

SPOTLIGHT

MAY 2020



VIOLENT
RIGHT-WING
EXTREMISM
IN
FOCUS

RANI 



Nick DAINES



Will BALDET



Anne GIUDICELLI



Ondrej KOLAR



Christer MATTSSON



Jacek PURSKI



Hakan JARVA



Robert ÖRELL



Fabian WICHMANN

EDITORIAL

Spotlight is a new publication for the RAN's network of practitioners, designed to give you, the people on the frontline in communities, in schools, prisons, online and elsewhere, the opportunity to share your insights and your stories about the work that you do to tackle the violent extremism challenges in Europe today.

Each edition of Spotlight will focus on a new topic. In May – the first in the series of quarterly publications – we take a look at the topic of violent right-wing extremism (VRWE), how the challenge has evolved, the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on their ability to radicalise and recruit and some of the work being done to address it.

This publication does not provide the definitive or complete view of the topic. Instead, it shines a spotlight on different aspects of the topic and showcases the work of practitioners in a way that we hope will capture your attention and encourage you to discover more about the topic through the insightful and detailed papers produced by the RAN and its practitioners in recent months and years.

We want to hear from you! If you would like to contribute to future editions of Spotlight, or if you have ideas for an article, please get in touch with the RAN communications team at ran@radaradvies.nl.

The RAN Team

Contents

03

EDITORIAL
Spotlight

08

OPINION
**The Evolving VRWE
Challenge**

12

FILM
**The Evolving VRWE
Challenge**

14

PROFILES
Our Practitioners

16

FILM
**Narratives and
Strategies of VRWE**

18

ARTICLE
**Conspiracy theories
in the age of COVID-19**

27

PUBLICATION
RAN Factbook on VRWE

30

INTERVIEW
Hakan Jarva: My Story

36

ARTICLE
**Delivering Interventions
Online**

44

FEATURE
Web Walkers

50

INTERVIEW
**A Day in the Life Of...
Fabian Wichmann**

56

HIGHLIGHTS
RAN Activity on VRWE

60

LIBRARY
Discover More





OPINION

**THE
EVOLVING
VRWE
CHALLENGE**

Nick DAINES

FOR the past ten years I have been providing intervention and threat analysis to organisations across Europe and the UK, specifically concerning violent right-wing extremism. During my work I have engaged with over 300 individuals at risk of right-wing radicalisation and have provided insight into how an unprecedented influence from violent right-wing extremist groups has developed throughout Europe over recent years.

Recent events have served to provide significant traction for groups exploiting populist right-wing narratives. Critically in 2014 the world watched as a humanitarian crisis developed in Syria, subsequently putting pressure on European borders, a situation which violent right-wing extremist groups have exploited heavily.

Such mass movement in and around Europe has created enormously complex issues. Whether those migrating were doing so for economic reasons or simply safety from the horrific conflict unfolding in Syria and Iraq, extreme groups have seized on this visible influx. Using tried and tested methods to blame and dehumanise, various social scandals such as a perceived increase in rape statistics in Sweden and sexual assault during New Year's celebrations in Cologne, were used as justification for anti-Muslim hatred. Violent right-wing extremist groups seized the opportunity to recruit, using these social scandal as part of a narrative which was meant to justify hatred.

The exponential influence of social media has enabled groups such as Identity Evropa to reach a sympathetic audience across Europe. As a result, these groups are far more communicative, sharing outrage, ideologies, platforms and in some cases defence and military training. As part of my role, I have worked with individuals from the UK who have travelled to European countries to take part in weapons training camps and develop connections with other extreme groups. One such group had initiated contact with a well-established Russian mixed martial arts organisation that promoted white supremacy and were offering training to members as part of their call to violence. These kinds of developments all represent evolving challenges

“The exponential influence of social media has enabled groups such as Identity Evropa to reach a sympathetic audience across Europe.

As a result, these groups are far more communicative, sharing outrage, ideologies, platforms and in some cases defence and military training.”

in understanding and response. However, it is the facilitation of hateful ideology and encouragement of violence through these online spaces which we need to collectively understand and work towards effectively countering.

Acknowledging the impact of such visible migration is important in our response, being able to credibly recognise concerns but also counter violent right-wing extremist narratives. For example, narratives around replacement of indigenous European culture from Muslim populations, feed into a perception of being under attack and consequently may encourage people to be viewed as the enemy. There are huge challenges in the P/CVE area presented by reciprocal radicalisation where the actions of one group motivate similar extremism in an opposing faction. Despite achieving success when working with individuals, these counter narratives need to be more broadly promoted and accessible in the online space.

Nick Daines is Director of Omega Comms, which provides safeguarding support and mentoring for people who are vulnerable to radicalisation and forms of exploitation.


