (conceptualized as the I-GAP spectrum in our project), in a self-reinforcing cycle.

Finally, adapting a visualisation task that asked participants to portray the way they placed themselves in their society provided an additional perspective through the inclusion of metaphors, which allowed our young people to share their lived experiences in a way not bound by traditional interview formats. For most of our participants, experiences of marginalisation crossed over into physical spaces, with shared feelings of dissatisfaction with the current structure of society and social exclusion. This highlights the disenfranchisement experienced by many of our young people in terms of a lack of representation and experiences of discrimination across many social identities. To complement these findings, we conducted further interviews with practitioners who do deradicalisation work with young people.

3. Practitioner interviews

Radicalization is a process whereby "radical" ideas are translated into violent practice (Crone, 2016, p. 589-604). Online propaganda amplifies it (Koehler, 2014, p.116) as the internet makes like-minded radical individuals communicate more easily while encouraging them to use radical content for gaining support within their groups (Koehler, 2014, p.118). Furthermore, weakened social bonds make it increasingly difficult to assume the existence of "radical profiles", meaning radicalization is a ubiquitous process that cannot be pinned down to certain regions, age groups, or subcultures. Therefore, we should avoid approaching radicalized actors as fundamentally different "others", as they are hardly "nihilists, starkly or ambiguously, but often deeply moral souls with a horribly misplaced sense of justice" (Atran, 2010, p.5). Thus, they are not necessarily strangers to empathy and other emotions of "ordinary citizens."

Building on this literature, we interviewed practitioners involved in deradicalization programs in four countries: France, Germany, Israel, and the United Kingdom. We sought to find out how radicalization and extremism, the central concepts for the extremism prevention field, make sense to them and whether and how they use these concepts in their everyday work.

More fundamentally, we wanted to learn more about how they explain these concepts, whether they developed alternatives to them, and what paths to deradicalization make the most sense to them as social workers.

3.1. Radicalization

First, approaching radicalization as a process translating ideas into violent practice was a commonplace perception among our respondents. In the words of one respondent: “We, on the service, refer more to Farhad Khosrokhavar's 2014 definition, so with an individual or group command adopts, moves from an ideology to a mode of violent action and that it could be radicalization on a social, political or religious level, full face (FR-02, 2023, p.1).” Respondents doubted the use of “radical profiles”. A French - originally North African - male respondent argued, "For me, the first thing is that I don't think anyone is immune to this phenomenon (FR-03, 2023, p.3).” In addition to him, an Israeli male respondent underscored that “Everyone, if he harnesses the powers of the killer himself - every person can be a killer and every person can also become a doctor if they are given the tools to realize the potential and abilities that you have (IS-03, 2023, p.2).” Respondents mentioned that radicalization advances gradually, in a “slippery slope” fashion (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008, p.429, see “slippery slope” as “a mechanism of self-radicalization via self-justification, in which new beliefs and values are adopted in order to make sense of past behaviors”). In the words of an Israeli male respondent (originally Bedouin):

> “It's symbolic and also proves the intents and trust of each person in the group. If you want the benefit of sports you have to be healthy. If you put smoking as something more important for me it indicates that you prefer the social influences then the best of the team. Not only that, it can affect other players like a "chain reaction", so it needs to be eliminated from the start (IS-1, 2023, p.5).”

Most respondents conceived of radicalization as both an individual and collective process, in line with a large literature (Smith et al., 2020; Swan et al., 2014; Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Kruglanski & Webber, 2014). According to this literature radicalization refers to group socialization processes through which people develop identification with a set of norms – violent or non-violent – via situated social interactions that leverage their shared perceptions and experiences (Smith et al., 2020, p.2). As Kruglanski & Webber (2014, p.381) state, “When the humiliation occurs as a result of one’s group identity or category membership, it is labeled as social identity loss of significance. In these circumstances, the individual is not specifically attacked, but attacks are levied at groups to which the individual belongs.” Kruglanski & Webber (2014, p.384) underscore that “immense social psychological literatures exist showing that group-based decisions and behaviors tend to be more extreme or polarized than decisions that are made by an individual.” In the words of our respondents: “The same. I think it's both. There are very individual trajectories, but I think it's more collective for me (FR-01, 2023, p.2)”; “I think it's complicated to distinguish one from the other (individual from collective radicalization). I think there's a bit of a relationship there too. I think it's a bit of a relationship between all these things. That's also why we have an approach... (FR-02, 2023, p.2).”

