



INSTITUTE *for*  
STRATEGIC DIALOGUE

# On the Front Line

## A guide to countering far-right extremism

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VIDHYA RAMALINGAM

THE  
**FREE**  
INITIATIVE



With the financial support from the Prevention of and Fight  
Against Crime Programme of the European Union European  
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## About the project

From 2012 to 2014, the Swedish Ministry of Justice and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) are partnering on a pan-European project aiming to enhance understanding of what works in preventing and countering far-right extremism in 10 countries (Sweden, UK, the Netherlands, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Slovak Republic). It has developed a package of resources which include the policy report *Old Threat, New Approach: Tackling the Far Right Across Europe*, as well as *The FREE Initiative – Far-Right Extremism in Europe* ([www.theFREEinitiative.com](http://www.theFREEinitiative.com)), an online resource which aims to inspire and connect those tackling the far right and showcase best practices.

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Finally, we would like to thank the inspirational individuals we interviewed across these 10 countries, for sharing their personal stories and insights into tackling this problem. This project aims to amplify their voices and experiences.

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# Introduction

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Far-right extremism remains a worrying problem across Europe. The most visible cases are those that hit the headlines, such as the discovery of the National Socialist Underground in Germany or Anders Behring Breivik's attacks in Norway. In the past decade, both Hungary and Sweden were hit by a string of serial murders of Roma and ethnic minorities. Though attacks of this magnitude and scale remain rare, they are not unheard of. In some cases, those personally touched by these violent attacks are still fighting for justice.

While high-profile and high-impact events hit the headlines, the bulk of the threat posed by the far right is felt through smaller-scale localised harassment, bullying and hate crime by extremists targeting minority communities. These kinds of incidences often go undetected, and indeed they are hard to quantify. They manifest in the sectioning off of some local areas as no-go zones for ethnic minorities, graffiti of far-right symbols on mosques and synagogues, or threats received by individual members of the community.

Those carrying out these actions – far-right extremists – are a broad group, ranging from less ideological youth street gangs to neo-Nazi terrorist cells, anti-Islam activists and registered political parties. Though they differ in their aims and methods, there are some defining features: racism, xenophobia, ultra-nationalism and authoritarianism. The actions they

take aim to intimidate and assert power over particular communities and undermine democracy.

In some countries, the capacity for violence within the far right is on the rise, and it remains challenging to ascertain at what point ideology can turn to violence. With the proliferation of extremist content online, and the ease with which anyone can access communities advocating violence across the web, this challenge has only grown.

There are thousands of front-line professionals across Europe who come face-to-face with this issue on a regular basis, whether it is those working specifically on countering violent extremism, or those who encounter the far right as part of their daily responsibilities policing communities or educating young people.

Though European countries differ on the particular problems they face and the ways in which they address them, there are more commonalities than differences when it comes to specific challenges posed by the far right. Front-line professionals and local communities often develop innovative solutions to these challenges, though these rarely make headlines or send ripples beyond the community immediately affected.

This project aims to change this. This is one of the first projects aiming to enhance understanding of what works in prevention, intervention and response to far-right extremism across Europe. It has developed a package of resources which include ISD's report *Old Threat, New Approach: Tackling the Far Right Across Europe* which sets out government approaches to far-right extremism and provides guidance to policymakers, as well as an online platform called The FREE Initiative – Far-Right Extremism in Europe ([www.theFREEinitiative.com](http://www.theFREEinitiative.com)), which aims to inspire and connect those tackling the far right and showcase best practices.

This is a practical guide for front-line professionals and activists. It is based on the collective experiences of over 120 individuals tackling far-right extremism across 10 countries (Sweden, UK, the Netherlands, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Slovak Republic). This includes both governmental and non-governmental professionals coming into contact with far-right individuals or those who are impacted by them, on a daily basis. These professionals are thus in a unique position to influence those within or vulnerable to far-right extremism, and limit their impact.

These are: education and youth workers; local authorities; police; Exit and intervention providers; victims supporters; and campaigners and activists.

Though most are delivering local or nationally specific work, those tackling far-right extremism are not alone in their efforts. Across Europe, they share many of the same challenges. They often devote their personal and professional lives to tackling extremism and many have worked in this area for many years. They often fill a void where national government is unable or unwilling to act.

They work in a variety of ways; a break-down of their key actions is outlined in the figure below. These range from softer measures like local dialogue and promoting positive narratives to rival the far right's to hard-end policing of extremist activity and intervention work to halt violent behaviour.

ACTIONS



## **EDUCATION AND YOUTH WORKERS**

- Contact across community divides
- Diversion and alternative activities
- Educational programmes
- Dialogue on the hard issues



## **LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

- Local dialogue
- Public order management
- Diversion and alternative activities
- Reclaiming public spaces
- Alternative narratives



## **POLICE**

- Public order management
- Diversion and alternative activities
- Local dialogue
- One-to-one interventions



## **EXIT AND INTERVENTION PROVIDERS**

- One-to-one interventions
- Exit programmes
- Online engagement



## **VICTIMS SUPPORTERS**

- Rehabilitation and reintegration
- Empowering victims and their communities
- Training for the justice system



## CAMPAIGNERS AND ACTIVISTS

- Take downs
- Alternative narratives
- Counter-narratives
- Training for key professionals
- Raising awareness of the problem
- Pushing public agencies to act

This handbook provides a series of ‘how to’ guides for key activities delivered by front-line professionals to prevent, counter and respond to far-right extremism. These include:

- 1 Diverting people from getting involved
- 2 Responding to hate speech and incitement
- 3 Managing threats to public order
- 4 Ending violent behaviour and fragmenting movements
- 5 Supporting and empowering victims
- 6 Raising awareness of the problem
- 7 Pushing public agencies to act

Each of these guides provides a breakdown of key approaches and case studies, as well as guidance on ‘getting it right.’

This handbook recognises that front-line professionals’ good work is sometimes inhibited by the wider environment, or institutional constraints. These include the reality that in some places the public debate on these issues is dominated by misinformation, or that far-right attitudes are held by the majority. In some contexts local authorities don’t see the problem, refuse

to acknowledge it or simply don't know how to act. Front-line professionals may even be targeted by far-right movements, and their personal safety may be at risk. Therefore this handbook also provides some guidance on changing the wider environment around front-line professionals.

Finally, professional groups share some common learning points, but there will also be distinct challenges and lessons for different responders. The conclusion presents the key take-aways for each of these groups.



EDUCATION AND  
YOUTH WORKERS

## **ACTIONS**

.....  
Contact across community divides  
.....

.....  
Diversion and alternative activities  
.....

.....  
Educational programmes  
.....

.....  
Dialogue on the hard issues  
.....

## **GETTING IT RIGHT**

.....  
Experiential learning rather than simply  
myth-busting  
.....

.....  
Acknowledge and address real and  
perceived grievances  
.....

.....  
Creative use of film, visuals and new media  
.....

.....  
Amplify voices of credible messengers  
.....

.....  
Offer a competitive package  
.....

.....  
Support peer education for  
a longer term impact  
.....

.....  
Long-term programmes rather  
than one-off events  
.....