FILM:
THE EVOLVING VRWE CHALLENGE

IN May 2020, we brought together a select group of expert practitioners for an online exchange of views on the evolving violent right-wing extremism challenge in Europe. Representing different geographic regions of the EU and spanning the fields of community, school and prison work, they shared their ground-level insights about the challenge today and what it means for practitioners. A second film, which will showcase some of the cutting-edge initiatives and approaches to tackling the challenge, will be published in the coming weeks.

You can watch the film
in full [here](#).

FILM
THE EVOLVING VRWE CHALLENGE

MAY 2020
'VIOLENT RIGHT WING EXTREMISM' IN FOCUS



But there **ARE**
reasons to be hopeful

PROFILES: OUR PRACTITIONERS



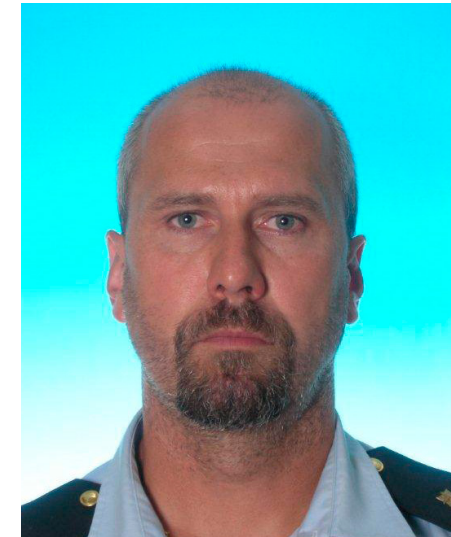
Will BALDET

WILL Baldet is a Policy & Practitioner Fellow at the Centre for the Analysis of the Radical Right (CARR) and is a Senior Advisor to the UK Government on Prevent. He has designed counter-radicalisation workshops on VRWE for delivery in schools, colleges and communities and sits on the UK's national working group for developing and implementing Local Government solutions to VRWE. Will has also been a consultant for the Office for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), has supported Governments in the development of their P-/CVE programmes and was the UK representative for the 2015 UN General Assembly Youth Summit in New York.



Anne GIUDICELLI

ANNE Giudicelli is the founder and CEO of Terr(o)Risc, an internationally-recognised organisation specialised in policy formulation and project management in the field of global security, risk and threat assessment, and crisis prevention and management. She previously worked as a security analyst for the French Foreign Affairs Ministry in Paris. Anne has designed innovative state-funded online campaigns as well as awareness training programmes in the field of counter terrorism and P-/CVE. She regularly contributes to strategic studies and is a published author.



Ondrej KOLAR

ONDREJ Kolar is a member of the prison staff of the Czech Republic, working in prisons in Brno, Kuřim and now Světlá nad Sázavou, a prison for women, where he is the head of the prevention and complaints unit. His work involves managing complaints, investigation of petty crimes and the monitoring of extremism tendencies among inmates. Ondrej is responsible for educational activities for prison staff about the manifestations of extremism inside prisons. He is the co-author of the analytic tool, Summary Analysis for Indicators of Inmate's Radicalisation', known as 'SAIRO' and lectures students at the Police Academy in Prague about extremism and radicalisation in the prison service.



Christer MATTSSON

CHRISTER Mattsson is the director of the Segerstedt Institute at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. He has had a long career in creating educational programmes to counter violent extremism, in particular radicalisation to violent right-wing extremism. In his research, he focuses on the trajectories of individuals who have been or are still part of violent extremist groups. At the Segerstedt Institute, he is involved in educating frontline practitioners in the prevention of violent extremism and engagement in exit processes.



Jacek PURSKI

JACEK Purski is the Chairman of the Institute of Social Safety (IBS) in Poland and is a member of the International Organization of Social Innovators (ASHOKA). As a consultant and expert, he cooperated with UEFA as part of the Social Responsibility Programme at EURO 2012 and with FIFA during the World Cup in Germany in 2006. At the IBS he is responsible for developing and providing training to police forces, teachers and local government officials. He has delivered training in Dabrowa Gornicza as part of Poland's first local multi-agency team responsible for P/CVE (as part of the CHAMPIONS project).

FILM:
**NARRATIVES AND STRATEGIES
OF VRWE**

IN October 2019, the RAN produced a case study film which explores the narratives and strategies deployed by violent right-wing extremist groups. The film follows the fictional story of a 19 year old lady called Hanna, from a deprived suburb in a big city somewhere in Europe. Hanna, whose friends were harassed by a group of young men of North African decent, is being recruited by her cousin into an extremist group. The aim of the group is to 'protect the country against migrants'. Her mother calls the community police for assistance. The film asks a select group of practitioners to share their opinions about the case of Hanna.

Read more about the narratives and strategies of violent right-wing extremists in a RAN Police and law enforcement (POL) and RAN Communication and Narratives (C&N) paper [here](#).

