

**Forum:** United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

**Issue:** Measures to combat youth radicalisation

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## **Introduction:**

Radicalisation can be defined as the action or process of causing someone to adopt radical positions on political or social issues. Social media platforms and discussion forums such as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit and 4chan have made it easier for young people to be exposed to radical ideas and ways of thinking, and there have been several notable cases of young people holding leadership positions in extremist organizations, such as a 13-year-old in Estonia who was found to be a leader of the Feuerkrieg Division (an international neo-Nazi organization).

“Violent extremism is not associated with any particular religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group. Quite the contrary, due to its global dimension, the phenomenon of radicalization leading to violence poses threats to the security and fundamental rights of the citizens of all our societies. These trends must be seen in light of the increasingly blended off-line and on-line lives, especially of young women and men, which increases the need to address the ICT-related dimensions of youth radicalization and extremism leading to violence. This complex challenge requires innovative, lasting and global solutions, underpinned by a strong commitment to cooperation and coordination between all relevant stakeholders at a national and international level” UNICEF says. The current generation of young people is the largest the world has ever known. While this young population offers tremendous opportunity for development and economic growth, more than 600 million young people live in fragile and conflict affected settings. These young people are especially vulnerable to being influenced by pre-existing extremists that hope for violence and negative change.

## **Definition of Key Terms:**

1. **Radicalisation** - the gradual action or process of causing someone to adopt extremist positions on political or social issues

2. **Extremism** - the holding of extreme political or religious views

## **Background Information**

### **The internet and impacts of social media**

The internet and social media is privilege that the youth of today's age has access to. On the internet and especially social media, teenagers as young as 13 are allowed to access and create accounts on platforms such as Snapchat, Facebook, Omegle, Instagram, Twitter and Kik.

#### **Chatrooms**

Chatrooms can be embedded within most Internet-based media. Reports that have looked into the use of chatrooms by violent extremist groups, describing them as spaces where at-risk youth without previous experience with radicalisation would be likely to come across radicalising religious narratives. Chatrooms are different than regular websites, due to their need for active sources of interaction as compared to websites being passive sources of news and information. Networking in chatrooms is facilitated by discussion forums because they develop communication among followers of the same ideas(experiences,ideas,values, etc). Chatrooms can also include spaces where extremist people share information such as photos, videos, guides and manuals.

#### **Facebook**

Although many extremist groups are ideologically and strategically anti-Facebook due to the app's implementation of chat bots which detect threats and automatically "shadow-ban" the user or delete the post entirely, some still maintain a strong presence on this platform either directly or through supporters. Facebook however, is not typically used for direct recruitment or planning, possibly because it has mechanisms of tracking and can link users with real places and specific times. Instead, Facebook has, in the past,, more often appeared to be by extremists as a decentralized center(a place where plans are explicitly posted) for the distribution of information and videos or a way to find like-minded supporters and show support rather

than direct recruitment. This may be on the possibility that young people can share information and images that create Facebook in a decentralised way.

### **Twitter**

Micro-blogging sites like Twitter present more advantages for extremist groups because traceability of the identity and the source of the tweets are harder to achieve, thus increasing the communication potential for recruiters. Analyses of Twitter feeds generated by Islamist violent extremist groups show that they are mostly used for engaging with the opposition and the authorities, in what appear to be tweetclashes that mobilize the two sides, and also used for provocation. Lastly, Twitter allows for these extremists to comment on international events and personalities, allowing them to be vocal and timely when mounting campaigns.

### **YouTube and other video platforms**

YouTube remains the video-sharing platform of choice despite the increased competition from other platforms, such as Dailymotion, Vimeo, and the like. It has the advantage of increased difficulty in tracing the identity of users posting content, while offering the possibility for users to generate comments and share videos. The Quilliam Report publishes a comprehensive analysis of the content of Islamist violent extremist videos published on YouTube. It describes how the content targets a sympathetic audience, and focuses on education and the praising of martyrs, with less overt violent content such as suicide bombings. This might be an implicit strategy to subvert the extremist labeling that might lead to government blocking or censoring, or lead YouTube to act proactively and remove content that is in breach of its user guidelines.