3.2. Causes of radicalization

Most respondents locate the causes of radicalization at the level of structural factors (lack of political representation, poverty, unemployment etc.) and hardly at the level of political ideologies or radical religious beliefs spreading among through populations culturally close to the disseminators of such ideologies or beliefs. The crisis of political representation is a

recurrent topic in most of the interviews. For example, a British male respondent mentioned the alienation prevalent among young people due to the distrust in politics:

> "I think what we might see is this loss of trust in the state, loss of trust in government and politicians that's quite tangible and I'm very curious about where that's going to lead because when we have elections here, you get smaller turnouts and that's yeah. And I think that's going to be that's more of a tangible outcome, but that's not really radicalization. That's just a loss of faith (UK - 2, 2023, p. 20)."

Often mentioned is also discrimination, highlighted particularly by the French respondents thematizing the experiences of discrimination and racism prevalent among France's North African Youth. As Narang (2019, p.1) states, "Persons of North African origin, who are most numerous in France, have been noted to face disproportionate and systemic socio-economic disadvantage and discrimination, in addition to being securitised subjects within French media representation political discourse and certain sectors of public opinion." When the Franco-Maghrebi citizens confronted structural discrimination in the forms of barriers to the labor market, housing segregation, and racism, they felt excluded from the host society (Narang, 2019, p.5). This can lead to further social alienation and deepen the sense of despair, anger, outrage and isolation, and potentially contribute to youth radicalization (Andre et al., 2015, p.296). In addition, this could also make the Muslim community underrepresented politically, and lead a fertile ground for radicalization such as terrorism (Narang, 2019, pp.5-10). That was why modern jihadist narratives positing a civilizational clash are resonating amongst a section of disenfranchised second and third (young) generation Franco-Maghrebi Muslims (Narang, 2019, p. 1).

Arguing along these lines, a French female respondent of North African descent states that "You can't get past it. It (rejection) happens to me because I'm like that and it's this society that rejects me. I can't get past it (FR-01, 2023, p.5)." A French male respondent argued how perceived injustice leads to radicalization:

> "I quite agree that there's a link between discrimination, the experience of discrimination and persecution, and the move towards violent radicalization. I think it's important for people who suffer injustice, even political injustice, on an individual level or in their life course, to be able to rebel, to find a group, to federate a "cause" that they feel is right. I think that discrimination, persecution and exclusion can be fertile ground for violent radicalization (FR-02, 2023, p.4)."

Israeli respondents focused on how state policies frustrate minority groups such as Bedouins and Palestinians (see Ganor, 2011, p.592; Yiftachel & Roded, 2010, p.1, 21) An Israeli male respondent of Bedouin descent argued that

> "I think we are experiencing the radicalization of the Arab society inside and the Bedouin society, because there is a very high level of frustration. There is a belief that this is no longer a conspiracy, but that it is something very aimed at suppressing us and pushing us into a corner (...)So I do it not because I hate you but because they tell me all the time that I hate you and then I already believe it, and because of that I have been wronged a lot. If they have already attached the title of "terrorist" or "murderer" then come on, until the end. (IS-04, 2023, p.9)."