FILM
THE EVOLVING VRWE CHALLENGE

MAY 2020
'VIOLENT RIGHT WING EXTREMISM' IN FOCUS

You can watch the film in full [here](#).



ARTICLE:
**CONSPIRACY
THEORIES
IN
THE
AGE
OF
COVID-19**

**A multidisciplinary approach
by The *Dutch National Support
Center For Extremism...***



Belief in conspiratorial narratives has always been a prominent component of extremism, but in recent months the spread of alternative 'facts' has become an increasing source of concern due to its seemingly wider reach. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Dutch National Support Center for Extremism (Dutch abbreviation: LSE) has seen a rise from professionals and family members in requests for consultation concerning paranoid beliefs of persons in combination with potential worrisome behaviour. Anticipating on current events and trends is vital for developing strategies to counter potential processes of radicalisation. It is for this reason that LSE is available for advice and consultation for partner organisations, professionals and citizens who face difficulties regarding possible signs of extremism.

Utilisation of Conspiracies by the Violent Right-Wing

Conspiratorial narratives may be at odds with epistemic authorities (such as the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment), they resonate with common grievances – both on a personal and political level. Together with the increasing stress and uncertainty of the global pandemic and its consequences, emerging conspiratorial narratives can be negative drivers for persons who are vulnerable due to mental health or social issues.

Among those taking advantage of the pandemic are (online) far-right activists that bring their main grievances to attention: conspiratorial thoughts regarding European governments and the dangers posed by the 'open-border'-policy of the globalised ruling powers. Related to this view is the idea that nation states with closed borders are much better equipped to defend themselves against what they see as 'foreign diseases', creating overlaps in far-right xenophobia and public anxiety for emerging diseases such as the current Coronavirus. The uncertainty and global impact of the Coronavirus pandemic provides the perfect storm in which "alternative" explanations to those provided by official authorities can thrive.

“Among those taking advantage of the pandemic are (online) far-right activists that bring their main grievances to attention: conspiratorial thoughts regarding European governments and the dangers posed by the ‘open-border’-policy of the globalised ruling powers...

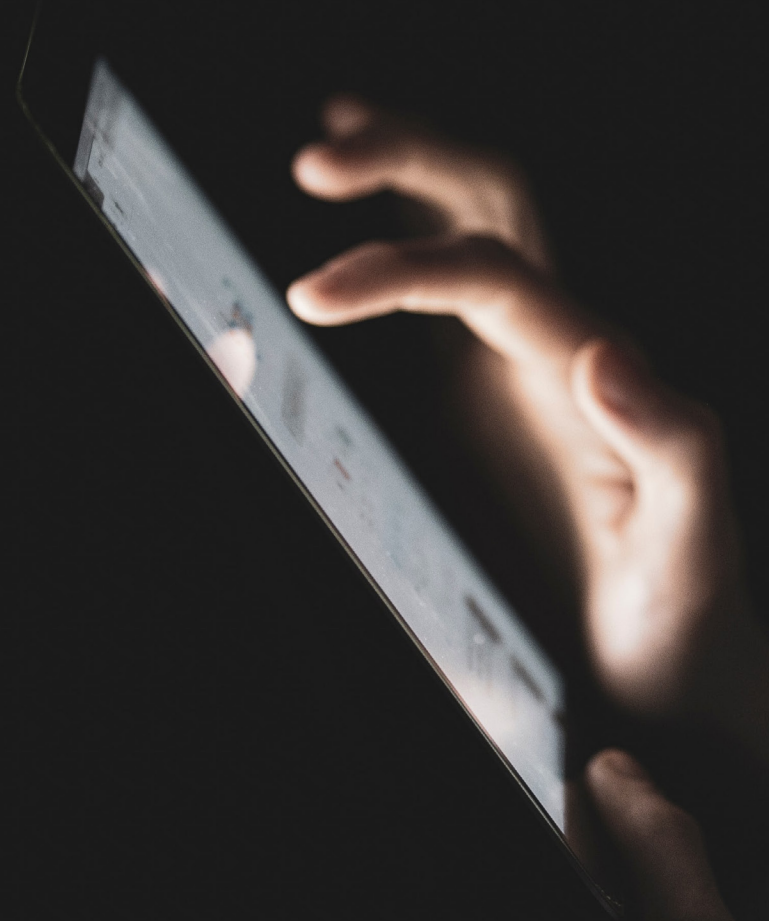
Creating overlaps in violent right-wing xenophobia and public anxiety for emerging diseases such as the current Coronavirus.”