### **Individuals who get radicalised**

It is generally seen that once someone gets radicalised, they join a cult of some sort that circulates posts, thoughts and plans about how they can spread often false information about a minority group(usually) or a group currently in power that they feel need to be overthrown. Some signs of an individual changing their

views about a certain group include the reluctance to discuss their views, a sudden disrespectful attitude towards other people, increased levels of anger, etc.

## **Current Situation**

### **Recruitment and Radicalization**

Young people are targeted both by recruitment and radicalization to violent extremist organizations and in terrorist attacks. They recognize prevention of violent extremism as a priority and many have already acted to reduce the impact of violent extremism, promote tolerance and value pluralism, and build resilience in their local communities and societies. So far, very little information has been collected on how effective current self-regulation measures are. Although, the need for this information is rising, due to the increased pressure on the government over the last few years, as they are required social networks and internet providers to act on information regarding alleged terrorists.

### **Major Social Media platforms' viewpoint**

All major social media platforms have their own statements of rights and responsibilities or Terms of Service whereby they explicitly position themselves in relation to "hate speech" (which is variously defined) and gratuitous violence, discriminatory and unlawful content. They often reserve the right to take down or refuse to distribute such content, while pledging to not disclose user information so as to respect their privacy, except in cases of harm done to others or legitimate requests by the authorities. Over time, several social media providers have created a group of reviewers who examine each complaint sent to them. An analysis of their yearly transparency reports shows the increase in requests from governments rather than from individual users.

### **Video Games**

Videogames can be placed in a similar category as social media because they increasingly have their own forums, chatrooms and microblogging tools. Videogames, widely used by young people, are under-researched in relation to extremism and violent radicalization. There is mostly anecdotal evidence that ISIS supporters have proposed modified versions of some games to spread propaganda

(Grand Theft Auto 5) formats that allow players act as terrorists attacking Westerners (ARMA III) and provide for hijacking of images and titles such as Call of Duty to allude to a notion of jihad.

Selepack (2010) used qualitative textual analysis of hate-based videogames found on right-wing religious supremacist groups' websites to explore the extent to which they advocate violence. The results show that most hate groups were portrayed positively, and that videogames promoted extreme violence towards people represented as Black or Jewish people. The games were often modified versions of classic videogames in which the original enemies were replaced with religious, racial and/or ethnic minorities. Their main purpose is to indoctrinate players with white supremacist ideology and allow those who already hold racist ideologies to practice aggressive scripts toward minorities online, which may later be acted upon offline. It should be noted that some experimental social psychologists show that cumulative violent videogames can increase hostile expectations and aggressive behaviour.

### **Religious View**

Before 2005-2006, most of the uses of the Internet and social media focused on political extremism, mainly white supremacists in the USA, via the operations of their websites as precursors of social media. Their "oppositional culture" was examined either in traditional ways (modes of recruitment, types of actions) or in terms of outreach capacity (focusing on affinities, group identity). The Internet is presented as a new, cheap and easy-to-integrate medium that adds to the communication strategies of such fringe groups. In more recent years, research focus in the regions discussed here has turned to violent radicalization claiming religious rationales, especially in the light of messaging targeting potential recruits not just in the Middle East, but in the West and elsewhere.

### **Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

#### **The UN**

The United Nations, in general, has a big role to play in implementing measures to combat youth radicalisation. The UN Security Council, for example, came up with

Resolution 2250 in 2015 to ensure the peace and security of each generation's youth. UNICEF and UNESCO have also had resolutions, similar to the above Security Council resolution, that put measures in place to prevent major social media platforms from negatively influencing respective generations and their youth.