The respondent underlined that the Arab society felt itself strongly oppressed by the ultra-Orthodox Jewish politics. As in the French interviews, official stigmatization as "terrorist" or "murderer" is key to radicalization. Furthermore, respondents also highlighted that both poverty and lack of education could also trigger the radicalization process as well (see also Sas, Ponnet, Reniers & Hardyns, 2020). In the words of respondents:

> "In the local elections you will see participation of over eighty percent and in the Knesset elections you will see between 40-55 percent. The mistrust exists in a crazy way and still the terrain only strengthens it. What is meant by? I will give an example, for example, regarding protests that take place on behalf of the Arab society in Jerusalem in front of the Knesset. Last week we barely gathered 20 people in protest of the fact that the budgets for the Arab local authorities were stopped, and the damages that are expected to occur if these budgets do not arrive are enormous! (IS-4, 2023, p.8)."

3.2.1. State violence

Practitioners discussed at length the role of state violence in triggering radicalization. Police response that may include indiscriminate violence or some abrogation of civil or human rights could increase grievance within the people (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008, p.425). The result is an increase in sympathy for the victims of state repression and some mobilization of the group's sympathizers toward action. In that context, as McCauley & Moskalenko (2008, p.425) state that "Of all those who take the first radical action—joining an illegal rally or march or sit-in—most are likely to respond to repression by giving up action. In any case, the result of the interaction between state and non-state groups is often a mutual escalation of violence between group and police, with further peeling off of individuals whose radicalization is not sufficient to face increasing state pressure. The conclusion of this cycle of escalation and self-selection is likely to be that a tiny fraction of the original protest group has condensed into a highly radicalized group that goes underground as a terrorist cell." In that context, McCauley & Moskalenko (2008, p.425) argue that "Radicalization by condensation depends upon the strength of the affective ties between individuals, in particular ties to individuals who suffer from the state reaction to radical challenge." For example, France's securitization of Islam could be challenged with its counter radicalization policy against Jihadism (Hellmuth, 2015, p.33). In that case, a female French respondent who is Muslim criticized France's security policies such as strip search for exerting radicalization within the Muslim immigrants:

> "We had a huge number of requests for summary proceedings and abusive searches and everything. I know it was after 2015. I know that, having been on the networks and still working with young people, it's something that made them even angrier (FR-01, 2023, p.14)."

Furthermore, a German male respondent claimed that state aggression could not prevent extremism:

> "But that's not the solution to get extremism out of the knots, so, that's the solution if I want to punish crimes, then that's the approach, but if I want to enter into dialogue or prevent extremism, or abolish it again or make it smaller, then I need something else, not punishment, because that's more likely to be exactly what I said at the beginning with people who see themselves more in a victim role, that they're more likely.... who then see themselves even more so in a victim role

> when they are victims of state violence, of state punishment (GER-001, 2023, p.12)."

Thereby, both respondents complained about the abusive policies of the state. The common result from these interviews were state aggression could increase extremism within the people who felt themselves as the "oppressed." In other words, both respondents also argue that the sense of injustice could push people to become more extremist.

The practitioners also discussed how prisons serve as radicalization hotbeds. Prisoners could become radicalized due to their grievances regarding discrimination (Khosrokhavar, 2013, p.285). In addition, McCauley & Moskalenko (2017, p.122) state that "The aspect of this problem that has been given the most attention is the mutual learning that terrorists profit from in prison universities. They have time to go over the operations that brought them to prison." For example, French Muslim prisoners become frustrated due to authorities' prejudice and the lack of knowledge about the Islam (Khosrokhavar, 2013, p.289). The French authorities sought to focus on the radicalization in the prison after the Charlie Hebdo attacks in 2015 (Hellmuth, 2015, p.26). In that context, the radicalization trajectories of Mohamed Merah, Chérif Kouachi, and Amedy Coulibaly, the perpetrators of the 2012 Toulouse/Montauban and 2015 Paris attacks, were thought to have been significantly influenced by their prison experience (Ibid). Moreover, a person could be a "radicalizer" for the individual playing the active role, through his charisma or a capacity for manipulation to spread radical views in the prison (Khosrokhavar, 2013, p.288). In that context, a French male respondent who is Muslim and originally north African gave an example about the rise of Jihadist views in the prison:

> "As a result, radical Islam proliferated to some extent. A radical prisoner arriving in a unit would inevitably spread Islam throughout the unit (FR-3, 2023, p.33)."
>
> "They created QPRs [ordinary detention, solitary confinement, units for particularly violent prisoners] radicalization prevention units. These were dedicated units where only the radicalized were placed. Is it a success or not? I've got a strong opinion, but everyone does what they want. In any case, I don't think it was the right solution either. Now, which is the right one? I don't claim to know, but it's a real subject. Because in prison, moreover, let's put it this way, they have time. Temporality isn't the same as outside. So it's very easy to maintain a radical in prison for a moment. This means that those who have generally come out, from what I've read, heard and seen, haven't come out any nicer. Quite the contrary. Either they left French territory, or they decided to live elsewhere in other countries, or they joined Daech or the Islamic State for some, or they left to live their piety in certain Muslim countries, (FR-3, 2023, p.33)."

Thereby, the respondent highlighted that the prisoners could be a hotbed for Islamist radicalization. First, he claimed that a radical prisoner could have the ability to spread his Jihadist values on others. Second, he underscored that the French authorities' radicalization prevention units such QPR could not stop the prisoners from becoming more radicalized.

3.2.2. Securitization and Conspiracy theories

Practitioners also focused on the role of discourses - state discourses of securitization or less easily traceable conspiracy theories - drive radicalization. French respondents insisted on how

government security narratives - picked up by media and the broader public - marginalize Muslim immigrants (see also Narang, 2019, p.10-11; Andre et al, 2015). In line with our respondents' perceptions, Narang (2019, p.11) states that "frequently the French media has framed Islam as a threat to the communitarian values of the French Republic; words and phrases such as 'menace', 'fear', 'danger', 'threat', 'invasion' and 'failure of integration' appear on the front covers and in the headlines." Moreover, the French government had adopted strict secular laws such as the banning of burqas in public places in April 2011 (Andre et al., 2015; Abdelgadir & Fouka, 2020). However, this secularist vision alienated Muslim immigrants (Andre et al., 2015). One respondent however replicated the securitizing narrative about Islam:

> "At my field level, what I can see is that between 2015 and 2017, let's say, among a lot of young girls, I found the same discourse that came a lot from the Internet and I think also from Daesh propaganda, which must still have been pretty strong at the time. For example, a lot of girls were telling me "In France, you can't live Islam the way you want to. You have to make your hijra, you have to go to the land of Islam to be able to live it as you wish" (FR-02, 2023, p.7)."

> "After that, from what I'd read, for people who are more the cadres of terrorist groups, this kind of discriminatory policy suits them because the aim for them would be to create a civil war or a violent act quickly. I think they talked about it for Daesh leaders who, precisely with the attacks, were hoping that it would generate a policy that discriminates against Islam and Muslims, for example, to feed off that, to fuel the conflict (FR-02, 2023, p.13)."

The respondent equated conservative Islam with the extension of ISIS propaganda. He also sought to justify the government's discriminatory policies against the Muslim immigrants as an obligation to prevent the civil conflict between the Muslims and the natives in the country (FR-02). In addition, he underscored that it was ISIS but not the state which is responsible for discrimination against Islam (FR-02). In that way, he aimed to downplay the strict secularist vision of the French authorities which considered Islamic culture as a potential source of radicalization (Hellmuth, 2015, p.33). Indeed, Islam is also considered as part of the radicalization problem. For example, a French male respondent who is originally from North Africa portrayed radical Islam as a concerning issue:

> "There are different types of radicalism, but I'm going to focus on the theme I've been working on for a very long time, which is radicalization concerning radical Islam (FR-03, 2023, p.1)."