LOCAL AUTHORITIES

## **ACTIONS**

Local dialogue

Public order management

Diversion and alternative activities

Reclaiming public spaces

Alternative narratives

## **GETTING IT RIGHT**

Identify and tackle community  
grievances head on

Offer a competitive package

Get the community involved  
in positive ways

Encourage change of behaviour

Strong communications: accessibility,  
transparency, consistency

Long-term programmes rather  
than one-off events



POLICE

## **ACTIONS**

Public order management

Diversion and alternative activities

Local dialogue

One-to-one interventions

## **GETTING IT RIGHT**

Encourage self-policing or change  
of behaviour

Demonstrate a willingness to protect  
vulnerable communities

Involve the community in public  
order management

Increase the social costs of participation

Strong communications: accessibility,  
transparency, consistency



EXIT AND INTERVENTION  
PROVIDERS

## **ACTIONS**

---

One-to-one interventions

---

Exit programmes

---

Online engagement

## **GETTING IT RIGHT**

---

A non-judgemental approach

---

The right timing: on the way in  
or on the way out

---

Individualise support

---

Focus on the future, rather than the past

---

Confront ideology with caution,  
and when the time is right

---

Offer a competitive package

---

Prioritise staff well-being  
and personal safety



VICTIMS SUPPORTERS

## **ACTIONS**

Rehabilitation and reintegration

Empowering victims and their communities

Training for the justice system

## **GETTING IT RIGHT**

A non-judgemental approach

Build a trusted reputation

Creative use of new media to reach  
communities

Police and prosecutor ownership  
of training

Storytelling as part of a survivor's journey

Prioritise staff well-being



CAMPAIGNERS  
AND ACTIVISTS

## **ACTIONS**

Take downs

Alternative narratives

Counter-narratives

Training for key professionals

Raising awareness of the problem

Pushing public agencies to act

## **GETTING IT RIGHT**

Positive alternatives to counter-demonstrations

Creative use of film, visuals and new media

Appeal to the emotions rather than just the facts

Amplify voices of credible messengers

Use existing platforms rather than setting up new ones

Public ownership or anonymity of campaigns can be important

Quality over quantity of messages



# 1. Diverting people from getting involved

## Introduction

Far-right extremist attitudes are often far from confined to the margins of society, but increasingly found in the mainstream. In many cases far-right individuals are perfectly normal, socially integrated, and connected in one way or another to mainstream groups and ideas. In some countries, like Hungary, far-right attitudes are widespread amongst young people. In others, like the UK, younger generations are progressively more tolerant than older generations. However, even in these places, it is important that front-line professionals do not assume this trend will continue without programmes in place to promote tolerance and democratic behaviour among those vulnerable to far-right ideologies.

## Key approaches

### 1. **Contact across community divides**

*Aims to promote meaningful contact between individuals from different communities, and across divides.* This might be done through informal social networking, sports clubs or mentorship programmes. It might also involve

cross-community dialogue programmes to bring together individuals to discuss grievances in a frank way.

## CASE STUDY

### **Project name/Country:**

Artemisszio Foundation, Hungary

### **Aims/Objectives:**

The Artemisszio Foundation works to encourage cross-cultural communication and better relations among diverse communities in Hungary.

### **Description/Activities:**

The Artemisszio Foundation's work is framed around the idea that the greatest barrier to understanding and empathising with the 'other' is that individuals carry a whole cultural system that is not easily visible to oneself. Sustained interaction and training can make people aware of this cultural weight and how it affects their interactions. Its youth training programme organises events to encourage communication across social and economic strata, and diverse ethnic backgrounds. The Foundation pairs individuals of ethnic minority background with ethnic Hungarians to do joint mentoring and volunteer work.

Additionally, the Foundation provides training for social workers in effective communications with clients to prevent misunderstandings and stop the spread of stereotypes and prejudices. They also run training seminars for private sector businesses, aiming to reduce conflict between social and ethnic groups in the workplace. These two-day seminars are designed to break down mutual prejudices and serve as a starting point for frank discussions about identity and discrimination in the workplace.

## 2. Diversion and alternative activities

*Aim to undercut far-right groups' abilities to contact and recruit young people.*

This can be as simple as providing young people with meaningful spare time activities, particularly targeting susceptible youth, including football, extreme sports and outdoor activities. In some cases these are led by individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds.

### CASE STUDY

**Project name/Country:**

Mixed Martial Arts Club, Poland

**Aims/Objectives:**

Using sport to push skinheads out of the far right scene and challenge their perceptions of the 'other'.

**Description/Activities:**

This unique programme engages skinheads interested in fighting clubs and trains them in martial arts. The programme has brought in Mamed Khalidov, a well-respected Polish mixed martial artist of Chechen descent to work with them. Chechens are often victims of far-right crime in Poland, and discovering Khalidov's ethnic background and being trained by someone they admire so much, has shaken prejudices about Chechens.

## 3. Educational programmes

*Aim to shift attitudes through tailored curricula.* This includes Holocaust and religious education as well as more targeted programmes such as teaching people about the multicultural history of a place and the plight of refugees. Educational programmes may work specifically to challenge myths and prejudices harboured by particular groups.

## CASE STUDY

### **Project name/Country:**

The Tolerance Project, Sweden

### **Aims/Objectives:**

To provide opportunities for young people susceptible to extremist or white power subcultures to take part in an educational programme that seeks to challenge their perceptions and disengage them from these movements.

### **Description/Activities:**

The Tolerance Project was developed in 1995 in Kungälv, Sweden and is a model that has since been rolled out across Sweden. A mapping exercise is done in partnership with teachers, social workers, youth workers and students themselves to identify the target group, key activists and their followers. Those deemed most 'at-risk' are given the option to apply for participation in the project as part of their regular school curriculum. The main incentive to apply is the promise of an international field trip to Poland.

The Tolerance Project mixes a traditional Holocaust education model with a challenging educational experience to enable students to re-evaluate their existing belief structures. There are three stages to this strategy: splitting activities; focus on the future and re-socialising activities.

First, the programme offers new meaningful activities that are designed to create a boundary between the core group and their followers. Then, the project focuses on helping participants focus on their future, to visualise a successful life that is detached from the extremist group. Finally, at-risk students are pushed to develop new social strategies in groups that they are unfamiliar with, as the Tolerance Project mixes them with high-achieving students who are not at risk. This mixed approach pushes those on both sides to re-evaluate their conceptions of the other. The programme culminates in a trip to Poland, where the students explore the history of the Holocaust and engage in a series of exercises to humanise this history and apply lessons from this to the students' own lived experiences.

#### 4. Dialogue on the hard issues

*Aims to engage directly with difficult viewpoints, to tackle grievances that can underlie racist or prejudiced attitudes.* It might be done through peer education programmes to train individuals to have hard conversations with peers who may exhibit extreme views, or public dialogue forums on tough and divisive issues, including foreign policy, immigration and employment. It also includes programmes that engage directly with far-right extremists, rather than simply talk about them.

#### CASE STUDY

**Project name/Country:**

The Think Project, UK

**Aims/Objectives:**

To strengthen and empower young people in Wales by building inner self-resilience to the growth of far-right sentiment in the UK and Europe.

**Description/Activities:**

The Think Project was inspired by the Swansea Ethnic Youth Support Team's (EYST) work supporting victims of racism, and the realisation of a critical need to work with those vulnerable to the far right and challenge the growth of negative views surrounding asylum and immigration.

The project aims to test and develop new ways of working with the most disengaged young white people in Wales.