A healthcare approach to extremism and intervention

Conspiracy theorists, in the Netherlands as well as in the rest of the world, aim to popularise the notion that mainstream media and governments can no longer be trusted and may serve as multipliers for extremist radicalisation. These constructs provide a master narrative that explains various complex developments and thereby can provide some with meaning. The notion that life is mostly accidental and uncontrolled is rejected and can therewith reduce feelings of helplessness to some.

These processes largely overlap with the individual stories of clients of LSE's Exit facility Forsa and the Family Support Center. Forsa supports through voluntary social and healthcare programmes people, from young adolescents to adults, who harbour extremist convictions or who are or have been involved in extremist networks to leave behind their extremist lives or pasts. The Family Support Center provides support to the family members of radicalising and radicalised individuals through among other things family therapy and psychoeducation. Forsa and the Family Support Center both use [an evidence-based methodology](#) which takes into account the crucial role 'alternative' explanations and conspiracy thinking plays in the process of radicalisation.

In order to help people renounce extremist views and/or to distance themselves from extremist networks LSE reinforces protective factors to cultivate critical reflection on a voluntary basis. A non-judgmental attitude, transparency and flexibility are key in the healthcare approach to disengagement and deradicalisation. LSE applies a holistic approach, covering psychological, ideological and practical aspects. Our interventions are formulated by the multi and interdisciplinary team, which include (forensic) psychologists, social workers, family therapists, spiritual care workers, and researchers specialised in religious studies, anthropology, and political and conflict studies. The positioning of the caseworker and the way the caseworker corresponds to the clients' needs and expectations is vital in the effectiveness of the counselling process in relation to deradicalisation, especially concerning grievances which resonate with conspiracy theories, and is characterised by an intensive person-centered approach.



“It is common that extremist groups such as the violent right-wing exploit times of uncertainty and anxiety to advance their agenda.”

It is because of this active role, the LSE can provide support to clients as well as information and consultation for both general public and professionals.

Mainstreaming conspiratorial narratives

It is common that extremist groups such as the violent right-wing exploit times of uncertainty and anxiety to advance their agenda. A discourse in which the violent right-wing gets more airplay to magnify their extreme discourse underlines the importance to boost the resilience of vulnerable groups. Supporting self-reliance, resilience and identity of these citizens and the people close to them will therefore remain of crucial importance in the work of LSE.



FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM

A PRACTICAL INTRODUCTION

PUBLICATION
RAN FACTBOOK ON VRWE

OVER the past 15 years, frontline practitioners have played a pivotal role when it comes to preventing radicalisation and combating violent extremism. However, while some Member States have already been focusing on RWE for many years, some of the efforts, strategies and policies have been historically aimed at countering Islamist-inspired extremism. Foiled plots in the aftermath of Christchurch, a surge in hate speech and racially motivated violence in EU Member States, including recent attacks such as in Halle (2019) and Hanau (2020), have demonstrated to the whole of Europe that right-wing extremist violence should not be overlooked.

The current right-wing phenomenon is also fostering a growing repudiation of political and democratic solutions for grievances at a national level, fuelling societal hostility and polarisation that could lead to the escalation of highly polarised conflicts and attacks on minorities and refugees. But the potential threat from violent right-wing extremism comprises more than solely a security threat. Just a few individuals propagating hate speech and polarising messages can create a climate of tension in communities, sports teams or schools.

In order to tackle violent right-wing extremism, it is key to get a better understanding of the phenomenon. It encompasses a diverse range of different ideologies and narratives that coexist with more traditional right-wing extremist ideologies like national socialism and fascism. With a strong and sophisticated online presence, it is nowadays much more likely to come across explicit or implicit violent right-wing extremist messages, often in the form of memes or hidden symbols.

The RAN has produced a factbook to raise awareness and to provide practical and factual knowledge on representations, ideologies, narratives, symbols and vocabulary of violent right-wing extremism. It gives a good overview of the fundamental elements of the challenge, which could be beneficial when developing a tailored approach for a phenomenon that should not be ignored. You can read the factbook in full [here](#).

Nikki Sterkenburg is a journalist, researcher and expert on violent right-wing extremism.

Interview: Hakan Jarva My Story...

WE spoke with Hakan Jarva, a former member of the Scientology movement and now frontline practitioner who shares his experiences with, and offers counselling to parents and young people impacted by VRWE. Sat with his back to his home music studio, Hakan told us his story, about his love of music, his experiences in a cult and his life after.



What factors led to you joining the Scientology movement?

I didn't have a troublesome background, maybe I was a little bored with school. I was a bit impulsive and impatient. I have been diagnosed with ADHD. So that was one of the things that might have been working against me when I got recruited. After school I was looking at career opportunities and things I could do. But I was wanting something else.

Everyone wants to take part in something, have meaning, be important, do things that matter. Young people, between the ages of 16 and 26 are particularly vulnerable. Often, it's about being in the wrong place at the wrong time. For me, I didn't like society.