In addition, a female French respondent who is from the Middle East also equated Islam with the use of violence:

> "I think there's a real problem with the use of violence, whether it's the rupture or the current Islamist radicalization (FR-01, 2023, p.11)."

Hereby, both respondents aimed to securitize Islam as a part of radical ideology. The first respondent claimed that radical Islam was the most concerning issue. Although he accepted the presence of other types of radicalization such as extreme right-wing groups, he considered that radical Islam is more visible (FR-03, p. 12).

The patriotic securitization of Islam is also prevalent in the Israeli interviews. As Yiftachel & Roded (2010, p.6) mention, “Zionist ideology – which traditionally treated 'Jewishness' ambiguously, as ethnic, national and religious -- became increasingly theocratic. Indeed, the influence of religious parties such as Shas within the Israeli polity has increased, reaching a peak during the 1990s, with religious parties winning some 30% of the Israeli parliament in the 1996 elections (Weissbrod, 2003; Yiftachel & Roded, 2010). The rise of right-wing and religious ideology increased the impact of Zionism on the Israeli-Bedouin relations. For example Yiftachel & Roded (2010, p.20) state that “Israel appropriated nearly all Bedouin land (with about five percent of the region still under dispute), built ten new Jewish towns and about 100 rural Jewish settlements. Here, Jewish immigrants were housed, wrapped in a glorifying national and planning discourse of 'settling the frontier'.” A respondent underscored how Arabs perceived the discrimination stemming from Israeli state security-led policies vis-a-vis the Bedouin community:

> Because belonging is a piece of interest, a piece of domain, which should build trust, let me feel that I am a part, that I am at all proud of what is happening, that there is hope. Who see me, give me space, know my narrative and that is the idea of belonging. For the state, unfortunately, belonging is... take social security. It's belonging. and its not. It is not. There is a lack of reference to the Bedouin narrative, so the affiliation will only fade, and be small. I sometimes see, it's funny, there is some video that they try to use for the purpose of increasing recruitment for the army in Arab society. (IS-04, 2023, p.12).”

Hereby, the respondent highlighted the sense of alienation within the Bedouin community and that Arabs feel as “others” in relation to the Israeli state, and therefore are hardly eager to join the Israeli military (IS-04, 2023, p.12).

Practitioners also stressed that radicalization develops not only out of political ideologies and religious beliefs, but also out of conspiracy theories. This is in line with scholarship detailing how conspiracy theories can spread due to perceptions of injustice, but also “ow political trust, feelings of powerlessness, uncertainty, and unpredictability” (Douglas et al. 2019, p.9-10). Douglas et al. (2019, p.4) point out that “While often thought of as addressing governments, conspiracy theories could accuse any group perceived as powerful and malevolent.” That is why, a conviction that other groups conspire against one’s own can help explain the ingroup’s disadvantaged position (Douglas et al., 2019, p.9; Rahlf, 2023, p.3). In the words of a French respondent: “I've seen several phases in the radicalization process, starting with conspiracy theories (FR-01, 2023, p.1).” Conspiracy theories do not have to be political, but can thematize technology, from vaccines to 5G, as tools to decimate or enslave the world population(Ralf, 2023; Garry, et al., 2021). Thus, a British practitioner detailed how far-right news outlets boost radicalization by using conspiracy theories:

> “(the far-right newspaper is) called The Light and it's quite well made. It looks very, very professional because it is professional in the sense that it's quite skilled, but it basically promotes conspiracy theories throughout it and very anti state again, very anti-government, all stuff about 5G masts, somehow the vaccines really are dangerous (UK-2, 2023, p.27).”

It is unclear whether conspiracy theorizing may be a result of political ideology, or vice versa (Douglas et al., 2019, p.11). However, respondents underscored that conspiracy theories

trigger radical behaviors within the society. The acceptance of conspiracy theories serves as a ‘radicalizing multiplier’, which feeds back into the ideologies, internal dynamics and psychological processes of the group (Bartlett & Miller, 2010, p.40).