It targets youth offenders and individuals excluded from mainstream schools. Its approach involves discussing the definitions of divisive terminology related to 'hot' political issues (such as *asylum seeker*, *extremist*, *terrorist*) with participants, and encouraging open and honest dialogue. Educational courses are supported by films, interactive exercises, particularly focused on bringing a human face to these issues.

The project equips young people with the knowledge, understanding and experience to refute and challenge racist myths, as well as to hear and address young people's real and perceived grievances. In doing so, the project

seeks to strengthen and empower disadvantaged young people in Wales to become more confident in their own identities, more secure of their own belonging, and more resilient to extremist ideologies.

## Getting it right

### **Profile**

Whether or not a preventative programme will reach its intended audience depends on how it markets the programme to these groups. Project titles should be non-judgemental and positive, avoiding references to extremism or racism. Make educational and experiential learning programmes relevant to the local community and lives of the participants. Some organisations like the Jewish Community Center Krakow have shown participants the hidden Jewish history of their local community, or the immigrant background of major local institutions.

### **How to do meaningful contact**

Though organising one-off events like a cross-cultural football tournament can be meaningful for a day, they will not on their own build long-standing relationships across communities, or lead to long-term attitude changes, unless they are repeated at regular intervals with the same groups, incorporated as part of a broader programme, or mainstreamed within schools. Front-line professionals need a methodology for meaningful contact. This can include having diverse staff members run a programme, those who are prepared to field difficult questions and challenge stereotypes. Intercultural education methodologies, which specifically train young people to engage directly with those who have different cultural backgrounds, can be valuable here.

### **How to do the hard conversations**

In many cases, prejudiced and racist ideas can be traced back to perceived grievances about different groups, and in some cases real grievances, such

as experiences of being bullied by ethnic minority gangs. When individuals express ideas contrary to popular norms against racism, there is a tendency to deny them the right to be open about these grievances. The tendency to deny and shut down conversation with ‘don’t be a racist’ can inadvertently push people further down the path to radicalisation. It is important for those with grievances to have their views listened to and heard, before they can be challenged. This kind of approach is often not easily achieved in a mainstream educational setting, and may require special educational programmes that can provide a safer environment for people to express and discuss unsavoury opinions.

### **How to myth-bust**

Myth-busting is notoriously difficult, and providing facts to undercut far-right narratives is often not the most effective way to change attitudes. Myth-busting has to be done in conjunction with experiential learning. This means rather than telling someone the facts about people from different backgrounds, give them the opportunity to engage with someone from that background, for example through engagement with a Muslim programme instructor or the opportunity to meet an asylum seeker and ask questions first-hand. In some cases, this may be the first time someone has engaged with a person from this background. ‘The facts’ must be embedded in wider learning process. Humanising anti-racism education can have an impact, and can push people to think about the human impact of their words and actions. For example, the Think Project provides a space for young people to speak to staff members from minority backgrounds about how they feel when they are called by popular derogatory slang specific to their ethnic or religious group.

### **Helping young people challenge one another**

Initiatives will have a wider impact if they can help to train up young people to have tough conversations themselves with their peers who express intolerant views. The Tolerance Project specifically brings high achieving students alongside those vulnerable to extremism in a Holocaust education model, with the aim of not only building tolerance among the intolerant, but also helping those not at risk to come to terms with their own

prejudices against their intolerant peers. This also includes training young people to run projects to tackle far-right extremism: An initiative by the Amadeu Antonio Stiftung in Germany aims to equip young activists with the tools they need to run effective campaigns and local initiatives to tackle far right extremism.

### **Keeping people involved**

Activities that empower people and give them a sense of achievement are more likely to keep the vulnerable involved. This might include mentoring (professional or social), leadership programmes, or sports and music programmes. Once participants feel empowered and engaged in an initiative, those running a project may be in a position to negotiate the terms of involvement and push for small changes. For example, an initiative by Oslo Municipality Preventative Police officers to get young kids in the neo-Nazi scene snowboarding was ultimately able to get the group to replace their skinhead bomber jackets with snowboarding jackets.

Particularly when it comes to sports, it may be important to offer activities that are not 'the usual.' In Norway, preventative police have offered activities such as American Football and snowboarding. Some organisations, like Cultures Interactive in Germany, use alternative youth culture: hip hop and other music genres, skateboarding and street art.

Using creative methods and action-oriented activities can help to hook people. For example, getting participants involved in film production through video diaries, documentary creation and interviews with the community, as has been done by the Anne Frank House in the Netherlands. Some organisations have experimented with developing mobile phone applications which aim to challenge racist ideologies, like an app developed by All Together Now in Australia. This might also include more mainstream methods of creative outreach, such as theatre, traveling exhibitions or comic books. For example, Exit Fryshuset in Sweden has developed a play called *The Voice of Hate*, which brings the personal stories of Swedish former far-right extremists to young people in schools.



## 2. Responding to hate speech and incitement

### Introduction

While extremist voices are in the minority, they are able to punch far above their weight because they are determined and dedicated to their cause. Whether individuals on social media, movements disseminating hateful videos or leaders making public statements, hate speech and incitement can have a damaging impact on target groups and those vulnerable or on the peripheries of extremist movements.

Taking down posters and graffiti in public spaces is important and critical to ensuring that communities do not live in fear of the far right. However, focusing exclusively on takedowns on the online space can be futile, because the rate at which new information is uploaded means it is impossible to catch everything. Civil society activists have therefore experimented with other methods of engaging directly with the ideologies behind hate speech and/or the individuals spreading it. The methods employed here matter; engaging with hateful content in the wrong way can have a counter-productive effect.

## Key approaches

### 1. Takedowns

*Aim to limit the dissemination and reach of hate speech and incitement.* This includes takedowns of content, and use of reporting functions on sites like Facebook and Twitter. It also includes community mobilisation to remove stickers, posters and graffiti.

#### CASE STUDY

**Project name/Country:**

Against Violent Extremism network (AVE), YouTube Trusted Flaggers Program, Global

**Aims/Objectives:**

To combine the knowledge of ‘former’ extremists with the technical expertise of YouTube to improve existing procedures for video takedowns. The aim is to help remove extremist and gang-related content more effectively.

**Descriptions/Activities**

The Trusted Flaggers Program is a scheme devised by YouTube to use individuals with particular experience to flag the most malicious video content on their website. Any videos flagged by Trusted Flaggers are given highest priority for investigation and, if applicable, removed. As part of this program, YouTube has collaborated with the Against Violent Extremism network (AVE), to harness the experiential, first-hand knowledge of ‘former’ extremists and gang members to improve YouTube’s integrated flagging service. Chosen representatives from the AVE network, working across far-right and other ideologies, have received training from YouTube specialists with technical expertise, who in turn prioritise extremist videos flagged by these ‘experts’, as they have the relevant experience and understanding of the culture and ideology underpinning harmful or illegal content. Once they are Trusted

Flaggers, AVE 'formers' input and feed into future YouTube flagging policy, and a direct influence on the type of hateful content that can be removed.

## 2. Alternative narratives

*Aim to unite the silent majority against extremism by emphasising solidarity, common causes and shared values.* Alternative narratives come from a variety of actors, from inter-faith and inter-community leaders to sports personalities and pop artists, and promote more moderate and inclusive discourses.

### CASE STUDY

**Project name/Country:**

Never Again Association (NAA), Poland

**Aims/Objectives:**

To use civil mobilisation and education to counter ethnic and racial prejudice and contribute to an inclusive democratic civil society in Poland.