I was in between the punk age and the hippy age. The hippy age had its allure, things like meditation and mysticism. It became the new age movement and I was drawn into thinking about alternative realities.

One of the things that sold the deal to me, was that I was an aspiring musician and when I first got contacted by the recruiters, they told me two musicians that I listened to a lot, were part of Scientology. For me that legitimised the whole thing and that was the moment when I thought 'OK – they're not stupid, I like these guys.'

What were your experiences of Scientology?

It quickly became my whole life and my friends faded away. I had already removed myself from my social circle when I moved to another part of Sweden. So at that time I had no social circle around me. Later, my friends didn't know I had been drawn into Scientology until it was too late. When they started talking to me about it they were very negative and tried to convince me that I was in a cult, but when you are in love you don't listen to reason.

The hard thing when I talk to parents today, is to convince them not to be negative. They have to put themselves in their kid's

shoes and understand how they are feeling, acknowledging that they have found something of value, otherwise you instantly create a wall between you and them. You also have to separate the ideology as well. But it's difficult and understandable. It is easy to demonise someone as a neo-Nazi or other sort of extremist. As a professional though it's easier than being a parent because you can distance yourself from the emotion.

What impact did it have on your life?

Scientology was a lot about money. You pay lots of money to do all of the courses and the therapy that they sell you. The whole thing is a big money scheme. I got into a lot of debt.

What are the parallels that can be drawn between cults and VRWE?

Both cults and violent extremists target vulnerabilities, such as the need for purpose, meaning and belonging, and individuals who find themselves in isolation. For violent extremists this includes those that have already shown a capacity for violence. I call this whole recruitment process the 'SLICE' – Screen, Love bomb, Isolate, Control, Exploit. It's a telling acronym. They screen for the people they need, aim to make people feel great, distance them from their social circles and get them to take part in activities. So when you tell your parents you are a neo-Nazi, the recruiters already know a parent will react negatively, which confirms the extremist ideology for the individual.

How did you disengage from the Scientology movement?

I disengaged because my former wife got kicked out. That was a lucky stroke because I followed her out because of our marriage and our kid. We had been in the movement ten years and I needed a break really. It wasn't fun anymore, but I still believed in much of it. It took me four more years to de-radicalise. Eventually, I didn't believe anymore.

I had made other friends. The main thing was that I got in contact with people who cared – who had another story. I met people online who had left the movement and that was the main thing that made me change my mind really. That took some

“Cults and violent extremists target vulnerabilities, such as the need for purpose, meaning and belonging, and individuals who find themselves in isolation. For violent extremists this includes those that have already shown a capacity for violence.”

time. There was simply too much negative information about the movement that I just couldn't ignore, I couldn't rationalise the movement anymore.

It was like starting all over again. It's a lesson for people when they talk about de-radicalisation. For those who have been part of a movement for a long time, it takes time to get back on track.

What have you been doing since you left the movement?

For the last fifteen years I've been helping people in many different ways. One project was based on the idea of vaccinating kids against manipulation through experience. It is easy to talk about manipulation but it's hard to recognise it unless you have experienced it. It's like a virus, you need to be exposed to it, in a moderate dosage, before you can develop antibodies. It's only when you have been tricked and duped that you start to realise the signs and build up resilience. So the project worked with a magician to try to rattle the teenagers' world a bit.

What can practitioners learn from your experiences?

If you want to work preventatively, the lesson I learned was you have to have kids experience things. If you just talk about it, they're not going to learn and they are not really prepared. If you give them an experience you can build up their resilience to manipulation and violent extremist influence.

The door to extremism is always open but society's door is not, so if you want to work preventatively, you have to open as many doors as possible. That's the best preventative action you can take really. I think people, at least in Sweden, think too much about teaching values. However, I think it is better to provide opportunities to do things that matter in life.

What next?

Finishing my book! It's called 'The Radical Reality'. It's in Swedish and it's all the things I have talked about. I hope that if it's well received it will be translated into English. It's a very hands-on book with practical advice, it's very big on how you can really talk to your kids and how you can do practical things.

I don't know how the world will look in a year, but I am sure in a world of crisis, the radical movements will rise. So we have to keep doing our work and doing it well. But that's for the future.

“The door to extremism is always open but society's door is not, so if you want to work preventatively, you have to open as many doors as possible.”

ARTICLE: **DELIVERING INTERVENTIONS ONLINE**



VIOLENT right-wing extremists (VRWE) use the online space to spread their ideology and to reach vulnerable individuals to recruit online...

Robert ÖRELL



How do VRWE exploit the online space?