3.3. Extremism

Given how ubiquitous the term “extremism” is in the field of countering or preventing violent extremism, we wanted to find out how practitioners use and apply this concept in their work. We found that most interviewed practitioners expressed doubts about the usefulness of the extremism concept. The respondents that the D.Rad team interviewed underlined that extremism is not necessary violent, and violence is not necessarily extremist. Note that "extreme" refers to deviations from the norm and is not a sufficient basis for approximating violent action or more generally security threats (Borum, 2011, p.9); if given the choice, a respondent preferred the term violence, that to him felt less politicized (“For me extremism only begins with violence, so I would support <...> that we abandon the concept of extremism”, GER-02, 2023, p.15). Winter & Hasan (2016, p.669) define extremism as a rejection of balance and application of a single ideological perspective to all elements of an individual's life with, importantly, a fervent disdain for alternative ideological perspectives. However, this understanding of extremism hardly differs from that of radicalism, leading to confusion among some of the interviewed practitioners (“extremism” is about being “extreme” or having “extreme reactions” - FR-03, 2023).

As extremism can be non-violent (Winter & Hasan, 2016, p.670), some people with extremist ideas and violent justifications—perhaps even most of them— do not engage as much in violent actions as in the dissemination of their beliefs (Borum, 2011; Koca, 2022; Winter & Hasan, 2016, p.680). In our respondents’ words: “That's what I was saying earlier. Not all extremism is violent, not all acts of extremism are violent, and not all extremism leads to public disorder (FR-01, 2023, p.12).” And: “if you're a vegan extremist, do you really rape or commit violence, or is it just that you're very rigorous in the way you go about things, maybe very fair on the meat eaters, but maybe you'll never act violently? (FR-02, 2023, p.16).”

When asked about concrete examples of extremism, respondents mostly described group-based hate leading to violence. In other words, hate and violence, rather than extremism and radicalization, are concepts that practitioners are more likely to work with. In the words of respondents: “…sometimes they catch North Africans or Blacks and then they beat them up. That's extremist behavior (FR-03, 2023, p.15)”. And: “No, you don't bring together Jews and Arabs, right-wing and left-wing, secular religious already at the school stage? This is the separation. You grow up in a certain area and separately and there are a lot of prejudices and hatred and that's what's sad (IS-03, 2023, p.8).”

Respondents often thematized the closeness between extremism and radicalization. Radicalization - also to our respondents - came to be understood as the gradual adoption of “extremist” ideas that promote and eventually lead to violence (Adnan & Amaliyah, 2021, p.27; Helfstein, 2012, p.7), thus focusing attention on processes of cognitive and ideological transformation, mainly at the individual level but facilitated by group processes and structural factors (Malthaner, 2017, p.370). In the words of a respondent:

> “Sometimes the way I think about it, the more blurred those boundaries can become because for me, I think of radicalization as a process that takes you to extremism, whereby you hold those beliefs. That's when those beliefs are very solidified and then that's what really becomes that gateway to terrorism, that's separate again. So it's hard

> to be enacting terrorist acts without having the extremist beliefs that justify those and then… (UK-2, 2023, p.30)."

In sum, extremism appeared to our respondents as a more contested and confusing concept than radicalization. the most typical descriptions of extremism would fit less contested terms like "group-based enmity", but practitioners stressed that in their work it is more important to be able to talk of hate and violence without adopting terms that are too normative because of their official adoption by state authorities. A large part of the interviewees would rather abandon the concept, but used it for pragmatic reasons, that is, when interacting with authorities by writing grant applications.