### **United States of America**

The USA is a major party involved due to their involvement in law enforcements that affect all major social media platforms. Laws that the USA implements affecting social media platforms will ultimately affect all users(worldwide) of the platform, including extremist groups, due to the majority of social media platforms having their headquarters in the United States itself. During the last decade, the US government has set up two online programs against radicalization designed to counter anti-American propaganda and misinformation from al-Qaeda or the Islamic state. These programs seek to win the "war of ideas" by countering self-styled jihadist rhetoric. Studies show that these programs, in the US and other countries aswell, have a serious credibility gap. Western participation in wars and bombing of civilians, arbitrary detention, torture, etc., is used by ISIS and others to create an image of hypocrisy, duplicity and propaganda that may undermine counter-narratives and serve to exacerbate resentment in the Muslim world toward the US or other Western countries.

### **Middle East and North African(MENA) countries**

Arab youth are major consumers of social media networks and especially Facebook, which is one of the top ten most used sites by Arab Internet users, a tendency that quickly found its translation into the Arab political realm (Gonzalez-Quijano, 2012). According to a study by Mohamed Ibn Rachid Faculty for governance in the United Arab Emirates, the number of Facebook users in 22 Arab countries increased from 54.5 million in 2013 to 81.3 million in 2014 with a majority being young people. The study of literature in the region reveals the role played by social networks, especially Facebook and Twitter, as platforms for collective expression for Arab youth on current issues, conflicts and wars (e.g., Gaza situation in particular) (Salem, Mourtada & Alshaer, 2014). In Iraq, for example, young Internet users and

bloggers launched several campaigns on Facebook and Twitter at the beginning of military operations to free the major cities occupied by ISIS (Fallujah and Mosul). In Morocco, other initiatives with the same objective were launched such as the one by Hamzah al-Zabadi on Facebook, which consisted of sharing all kinds of content (images, texts, etc.) to contradict and challenge ISIS's narratives. The involvement of civil society actors on the web in the fight against terrorism and violent radicalization in the Arab region remains modest for many reasons including the lack of media policies dedicated to this struggle.

## **UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events**

The UN General Assembly adopted by consensus the [UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy](#) on 8 September 2006. The strategy is a unique global instrument to enhance national, regional and international efforts to counter terrorism. The General Assembly reviews the Strategy every two years, making it a living document attuned to Member States' counter-terrorism priorities.

The Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) on youth, peace and security stresses the importance of addressing conditions and factors leading to the rise of radicalization to violence and violent extremism amongst youth, which can be conducive to terrorism. It urges Member States to consider ways to increase inclusive representation of youth in decision-making at all levels to counter violent extremism.

- The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, 8 September 2006(A/RES/60/288)
- Security Council, 9 December 2015 (S/RES/2250)
  - youth participation in the maintenance of international peace and security

## **Possible Solutions**

### **Media and Information Literacy(MIL)**

MIL has a long tradition of dealing with harmful content and violent representations, including propaganda. In its early history, MIL was mostly put in place to fight misinformation (particularly in advertising) by developing critical

skills about the media. By the 1980s, MIL also introduced cultural and creative skills to use the media in an empowering way, with active pedagogies. Since the years 2000, MIL has enlarged the media definition to incorporate the Internet and social media, adding issues related to ethical uses of online media to the traditional debates over harmful content and harmful behavior and aligning them more with the perspectives that consider issues of gratifications of media users. Several formal and informal MIL initiatives have been implemented worldwide based on MIL as a pedagogical practice with a specific set of competences that can deflect narratives of anger and revenge and/or self-realization through violent extremism.

These initiatives aim at creating digital counter-narratives that are authentic and reflect youth perceptions of self and others, especially in terms of injustice, felt experiences of discrimination, corruption and abuse by security forces. In this regard, UNESCO and others have organized events about youth and with youth and journalists to consider how best to fight extremism and radicalization (2015).

The need to sensitize young people to online freedoms became clear but also the need to train journalists in MIL and in the coverage of terror and extremism, so as to be aware of critical functions of their reportage.

## Bibliography

### Useful Links

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260382/PDF/260382eng.pdf.mu>

[lti](#)

 What can be done to prevent youth radicalization?

[https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR400/RR453/RAND\\_RR453.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR400/RR453/RAND_RR453.pdf)

<https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/cct/youth-engagement-and-empowerment>

### Works Cited

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260382/PDF/260382eng.pdf.mu>

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