VIOLENT right-wing extremists (VRWE) use the online space to spread their ideology and to reach vulnerable individuals to recruit online. The online platforms operated by extremist groups oftentimes help these vulnerable youngsters form new relations and build a new identity online. They report feeling empowered by these platforms, feeling seen, heard, and important. They feel part of a community where they matter and are supported, at least in the beginning. These types of online communities usually build a strong sense of “us and them” where other people and groups outside are seen as bad, deceitful, unreliable, and inferior or threatening.

Sometimes the recruitment is direct with clear messages, but more often it is discrete and covert. Such recruitment can start with an invitation to a closed chat group that appears in an online game community, or with a link invitation to a closed forum. From there the messages slowly become more explicit propaganda and recruitment.

It's also a common strategy to post funny memes and images in online forums with subtle messages that have an influence on participants' views over time. The more extreme examples are groups or individual sympathisers that explicitly propagate committing violence.

The current global Covid-19 pandemic affects us all and feelings of fear and uncertainty have increased. In combination with the various measures taken to prevent the spread, many people find themselves isolated searching for a community and for answers to understand what is going on and how to cope with the current situation. Violent extremist groups of all types provide their version and ideas to frame the current crisis, spreading narratives in form of conspiracy theories and fake news. Most importantly, they offer a community to vent and to discuss the pressuring situation as well as a platform to promote ideas on how to change the current society into what they propagate as a better one.

“It’s also a common strategy to post funny memes and images in online forums with subtle messages that have an influence on participants’ views over time. The more extreme examples are groups or individual sympathisers that explicitly propagate committing violence.”

Why do practitioners need to work online?

It is important that practitioners become aware and understand the importance of online work in preventing and countering violent radicalism.

For many young people, the online world has become just as important as the offline and they spend a considerable amount of time consuming videos, connecting with other people on social media and searching for news and information.

The online world is not a vacuum without consequences or responses in the offline world. The online world of VRWE has inspired numerous violent attacks all around the world. The perpetrator of the Christchurch attack in New Zealand inspired the perpetrator of the Baerum Mosque attack in Norway. A high number of lone wolf perpetrators reference other lone wolf terrorists as inspiration for their own attacks.

Violent extremist groups exploit isolation and a sense of powerlessness. Practitioners need to be present in spaces where the vulnerable youngsters spend their time.

In recent years practitioners have addressed the role of online gaming as a recruitment forum for violent extremists' groups. By inviting young gamers to closed chat rooms, the young person feels special and chosen to be part of the new group. In these unrestricted virtual environments, recruitment has happened relatively undisturbed and sometimes over a longer period of time.

What can practitioners do online?

A reoccurring theme when former members of violent extremist groups describe what helped them change and leave is the formation of meaningful, authentic connections outside of the group. This is also one of the main goals when operating in an online space.

Classic EXIT work can be offered online. With effective advertising strategies the online service can reach individuals who are motivated to make a change. Similar to the offline work, practitioners establish rapport and focus on individual needs.

Another approach to online EXIT work is to provide an online community similar to online self-help groups. Such initiatives provide a secure and closed forum where clients can meet virtually and support each other in their disengagement process.

It is all the more important that online strategies and practices are being developed in preventative work. Similar to offline practice, trained social and youth workers engage with youngsters but they do their work in online forums and social media platforms. Authenticity and honesty about the role of the practitioner as well as modelling constructive online behaviours are important.

In all types of online work with clients specialised training is necessary for practitioners to have the relevant internet and media literacy, and understand the theoretical and technical aspects of online safety, confidentiality and anonymity.

An important element of all approaches is the ability to connect clients with offline services if needed. These services include psychotherapy, psychiatry, legal advice, study advisory centres, job centres, social work, tattoo removal salons and so forth.

How can practitioners do it?

It is important that practitioners get sufficient training to understand the strategies and tools extremists use to recruit and radicalise. In addition, they need training in the legal, technological, ethical and privacy-related aspects of online work.

Knowledge can be drawn from already existing online counselling literature.

Read more about doing digital youth work in a P/CVE context in a RAN YF&C paper [here](#).

Relevant material and information has been collected and published by RAN working groups: [RAN Exit](#) and [RAN Youth, Families & Communities](#) youth work in a P-CVE context, how to address different topics, advice on conversation techniques, and so on.

Are there any good examples of innovative approaches?

This is a developing field and we can expect more practices to emerge. An inspiring preventative practice has been developed by the French Web Walkers (WW). In their proactive approach, professionals reach out to young people, communicating and interacting through blogs, chats and forums, creating bonds and encouraging a critical mindset.

An example from the realm of online intervention is the North American organisation Life After Hate. Their Exit USA programme offers online EXIT support services including online mentorship provided by formers as well as trained mental health professionals.

Robert Örell has over eighteen years of experience working on disengagement from political extremism and family support at Exit Sweden and Exit USA. He is a Director of Transform, an NGO dedicated to capacity building and training. To view a TED talk delivered by Robert, 'TEDx: A Way Out From Violent Extremism'. Please click [here](#).