3.4. De-radicalization

The literature treats deradicalization as a process of individual or collective cognitive change from criminal, radical or extremist identities to a non-criminal or moderate psychological state (Kohler 2014; Rabasa et al., 2010). For our interviewed practitioners too deradicalization is a kind of reversed process of beliefs conversion, in particular, regarding the gradual abandonment and rejection of violence. For example, a British male respondent portrayed deradicalization as withdrawing from violent actions:

> "Deradicalization itself is a bit of a complex term because when we're reading and working off on it, withe issues such as disengagement and then the radicalization, where disengagement is when you step away from the actions and the violence. But you may still hold those beliefs that the world needs to look a certain way or about how the world should be run. And then I would look at deradicalisation as more you've really altered your views, you've shifted your perception to the point that… (UK-02, 2023, p.34)"

Hereby, it was evident that the respondent used "disengagement" to understand deradicalization as rejecting violence. There are, however, interpretations that understand de-radicalization as not requiring beliefs to change. In particular, an Israeli female respondent used feminist theory to underscore the sexism and gender-based violence against females and children (IS-02, 2023, p.9). As trivial as it may sound, the ideology-focused concept of (de-)radicalization and extremism that searches for the "vulnerable" individuals and groups even before they commit violence, may miss it. By referring violence against women, she defined deradicalization as de-escalation:

> "'I have value', my desires, my limits. And I translate how to maintain my boundaries and desires, on the one hand in a very strong and clear way, and on the other hand - it will hurt the other as little as possible. So here, from the beginning there is non-escalation and de-radicalization (IS-02, 2003, p.9)".

Moreover, the respondents argued that deradicalization implies that individuals are taken from the wrong entourage and integrated into a better one. In the process, creating a personal bond between a radicalized person and a practitioner is crucially important:

> "So facilitate would be, you know, meaningful conversations, meaningful relationships, meaningful support. So if they feel heard and validated and acknowledged, they don't get treated as a criminal and judge and stigmatise as a, as an extremist, but they're a human being

> who's come to these beliefs for, you know, range of personal reasons. And they they they're actually heard and respected ("UK - 03", 2023, p. 34)"

In the words of a French respondent:

> "I believe that, for the most part, the success factors are the relationship between therapist and patient. It seems to me that this accounts for almost 50% of positive success factors. It's the bond created (FR-02, 2023, p.21,)."

Such a bond offers an alternative to the networks and practices conducive to radicalization (e.g., UK-1, 2023). Similarly, Amin et al., (2018; see also Moyano et al., 2022) argue that sport can have a similar effect, that is, offer an alternative network that fosters deradicalization: "The involvement of radical youth into sports activities will not only help to transform anger into a positive energy but also keep them busy and passionate to earn fame and livelihood by contributing towards national cause." One of our interviewed practitioners organizes football games with "at-risk" youth in such a way "filling" their free time with a collectivity-building, emotionally rewarding activity:

> "Every municipal authority should first segment how many wandering youths there are, they can set up programs because they have the abilities and resources, but there should be an organized program for children and youth after school hours, incubators of hope for youth "at-risk". I no longer call it youth "at-risk", but youth, if possible, of "equal chance" (IS-03, 2023, p.10)."

All practitioners criticized their countries' national frameworks for dealing with radicalization, extremism, and fostering deradicalization. UK respondents took issue with the PREVENT programme for harming their country's pluralistic and liberal structure of the UK. As Kundnani (2009, p.10) explains that "The Prevent programme, with a budget in 2008/9 of £140 million, is a part of the government's counter-terrorist strategy which focuses on mobilizing communities to oppose the ideology of violent extremism." However, local authorities have been pressured to adopt PREVENT in direct proportion to the numbers of Muslims in the area – thereby constructing the Muslim population as a 'suspect community' (Kundnani, 2009). In that effort, local authorities have used PREVENT funding, in its early stages, to carry out 'targeted capacity building of Muslim communities', focusing particularly on young people, women and mosques. For example, a British male respondent criticized the government's deradicalization policies for violating democratic principles, stating that PREVENT "tends to just manifest in a very anti-democratic sense that really takes over people's lives (UK-02, 2023, p.33)."; another one called the same program "an anti-human rights, anti-liberal equality kind of agenda (UK-01, 2023, p.60)."