**Description/Activities:**

The NAA is a civil society organisation working to: raise awareness of the issues of racism and xenophobia; develop a broad movement against racism and discrimination; and to marginalise or eliminate racist and anti-Semitic attitudes and tendencies in Polish society.

The NAA have launched a number of high profile projects to promote both an anti-racism agenda and an understanding of different cultures and ethnicities. These include the 'Polish Woodstock' festival – one of the largest music festivals in Europe – as part of their campaign 'Music against Racism'. They actively work with musicians and major football organisations to ensure that positive narratives standing up for tolerance are given the right visibility in Poland. In 2012, they received funding from UEFA to implement the 'Let's Kick Racism out of the Stadiums' campaign and ran the 'Respect Diversity' programme during Euro 2012.

### 3. Counter-narratives

*Aim to deconstruct, de-legitimise and de-mystify extremist propaganda.*

This includes: picking apart extremist ideologies by undermining their intellectual framework; attempting to mock, ridicule or undermine the legitimacy of extremists; highlighting how extremist activities negatively impact on the people they claim to represent; demonstrating how their actions are inconsistent with their own beliefs, or questioning their overall effectiveness.

#### CASE STUDY

**Project name/Country:**

English Disco Lovers, UK

**Aims/Objectives:**

To counter the online presence of the English Defence League (EDL) through the use of “Google bombing” to reduce its significance on the internet.

**Description/Activities:**

The English Disco Lovers was founded in September 2012 as a London-based effort to counter the English Defence League. With messages of equality and respect (and with a good deal of humour), the English Disco Lovers were designed as a comical response to the xenophobia and racism of the EDL. The central tenet of this online campaign is to reduce the top result search of the English Defence League when typing EDL on Google. The English Disco Lovers also have Facebook and Twitter presences, with similar aims. They also run disco-themed events during EDL protests, donning colourful wigs and sparkly outfits.

## Getting it right

### Who to respond

Getting the right voices involved can expand the reach of alternative or counter-narratives and ensure they don't simply preach to the choir. This includes amplifying the voices of former extremists and survivors of violent extremism, who bring a human element to the issues and will be most credible among those at risk of radicalisation.

Celebrities and cultural leaders, particularly those well respected by individuals vulnerable to far-right narratives, can often reach much farther than anti-racism organisations on their own. For example, a tweet by popular British rapper Professor Green (who has 1.97 million Twitter followers) on the evening of the murder of Drummer Lee Rigby in Woolwich, London asking “why are idiots running around attacking mosques? why are edl supporters taking to the streets? to kill more innocent people?” was re-Tweeted thousands of times more than any tweet by the EDL themselves, or by those countering the EDL.

Finally, some of the most important counter-campaigns are led anonymously, e.g. the Slovak Facebook group called *Frankly Speaking about Slovaks*, which pokes fun at the far right's anti-immigrant claims by making ridiculous claims about Slovak people. The campaign's success is that it remains anonymous, and therefore cannot be undermined as no one knows who is behind it. These kinds of initiatives also give the impression that they are led by the general public. Similarly, flash campaigns (spontaneous campaigns) led by the public are difficult for the far right to undermine; for example, #creepingsharia, a Twitter hashtag used by former EDL leader Tommy Robinson, which was hijacked by hundreds of members of the public to ridicule the assumption that ‘Muslims are taking over.’ Though they cannot be anticipated or planned for, front-line professionals can encourage and help to snowball these initiatives when they see them.

### Where to respond

While it is important to ensure there are spaces online to share and disseminate moderate information, such platforms can have limited and self-selecting readership. Setting up new websites to share alternative

narratives can simply divide the audience and risk having little or no impact on those susceptible to extremist messaging. Disseminating ‘alternative narratives’ on mainstream social networks and platforms, where the audiences already are, is a better strategy than trying to pull them to new locations.

### **How to respond**

Confronting extremist messages and rhetoric directly and on an individual level can be difficult and risky. Getting into individual debates with far-right groups can often push them into a defensive and combative position, and can simply serve to confirm what both sides think. It is best to leave the one-to-one engagement with far right individuals to those who are trained and experienced in doing this. Front-line professionals can have a greater impact by planting seeds of doubt in the minds of those vulnerable or already signed up to extremist narratives. Seeds of doubt are pieces of information that, without directly undermining the narrative, push the individual to question key tenants of far-right groups and ideologies.

### **Quantity matters**

Practitioners countering the far right have, to date, struggled to match their investment of time and energy. Some shortcuts can be made if they train themselves up in technologies which can boost their social media presence, like Hootsuite or Tweetdeck and other applications. They should also seek to identify people who are looking for ways to get involved, both on and offline, and mobilise them to play a positive and collective role in promoting alternative or counter-narratives, rather than simply responding to extremists on their own. Some of the best initiatives have worked with young people who want to take action, to train them to develop successful counter-campaigns, including the Amadeu Antonio Stiftung in Germany.

### **Quality matters more**

Counter-narratives are often unappealing cut and paste jobs that fail to reach a computer savvy, media-saturated, video game-addicted generation. They often simply present facts to try and undermine the false claims of the far right. However, facts alone will not win this battle. Front-line

professionals need to mirror the far right in their strategies and match their use of emotional appeals, modern technology, culture, and public relations. Some of the more popular counter-narrative methods involve directly playing on the brands of the far right. For example, the English Disco Lovers use the 'EDL' acronym to subvert the EDL's messaging by replacing it as a top search result on sites such as Google and Facebook, and hijacking its Twitter hashtag. Other popular strategies have involved hijacking hashtags used by the far right, like #creepingsharia, which was first used by former EDL leader Tommy Robinson, but was co-opted by civil society ridiculing the assumption that 'Muslims are taking over'.

### **Real-time evaluation**

The counter-narratives space is new territory for most organisations, and there is very little understanding about what works. Front-line professionals can rely on some open source tools to track who is engaging with the content they post online and gauge which kinds of content receive greater attention. For example, on Twitter, these might include *TwitterCounter* to count followers over time; *Tweetmap* to show the location of these followers; *Hootsuite* for analysis of click-rates on articles posted on Twitter accounts; and applications like *Crowdbooster* to overall understand how engaging and far-reaching campaign Tweets are.



## 3. Managing threats to public order

### Introduction

Public order disturbances are some of the most common expressions of far-right extremism across Europe, ranging from less organised activities like loitering and harassment of local communities by street gangs, to larger demonstrations. This includes English Defence League demonstrations which have at their largest brought out 3000 supporters in Luton or the 66,000 who took to the streets across Warsaw during the National Independence Day in Poland. But even the smallest of demonstrations can impact local communities, shutting down local businesses, instilling a sense of fear, or in the worst cases, leading to violence.

The context of public order management will differ from country to country, both in the nature of the protests and the legal and political context in which they take place. In some contexts, police may have strong penal codes they can make use of to limit the impact of far-right movements on communities. In countries like Sweden and the UK, large numbers of counter-activists organise demonstrations to counter the far right, and clashes between the far right and counter-demonstrators have descended into serious violence. In countries like Hungary, mobilisations of counter-activists rarely occur.

## Key approaches

### 1. Diversion

*Aim to divert supporters' attendance at far-right events.* This includes raising awareness among protesters and those who are at risk of getting involved about the penal code and consequences of their actions; liaising with key influencers (e.g. social workers and teachers) to encourage them to discourage individuals from attending; and diversionary activities planned to coincide with the far-right event.