A close-up photograph of a person's hands interacting with a silver laptop. The person's left hand is on the trackpad, and their right hand is pointing at the screen. The person is wearing a black watch on their left wrist and a silver ring on their left ring finger. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a wooden wall. The text 'WEB WALKERS' is overlaid in large, bold, white, sans-serif capital letters across the center of the image.

WEB WALKERS

A solid blue circle containing the word 'FEATURE' in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

FEATURE



The Web Walkers project is a training programme aimed at preventing violence, harassment and the radicalisation of young people through digital mediation. The training is based on an online educational programme developed in France, called the ‘Promeneurs du Net’, which itself replicated a similar programme previously delivered by the Fryshuset youth centre in Sweden.

The Promeneurs du Net programme was created in response to the increase in internet and social network usage among young people and the need to provide young people with a trustworthy online presence. Prior to 2012, some youth workers were already working online, but this practice was marginal due to a lack of digital competence and no common framework of intervention. An online controlled and certified pedagogical action was therefore deemed necessary for these digital youth workers.

A Promeneurs du Net youth worker is a professional (community worker and/or educator) working in a structure that engages with young people. As an extension of their mission they are designated by their employer to link-up with young people on social networks. Each Promeneurs du Net professional has a bespoke profile, with his/her picture and the name of their employer. By becoming 'friends' online with young people, the Promeneurs du Net youth worker can share information with them, answer their questions or worries and give them advice. Their role is not to enforce surveillance but to provide a friendly presence online.

Thanks to this role, the professional can also detect a worrying situation that might affect a young person, such as suffering from isolation, uneasiness or fear. By conversing with young people, the Promeneurs du Net youth worker builds-up social links and cultivates the critical thinking of young people. Their action enhances expression, creativity and the sense of initiative among them. Importantly, the work of a Promeneurs du Net youth worker is always connected to offline activities.

The Promeneurs du Net programme is supported by the French National Fund for Family Allowances (CNAF), the Ministry of Health and Solidarities, the Ministry of Education and the National Agricultural Social Security Agency. Today, there are over 1,400 active Promeneurs du Net youth workers in France.

While this programme has proved fruitful, youth workers have often faced the issues of the growing phenomena of radicalisation, violence and harassment of young people online and how to deal with them effectively. This is where the Web Walkers training comes into action.

Read more about the Promeneurs du Net programme [here](#).

Interview: A Day in the Life Of... Fabian Wichmann

WE asked Fabian Wichmann, an EXIT practitioner, ten questions about a typical day working for EXIT Germany. Fabian is also the author of several publications and studies on the topics of violent right-wing extremism and threats to democracy and conceived the award-winning initiatives 'Rechts gegen Rechts' (Nazis Against Nazis), #HassHilft (Donate the Hate) and the Trojan T-shirt by EXIT Germany.



What does EXIT Germany do?

At EXIT Germany we help people to leave violent right-wing movements. If someone wants to leave they can call us. Often these people have some doubts or some problems in their current situation. But there needs to be a motivation from the person themselves to change something in their life. If there is, then we can help them.

How do you help people who want to leave VRWE groups?

We help people who want to leave right-wing movements in different ways, delivering a wide spectrum of interventions. This includes providing them with education, reintegration into society and advice and support on security, particularly for those who are at risk from former comrades or other elements of society. The deradicalisation and reintegration of extremists is a long process. It can take anywhere between two and four years, and sometimes 15 years in the most serious cases (because of difficulties).

Why do you do this job?

I was born in East Germany. My first experience of violent right-wing extremism (VRWE) was in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Before the fall of the wall, the phenomenon of VRWE did not exist on an official level. After the fall of the wall VRWE was very visible. It was the first time I saw these people on the streets and heard about attacks and violence. My first experiences of VRWE ideology was in school. This got me interested in the topic, to know why people became neo-Nazis, why they still believed in this ideology.

Was there anything that inspired you?

A book by Ingo Hasselbach, a former neo-Nazi from East Berlin, inspired me to think a little bit more about EXIT work. I thought it was interesting to see how people can change and how important it is to support this change. Democratic society has to give people a chance to change, there has to be a door for people to leave VRWE and a door to enter society. So since 2006 I have been working in different fields, including community coaching and family counselling, and from 2009 I have been working in the field of EXIT counselling.

What is your daily routine?

I start my day by checking the latest news and social media while on my way to work. We have a small team so we all have to support one another doing different things, including counselling, public relations to raise awareness of our work, developing campaigning ideas and content for campaigns. We conduct the counselling meetings in safe public spaces, such as coffee shops, carefully considering the location on a case-by-case basis. We talk to them about their problems and discuss the process of leaving VRWE. At the end of the day, if there is no evening event, I am back on social media. It doesn't end!