Another criticism concerned the inefficiency of these programs. As noted, respondents believed radicalization to be caused by structural factors (in line with a large literature, Atran, 2010; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Smith et al., 2020; Swan et al., 2014; Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Kruglanski & Webber, 2014) and the state's counter-extremism policies (Kundnani, 2009; Sjøen & Jore, 2019; Younis, 2021). The use of 'harder' profiling, surveillance, and zero-tolerance strategies, particularly towards immigrant and Muslim students can trigger radicalization (Sjøen & Jore, 2019, p.12). As exemplified by a respondent:

> “MP David Amess was murdered a couple of years ago by Ali Harbi Ali. He had been through the PREVENT programme. He had been de-radicalised. But then of course he went on to commit that murder. So there's arguments there about whether someone gets deradicalised and then re-radicalised sometime later. You've got a very messy area. (UK-02, 2023, p.35).”

Similarly to UK’s PREVENT, France introduced its own program, called *Plan de Lutte Anti-Terroriste*- PLAT in an attempt to stop French nationals from joining ISIS in Iraq and Syria (Lahnait, 2021, p.111). French authorities also passed an anti-terror law which included a travel ban on French nationals suspected to leave France to commit terrorist activities (Lahnait, 2021, p.111). But these counter-extremism measures also increased the stigmatization and radicalization of French Muslims (Lahnait 2021, p.122). In the words of a respondent:

> “I think it got to a point where, because it was new, it was very ineffective. Instead, we tipped over into stigmatization. (...) Measures were completely out of step with the reality on the ground, where any young practicing Muslim could fit into the radicalization criteria. (FR-01, 2023, p.16).”

To sum up, respondents decried the shifts in deradicalization policy taking such policies out of the hands of dedicated social workers and into the hands or under the control of security agencies. As a result, individuals working in the field of deradicalization are hardly quipped to deal with the causes of radicalization: “It's not something they are trained in. It's not something they come across very much (UK - 02, 2023, p. 17).”

3.5. Conclusions

In our interviews with practitioners, we sought to explore how social workers involved in deradicalization programs for youth understand and use in their work the key concepts in the field: radicalization and extremism. We also wanted to hear from them about the approaches that are most conducive to deradicalization. We found that practitioners understand radicalization as a process that has relatively little to do with how authorities - both national and EU - understand it. Rather than a process that occurs mainly because of the spread of threatening religious beliefs and political ideologies, practitioners saw radicalization as the result of structural factors, the neglect of social policies and social issues in societies experiencing growing inequalities, decreasing political opportunities, increasing perceptions of minorities as cultural others, and the spread of conspiracy theories due to the deterioration of public education. As expressed by a respondent: “Education, education, education. Education is the key. I claim that our weapons are education and knowledge. (IS-03, 2023, p.3; see also Sjøen & Jore, 2019, p.3).

However, while stressing structural factors, practitioners also underlined that these are beyond their control and expressed frustration over the lack of means at their disposal. “Social work is very frustrating in that sense because we overwhelmingly deal with objective socio-economic deprivation… we're more likely to be working with poor families (“UK - 02”, 2023, p. 16).”

Extremism as a concept was seen as particularly unhelpful because of its inherent normativity and adoption by law enforcement agencies, making it impossible to use in their day-to-day work with the young people they work with. Practitioners stated that rather than using "official

language" in their daily interactions, they prefer to talk about hate and violence, racism, right-wing extremism, and other similar concepts that are clearer to their clients while still indicating problematic behavior.

Finally, best practices for deradicalization have most often meant for our practitioners building the alternative networks and especially the trusting relationships with young people that are typical of social work in general (Smith 2001). At the same time, practitioners sensed a growing distance between their preferred approaches - and that they thought to be most effective in countering radicalization - and the securitizing state policies of the late 2010s, which, rather than building on social work principles, seek to control practitioners and co-opt them into efforts to identify and punish perpetrators.

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