### CASE STUDY

**Project name/Country:**

Choice Cards, Luton Borough Council, UK

**Aims/Objectives:**

To show young people the legal and personal ramifications of engaging in far-right extremist activity through user-friendly cards distributed at key events.

**Description/Activities:**

The Luton Borough Council has engaged in a number of innovative campaigns to reduce the impact of far-right activity in the Luton area. Among these are the distribution of “choice cards” to local schools and community centres.

These choice cards are the size of a business card, so are easy to transport and distribute. They contain information on the number of arrests for extremism, along with prison terms and personal consequences for convictions (for example, the end of studies and careers). The cards also contain information for Luton-affiliated organisations that deal with counter-extremism efforts, along with contact information for police and other reporting agencies. These cards have been distributed widely, hitting schools, colleges, youth centres and organisations, and youth offending services.

## 2. Reclaiming public spaces

*Ensures that extremists have minimal impact on communities.* This includes keeping demonstrations away from areas with high concentrations of ethnic minorities and migrants, community businesses declaring themselves zones where extremists are not welcome, and rapid community responses to paint over graffiti or clean streets after protests.

### CASE STUDY

#### **Project name/Country:**

Night Ravens Parents' Initiative, Norway

#### **Aims/Objectives:**

To involve community participation in night-time safety, with parental patrols of public spaces serving to counter hooliganism and violence.

#### **Description/Activities:**

The Night Ravens were founded in 1990 as a public engagement initiative to minimise street crime and violence at night in Norway's major cities. Beginning in communities with heightened neo-Nazi activity, the aim was to fill the evening streets with parents, and thus make the space less fun for youth gangs. Night Raven parents' groups simply stand on street corners providing a calm, parental presence in areas with higher levels of far-right hooliganism and violence. Though originally more closely connected with Norwegian police forces, it is now a fully private organisation that collaborates with police.

## 3. Smart demonstration management

*Ensures that demonstrations don't inspire fear, inflame tensions or lead to violence within the community.* This might involve tension monitoring, communication of the march route to the public, and real-time communications about the progress of the event as well as smart use of social media. It may also involve getting the community engaged in management of the demonstration.

## CASE STUDY

**Project name/Country:**

Active Citizens Initiative, Greater Manchester Police, Rochdale Division, UK

**Aims/Objectives:**

To involve key members of the community in policing of far right demonstrations and act as a community liaison.

**Description/Activities:**

The Active Citizens Initiative began as a police-led effort to encourage communication and address misperceptions in the local Rochdale community about how public services respond to extremism. Rochdale police identified 30 key individuals from across the community in order to get a cross-section of views and perspectives and then brought them together to explain legislation and tactical strategies relating to the policing of EDL demonstrations and gather community feedback. This offered a space to break down misconceptions about what police are legally able to do during demonstrations, and allowed for dialogue with the community about their concerns. During demonstrations, each 'active citizen' was paired with a police officer or mediator to patrol the community and act as a communication link to those directly affected by the march. Active Citizens are trained alongside police officers before and during demonstrations.

## Getting it right

**Getting the trust of the community**

Some communities lack trust in the police, and in some cases these are the very communities targeted by the far right. The reasons for this are varied, and may include experiences of police discrimination and racial profiling,

or even some local activists encouraging communities not to engage with the police. Re-building this trust is an important process.

On the one hand, it is vital that the police take seriously and show a willingness to respond to the fears of communities targeted by the far right. Police should invest the time and energy to learn about the society they are policing, and actively engage with community leaders and business owners, particularly those with a history of being targeted by the far right.

Building strong relationships with political activists in the community, across the spectrum, will also be helpful. Gaining the trust of the community will ensure that local leaders and citizens will come to the police when they see signs of unrest and violence. Police should also invest in specific roles responsible for dialogue and engagement with communities and targeted groups, as well as those responsible for engagement with extremist activists themselves (in some countries, this role is the function of preventative police officers).

### **Getting the community involved**

Communities may feel fear, powerlessness and frustration surrounding far-right demonstrations. Communities may not know how to show that they stand against the far right. Counter-demonstrations are valuable in that, in the best scenarios, they are peaceful displays of communities uniting against hatred, demonstrating that the far right is unwelcome in a community. However the risks of counter-demonstrations are that, in the worst scenarios, they can inadvertently inflame the actions of the far right, and end in clashes between groups.

There are other ways that community members can take action, and some of the best initiatives get the community involved in more positive ways, whether it is involving community members in demonstration management, local businesses declaring themselves extremism-free or inclusive zones, or organising alternative community activities.

Police for their part, can encourage community members to come and see the far right if they are curious, rather than preventing people from viewing the group, or not allowing photography. Putting up these barriers between the community and the far right group can serve to stoke more fear than often deserved.

## **Limiting the far right's appeal**

Far right groups often get boots on the ground through their social networks, with many turning up for demonstrations simply because it makes for an exciting afternoon with their friends. Local authorities and police can work with communities to make far right activities less appealing. This has been done successfully by working with local businesses and bars frequented by extremists closing or deciding not to sell alcohol at key moments during demonstrations. Some have experimented with clever methods like making toilet access difficult, or active construction sites next to the demonstration site. Engineering the area where the demonstration will take place to make it less exciting can be particularly effective and lead to fewer people willing to take to the streets.

## **Convincing people not to get involved**

Indicating the possible consequences of their involvement can be a successful method of diverting vulnerable individuals away from demonstrations. This has been done through home visits by police, teachers delivering the message in schools, and through innovative methods employed by local authorities such as the 'consequence cards' used in Luton. Local authorities and police have also put on diversion activities, including free trips outside of the area, football tournaments, and action and adventure trips (e.g. snowboarding, rafting, and mountaineering).

## **Encouraging self-policing and change of behaviour**

Minimising public disturbances can sometimes be achieved through interaction directly with far-right activists. Though in some cases far-right protesters may come from afar, in many cases, far-right demonstrators may be members of the community they are protesting in. Innovative techniques employed in Sweden by the Dialogue Police include getting to know far-right protesters personally; what their aims are and what methods they are prepared to use. De-anonymising protesters, seeing them as individuals and helping them to see the police as individuals too, can in some circumstances prevent people from carrying out particular actions.

Police can delicately balance enforcing the law with offering far-right activists opportunities to do things differently. Talking to the far right

rationally about the implications of their actions can have an impact. This has been done with groups as extreme as neo-Nazis in Germany, as done by Soko Rex, which communicated directly with potential offenders before events to highlight the consequences of additional criminal offences. It has also been done at the other end of the spectrum, with non-violent far-right groups in the UK. For example, in one instance when a wedding was set to take place at a local town hall at the very time the EDL was planning a demonstration there, the police simply explained the situation to the EDL activists; they agreed not to ruin a wedding day and cancelled the demonstration.

Police can also use the hierarchical structure of far right movements instrumentally; it is often clear who the leaders are and the responsibilities of different members of the group. By liaising directly with the leadership of these groups, they can encourage groups to police themselves, for example by serving as demonstration stewards.

### **Using the law**

If police are aware of the legal frameworks surrounding protests and how to use them, they can actually take advantage of this knowledge and use it to their benefit. For example, in the UK, the Metropolitan Police make good use of Public Order Act 1986 to ensure far-right demonstrations have little impact on the communities they are targeting. The Swedish Dialogue Police make good use of the application process when individuals apply to local councils for a license to protest; they call up the demonstrators and begin getting to know them personally to facilitate policing.