Can you tell us about one of your campaigns?

'Donate the Hate' is a campaign which turns hate-comments online into involuntary donations for refugees. The internet is currently overflowing with racist and xenophobic comments. So we have a very simple idea. For every misanthropic comment, we make a DONATION OF 1 EURO to refugee projects run by the 'Aktion Deutschland Hilft' campaign and 'EXIT-Deutschland'. We have raised over 100,000 euros since 2015.

What is the most challenging part of your job?

Seeing people who want to change their lives, who have a lot of development in them, but because of a mental block they have no chance to take the last step of making a clear break from VRWE. This is incredibly difficult.

What has been the most rewarding part of your job?

My first case was in 2009. It was a hard case. A woman was convicted of sharing online guidelines to make bombs. To see how she has developed in these years, leaving the VRWE scene was incredibly rewarding. At one point in time she talked about killing herself because of her problems. But we walked through all of these problems together and eleven years later you can see a marked change. In the end not everything is perfect but she has a normal life, a house and a family.

“Donate the Hate’ is a campaign which turns hate-comments online into involuntary donations for refugees. The internet is currently overflowing with racist and xenophobic comments. Cults and violent extremists target vulnerabilities, such as the need for purpose, meaning and belonging, and individuals who find themselves in isolation. For violent extremists this includes those that have already shown a capacity for violence.”

How has the RAN been helpful to you?

RAN is interesting and useful because of the opportunity to exchange ideas, practices and experiences with practitioners all over Europe to get a wider view on the challenge and develop new ideas to address it. For EXIT Germany this is a very important part of our work. We want to find ways to improve our work, to help others to develop ideas and find solutions together.

Any tips for other practitioners?

It is good to learn from other practitioners, but don't listen to people who tell you to copy and paste an approach for a project. You always have to adapt and modify approaches to your local context and environment. If you develop an EXIT project, you should identify and draw inspiration from good practices but modify them according to your target audience.

“RAN is interesting and useful because of the opportunity to exchange ideas, practices and experiences with practitioners all over Europe to get a wider view on the challenge and develop new ideas to address it.”

Highlights: **RAN Activity on VRWE**

THE RAN will be addressing the topic of violent right-wing extremism in a number of its activities this year. In May and June alone, we will be touching upon the VRWE topic in a Working Group meeting, two webinars and two publications. Further activities are being planned for the remainder of the year.

Stay tuned for updates in the RAN newsletter and on RAN social media channels.



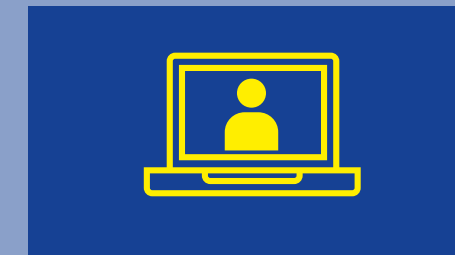
Working Group meeting:

'Day-to-day challenges of violent right-wing extremism'. For more information please read the section on upcoming events.



Webinar:

'Violent right-wing extremism'. For more information please read the article on 'webinar'.



Webinar:

'Practical know-how on violent right-wing extremism for the police'. More information to follow.



Publication:

'Contemporary manifestations of violent right-wing extremism in the EU: An overview of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) practices. More information to follow.



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LIBRARY: DISCOVER MORE

IF you would like to discover more about the violent right-wing challenge in Europe you can get in touch with the RAN Staff, take a look at the [RAN Collection of Inspiring Practices](#) or read through some of the latest [RAN papers](#) on the topic. We have included some of these papers in a carefully selected collection of interesting and relevant articles below.

RAN. (2019) *'Doing digital youth work in a P/CVE context'*, Ex Post Paper. Copenhagen, Denmark: RAN YF&C, 29 November 2019.

RAN. (2019) *'Narratives and strategies of violent right-wing extremists'*, Ex Post Paper. Stockholm, Sweden: RAN POL and RAN C&N, 4-5 April 2019.

RAN. (2019) *'Local-level management of far-right extremism'*, Ex Post Paper. Rotterdam, the Netherlands: RAN LOCAL, 23-24 January 2019.

RAN. (2018) *'Police prevention and countering of far-right and far-left extremism'*, Ex Post Paper. Rome, Italy: RAN POL, 12-13 April 2018.

Ebner, J. (2018) *'The rage: The vicious circle of Islamist and far-right extremism'*. London, UK: I.B. Tauris.

European Strategic Communications Network (ESCN). (2019) *'How the (violent) extreme-right 'radicalises the mainstream' in Europe'*, Thematic Paper 3.

State Security Service (VSSE). (2020) *'The hidden danger behind COVID-19'*. Belgium.



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