### **Smart communications – accessibility, transparency, consistency**

Good management of the far right should also aim to avoid misunderstandings and rumours, both about the far right and the policing of the far right, which can inflame tensions and make communities more fearful.

This can only be done through transparency and being prepared to answer key questions, such as why the far right is given the space to demonstrate, or why they cannot be banned. Police should be active in

uploading operational developments to their and partner Facebook and Twitter pages. They should keep track of what information the far right are disseminating on the day, and actively engage with and refute false claims.

Ensuring community members have access to the police and local authorities is also important, whether done via social media, offering mobile numbers to give community leaders direct access, or pairing community leaders with officers to patrol communities. It is also important to allow the community to view the demonstrations as they are taking place, and to take photos. This de-mystifies the groups themselves and helps communities become better informed about the problem.

Whether during a demonstration or simply managing a far-right group that is active in the area, a strong media strategy is key. The most important thing is to ensure consistent messaging. This can be done through local actors (including police, municipality, citizens groups, social workers and journalists) carrying out a joint mapping of the problem and developing a joint media strategy, so there is no risk of inconsistent stories emerging.



## 4. Ending violent behaviour and fragmenting movements

### Introduction

Though intervention is one of the most important and effective ways of having an impact on existing movements, it is rarely done by governments. In an ideal scenario, it should be done as a loose cooperation between government and civil society. The reality is that this work is often done by just a handful of qualified front-line specialists in each country, who often struggle for funding but pull far more than their weight in terms of impact. Practitioners adopt a number of approaches to help right-wing extremists to change their behaviour and avoid using violence.

#### GLOSSARY

**Group dissolution:** Break down or weaken local far-right extremist groups

**Disengagement:** Change a person's behaviour away from violence

**De-radicalisation:** Change a person's views away from far-right extremist ideology

**Exit:** Provide a way out of extremist movements for those who are ready to leave

## Key approaches

### 1. One-to-One interventions

*Aim to build rapport with an individual involved in far-right extremist activity in order to widen the gap between them and the movement, demonstrate the consequences of their actions, help them to identify a different life path, and support them to achieve it. The length of intervention will vary according to need. They can also be conducted with groups; they have successfully dissolved youth street groups in Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands.*

#### CASE STUDY

**Project name/Country:**

The Empowerment Conversation, Oslo Police, Norway

**Aims/Objectives:**

To push young people on the peripheries of the far right to consider their future ambitions, and empower them to leave far right street groups and pursue their goals.

**Description/Activities:**

The Empowerment Conversation is one component of an approach devised by Oslo Municipality Police. Individuals within or on the periphery of a far-right group are invited in for a one-to-one session with a preventative police officer. Participants are asked to create a 'social network map' during this conversation, to expose any social connections to known radicals, which is then used to assess their position in, or motivations for being part of, a particular group. Conversations often focus on the individual's motivations and goals in life, and demonstrating the consequences of involvement in criminal activity on the person's ability to achieve their goals. The aim is to empower individuals to envision the achievements and lifestyle they could have outside of a far-right movement, and assist them in transitioning away from the movement. The Empowerment Conversation was initially used

during preventative police work with racist and skinhead youth groups, but has since been applied to a variety of different youth delinquency problems. It has been most effective when parents are actively involved.

## **2. Exit programmes**

*Aim to offer a structured route out of extremist movements through de-radicalisation and a longer-term support package to re-integrate into society.*

These involve one-to-one interventions, but also include counselling and intense psychological support, practical help with housing and jobs and pursuit of interests and goals. Practitioners take different approaches to the balance between challenging and reshaping ideology and practical help or social support. Some are initiated in prison. They largely rely on voluntary participation.

### **CASE STUDY**

#### **Project name/Country:**

Exit Deutschland, Germany

#### **Aims/Objectives:**

To support right-wing extremists to leave the German neo-Nazi scene through long-term disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes.

#### **Description/Activities:**

Founded in 2000, Exit Deutschland is an initiative that provides support, advice and assistance for individuals seeking to leave the right-wing extremist scene. Exit Deutschland's work involves providing support to right-wing extremists and neo-Nazis who seek a departure from the movement. Exit Deutschland provides one-to-one support and gives practical aid, as well as offering guidance on personal safety and legal issues. They address the ideology of participants directly during the process of de-radicalisation, working to change perceptions and perspectives from

their prevailing far-right beliefs and narratives. Exit Deutschland emphasise the importance of establishing long-term, trustful relationships between caseworkers and clients. They have developed a case management system that teaches the core concepts of their work to employees: ideology, security, and intervention and dialogue techniques. Exit Deutschland also provides advice to the families and friends of people in extremist movements.

## Getting it right

### Where to intervene?

Most interventions are best delivered locally, but it is important to think broader – groups work across borders, local and international. Individuals are also influenced by what they see online, as well as their peer group in the local area. Many intervention providers travel to their clients' location for one-to-one meetings. This work is also increasingly done in prisons, which can be an important place for behavioural or ideological change.

### When to intervene

The best time to work with an individual is when they are considering joining or leaving a movement. It can be effective to reach out to far-right extremists in the aftermath of a violent incident associated with a far-right group, such as a murder or attack; for example, preventive police in Norway did this following the murder of Benjamin Hermansen by the BootBoys and the size of the movement dropped by half. Interventions shortly before release from prison can be effective when individuals are contemplating their future.

### How to intervene

It is vital to approach individuals without judgement. Labelling people – e.g. 'right-wing extremist' or 'fascist' – creates barriers. Using personal stories can help to build bridges, although those intervening should be careful to maintain professional boundaries and protect their own safety.

The programme has to have something to offer – it has to be able to compete with far-right extremist movements: this might include help securing a job, membership of a youth club or opportunities to pursue interests. It is also vital to individualise support to the person's needs, taking into account their personal history, ambitions and characteristics (such as age, gender, socio-economic status, and interests).

### **Who should intervene**

Having the right background matters – former extremists can be powerful in this role as they have credibility; those who share a social background may find it easier to strike up a rapport; and even fashion preferences can make a difference at the start of a relationship. Gender can be important in some contexts, for example, women may require female intervention providers, and some extreme right males' perspectives on women may impact their relationship with female intervention providers.

### **Profile**

Some programmes rely on referrals from social services or government programmes, such as *Channel* in the UK, while others rely on individuals seeking out assistance. For the latter, it is important that the programme is well known to members of far-right extremist movements so they know where to come when they decide to exit. This might be achieved through building a presence at far-right events, establishing relationships with individuals, or running campaigns (e.g. Exit Deutschland 'Trojan T-shirt' campaign which saw referrals increase three-fold). It is important to consider safety when doing so, as well as the structure of the far right scene. Rather than confronting movements directly, it may make sense to build a strong web presence to ensure the programme can be found through relevant web searches.

### **When to talk ideology**

There is disagreement about when to engage in discussions about ideology with those exiting far-right extremist movements. Some programmes, like Exit Sweden, avoid these discussions because they believe people enter movements for other reasons (e.g. emotional and social) and are

well rehearsed in counter-arguments, which would lead to a defensive pose un conducive to bonding. Others, like Exit Deutschland actively challenge and engage with extremist ideologies in an attempt to build a new world view. Structure of the far right scene, context and personal circumstance matter too.

Where ideologies are confronted, extreme caution is required: only within the bounds of a pre-existing trusted relationship; show understanding for the other person's concerns; and do not approach from a 'right/wrong' perspective. Direct challenge can be counter-productive.

### **Stay on the right side of the law**

The legal obligations of front-line workers in relation to informing authorities of past or possible future crimes vary from country to country. In some countries, intervention providers are not obliged to report crimes that have been committed already, but might be obliged to report knowledge of severe crimes before they happen. Some front-line workers tell clients not to tell them if they are planning to use violence. However, sometimes this is not a choice as clients rely on their case managers to talk them away from committing an act of violence.

### **Supporting yourself and staff**

Being confronted with hate on a daily basis can be emotionally taxing, particularly when it becomes personal. It is important that exit and intervention providers have strong support networks to speak about their work and how it is affecting them. In some cases, organisations have lined up external support, or have a trained therapist or counsellor in-house. This support can also be found informally from colleagues, similar professionals abroad, or friends and family. Aggreddi, a violence intervention programme in Finland, has a room in its office devoted to time out – an important space for intervention staff to take a break from this difficult work.



## 5. Supporting and empowering victims

### Introduction

Support for victims is instrumental not only to dealing with the aftermath of violent cases, but in preventing future incidences. Victims of far-right extremist violence and hate crime often face specific challenges:

- They often struggle to explain or understand why the violence took place, as opposed to victims of robbery and other types of crime
- They are often confronted with blame for the events that took place – for example, LGBT victims being told that they ‘brought it on’ themselves
- Victims of hate suddenly find themselves *representing* something (a minority identity); they may struggle with their sense of individuality
- They are unsure of whether police or local authorities will help them, due to institutional racism and discrimination, or may fear deportation or arrest
- There are significant challenges to re-integrating hate crime victims back into society: fear, risk of perpetuating cycles of prejudice

- Hate crimes are not just committed against the immediate victim, but against a community, so the impacts are felt far and wide. Entire communities may be traumatised following an attack on a single person.

European countries struggle with encouraging victims to report hate crime. The most common reasons that victims do not report hate crime include the belief that nothing will change as a result of reporting incidences, that these cases are everyday occurrences, and that they do not trust the police. Not only do victims support professionals assist victims, they also work with law enforcement (and prosecutors) to ensure that these relationships can be repaired.

## Key approaches

### 1. Rehabilitation and reintegration

*Ensures that victims and their families receive the care and support they need to regain health and stability and re-build a life for themselves.* This includes support reporting cases to the police, navigating social services and legal advice, as well as longer-term counselling and psychological support.

### 2. Empowering victims and their communities

*Aims to empower communities to report crimes and speak out against them.* This includes providing communities with information about their rights and the legal frameworks on hate crime.

## CASE STUDY

### **Project name/Country:**

Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU), Roma Programme, Hungary

**Aims/Objectives:**

To enable and empower Roma communities, raise intra-community awareness of fundamental human rights, and shape public opinion to reduce discrimination against Roma people.

**Description/Activities:**

Established in 1994, the HCLU is a human rights watchdog working to strengthen civil society and the rule of law in Hungary. HCLU runs a project dedicated to supporting the Roma population in north-eastern Hungary. The programme aims to empower Roma communities and activists by: reversing the process of criminalisation of poverty; utilising effective communication and campaigning to shift opinions against prejudices and discrimination; and drawing attention to 'double standards' within law enforcement, administrative authorities and the judiciary.

HCLU conducts training sessions to provide Roma communities and activists with the tools to understand their fundamental human rights and victims' rights, and the capacity to enforce these rights. They have set up over 20 legal support stations in Roma communities across the region, and offer free legal aid to vulnerable, isolated people living in extreme poverty remotely via Skype.

HCLU have used video testimony from the victims of racist attacks to raise awareness of hate crime and improve societal understanding of the problem. They also use video testimony as material for the judiciary to use as evidence during legal proceedings.

**3. Training for the justice system**

*Aims to prepare the justice system for handling hate crime and far-right violence with sensitivity and appropriate action.* This includes raising awareness among police, prosecutors and judges of hate crime and far-right extremism, and promoting human rights awareness and sensitivity to working with vulnerable communities.

## CASE STUDY

**Project name/Country:**

Lambda Warszawa, Poland

**Aims/Objectives:**

To create a space to build a positive identity for the LGBT community in Poland and bring independent, professional and expert assistance in cases of emergency and crisis.

**Description/Activities:**

Lambda Warszawa is the oldest LGBT rights group in Poland. The organisation serves as a centre of information for Polish LGBT members on legal, professional, and personal advice; maintains a hotline to respond to acts of discrimination and violence; and communicates with local authorities when necessary. The organisation carries out training with Polish police on working with vulnerable communities, particularly LGBT communities. They work closely with the Human Rights Adviser to the Commander in Chief of the Polish Police.

## Getting it right

**Approach**

A non-judgemental approach is critical. Victims support professionals should listen without any pre-conceived expectations, and without commentary. Victims may not realise that what they have experienced is not hate crime, but discrimination or simply a different form of crime. It is important nonetheless to listen to those you cannot help. Suggest ways in which the individual can approach the relevant service they should contact, whether it is the police, an ombudsman, or other social services.

## **Building trust**

Particular groups, for different reasons, often lack the victims' support they require. These include young people, male victims and groups that don't have a strong relationship with the police due to discrimination or prejudice (including Muslim and LGBT communities). Victims support professionals may need to partner with organisations and institutions that are trusted in the community in order to ensure they are known and trusted. Victims support organisations can offer special training for staff on how to support victims from ethnic minority backgrounds. Offering support to victims in key languages may also be important.

## **Profile**

In some contexts, depending on the organisation, smaller legal advice centres may not need to advertise the service because they risk having more clients approach them than they can handle. Those victims support organisations that advertise do so via the usual channels – in hospitals, police stations and online for example.

Some are increasingly using social media and online tools to reach communities. Even police have set up a presence online (via dedicated websites or Facebook pages) for people to report hate crime. In the UK, organisations like Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) are testing the use of social media as a method of collecting information on harassment, intimidation and violence against particular communities. Gathering data on hate crime and hate speech via Twitter and social media comes with its challenges, including a need to be rigorous (but sensitive) with fact checking and following up, but it is an area worth exploring.

## **Encouraging reporting of crimes**

In some countries, there is a real need for campaigns to encourage minorities to report hate crime, and raise awareness of where they can go if they are uncomfortable going straight to the police. Some of the most successful examples include use of shocking images to draw attention to the issue. It is essential to raise awareness within communities of what hate crimes are, and victims' rights. Organisations like the HCLU in Hungary or the Association for Legal Intervention in Poland provide training for

minority communities about hate crime, with the aim of empowering them to act when they see or are a victim of a crime.

### **Shaping the justice system**

Victims support professionals are increasingly delivering training sessions for police, prosecutors and judges on three key issues: recognising hate crimes and far-right extremist crimes; ability to engage with victims of hate crime and extremism; and broader diversity, tolerance and human rights education. The most successful training programmes for police are delivered by front-line professionals, but done in partnership with the police. Even organisations externally funded to deliver training have specifically asked police to work with them to design the curricula together, to promote institutional buy-in and ownership of it.

The most effective training sessions involve humanising hate crime by bringing minority community representatives or survivors to the table. For example, trainers in Denmark have brought the organisation LGBT Denmark or family members of a victim of racial violence in to speak to police officers during a training session on hate crime. Some organisations are also using film to deliver these personal testimonies.

### **Communicating personal testimonies**

Though recounting experiences can be a difficult and sensitive process for a survivor, for some people at the right time, telling one's story can be a meaningful process. It can be part of the healing process. In some cases it is a powerful method of pushing back at injustices that led to the events, and of appealing to government or the general public for change. This should be done with care, and when the time is right for the individual.

### **Supporting yourself and staff**

Supporting victims of hate crime and extremist violence can be emotionally taxing. It is important that victims support professionals have a system in place to support staff working on these issues, and to offer a space where staff can speak about their work and how it is affecting them. In some cases, organisations have lined up external support, or have a trained therapist or counsellor in-house.



## 6. Raising awareness of the problem

### Introduction

Some of the key challenges facing front-line professionals are made more difficult by the wider climate on issues surrounding far-right extremism, diversity and race relations. Practitioners are often pushing against the grain in countries where hostility and prejudice against particular minority groups are widespread. There are, however, a number of actions front-line professionals are taking to alter the way both the general public and governments engage with this issue.

In some countries, limited awareness among the general public of far-right extremism is a concern. This includes limited awareness about the scale of the threat of violence, but also about what far-right extremists look like today. The general public can be a powerful force in prevention and intervention efforts, and low public awareness can hinder communities from self-regulating far-right extremism where possible.

## Key approaches

### 1. Document the problem

*Aims to improve public information about far-right extremism and perpetrators.* This includes gathering and presenting the facts on far-right extremism and trends, and monitoring violence and hate speech.

#### CASE STUDY

**Project name/Country:**

Athena Institute, Hungary

**Aims/Objectives:**

To build a European-wide information database on extremist groups and actions.

**Description/Activities:**

Modelled after the U.S. Southern Poverty Law Center, the Athena Institute conducts several important campaigns, but the most important is its monitoring database of extremist groups and their activities. Athena has created interactive online maps, with individual country profiles, trends in cities and across borders, and overviews of extremist groups, their supposed levels of support, and their leaders (when known). The purpose of this monitoring is to serve as a tool for the media, government and the general public. As a group independent of government funding, the Athena Institute is able to act in a bold and honest manner, even noting the importance and threat of far-right groups in the Hungarian government. It also provides highly detailed data on far-right extremist groups in Hungary, noting eight major groups, their ideologies and probable behaviours.

## 2. Challenge misinformation

*Aims to disrupt stereotypes about what far-right extremists look like today.* The popular conception of a far-right extremist is an outdated one, generally based on visions of a male skinhead, anti-social, and in bomber jackets and boots, often perpetuated by mainstream media. Some non-government organisations (NGOs), are actively working with police and the media to disrupt their conceptions of far-right extremists.

### CASE STUDY

**Project name/Country:**

Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, Expert Center on Gender and Right-Wing Extremism, Germany

**Aims/Objectives:**

Runs projects and campaigns to directly support victims, promote alternative youth cultures and networks to weaken neo-Nazism, anti-Semitism and other forms of bigotry. This Expert Center specifically focuses on raising awareness of the role of women in right-wing extremist groups.

**Description/Activities:**

The Foundation houses Germany's strongest expertise on gender in the far right scene. Right-wing extremism in Germany continues to be perceived as predominantly a 'male problem,' with the stereotype prevailing of white women as peaceful and non-violent. The Expert Center promotes a gender-sensitive approach in all strategies and actions to prevent right-wing extremism. The Expert Center has provided training sessions in kindergarten and pre-schools across Germany on this issue, and has started a network of teachers, principals and heads of kindergartens who wish for further support to deal with this issue. They have also developed training for leaders of sports associations, youth clubs and other community centres. They have initiated discussions with journalists and schools of journalism in an attempt to influence media coverage to address the gender-specific failures in reporting on right-wing extremism.

### 3. Changing public opinion on diversity

*Aims to change stereotypes about particular minority groups targeted by the far right.* In some countries, like Hungary, it remains difficult to mobilise the general public on tolerance to diversity. This also rings true in countries that easily mobilise against racism, but have high levels of intolerance towards particular groups like Muslim communities, as in the UK, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries. These initiatives aim to mainstream positive stories about these groups, and change public perceptions by promoting positive role models from these backgrounds.

#### CASE STUDY

**Project name/Country:**

*Syndrom*, People Against Racism (PAR), Slovakia

**Aims/Objectives:**

Runs campaigns to combat racism, discrimination, anti-Semitism and antiziganism in Slovakia, ranging from educational programmes to billboard and TV campaigns.

**Description/Activities:**

PAR ran a national campaign called ‘Syndrom’ which presents stories of Roma who disrupt the common stereotypes of Roma in Slovak society, including successful teachers, lawyers and doctors. The campaign aimed to challenge popular stereotypes about Roma communities. The campaign profiled images and personal testimonies of several successful and inspirational professionals of Roma background, and invited the viewers to question their assumptions about Roma people. The website included split images of individuals, stating, for example ‘One of them is a teacher – A teacher and Roma. Excluded? Do you also have a syndrom?’ PAR has been successful in mainstreaming its publicity, even partnering with major newspapers to include their campaign images and reach wider audiences.

## Getting it right

### Getting the right timing

In countries where society poses a major hindrance to front-line professionals' work, as in Hungary, the focus should be on early promotion of human rights and education among young people. However, most countries will need strategies that target adults, and that respond quickly to changes in the local or national situation. The far right is particularly adept at using and abusing current affairs and major media headlines to promote their cause. Front-line professionals need to respond as quickly and with evocative messages in the immediate aftermath of national events. Though messages need to appeal to the emotions, it is important to remain calm in the face of the upsetting rhetoric of the far right. Front-line professionals can also prepare the basic tenants and principles of a communications strategy in advance of events, to be ready for crisis situations.

### Good use of creative methods

Though the far right is particularly good at dissemination of emotional rhetoric without the facts, simply disseminating facts is unlikely to have the desired impact. Visualising information and data can ensure it reaches a wider audience. PAR runs a campaign called HateMeToo, which has developed visually appealing infographics to deliver key facts on Roma and immigrant groups in Slovakia. Through a partnership with a major newspaper, these infographics have been disseminated in the daily newspaper. Celebrities and other leaders can also be instrumental in getting racism and far-right extremism on the radar. Organisations like Never Again Association organise concerts and massive public events with celebrities professing their dedication to the cause.

### Where to do this

Similar to alternative and counter-narratives, initiatives to change public attitudes are more likely to have an impact if placed in the mediums that those who hold those attitudes might see. Front-line professionals have developed partnerships with major newspapers to ensure they are given a space to publicise their perspectives.

### **Making good use of existing data and filling gaps**

In some cases, there is extensive information out there on the far right, which simply needs to be coordinated. German NGO Apabiz, for example, is gathering this information to develop an online map called *Rechtes Land* for the general public to key in their postal code to see a snapshot of far-right extremist crimes and activity ongoing in their local areas.

Front-line professionals can also identify gaps where less data is available. For example, Apabiz also initiated a project to improve photo documentation of the far right, as the police were preventing photography at far right events to limit public visibility. Apabiz filled a gap by gathering photos of the modern far right in Germany.



## 7. Pushing public agencies to act

### Introduction

Where municipalities have a high level of autonomy, there have been considerable challenges to push them to recognise the problem and devote resources to tackling far-right extremism. In some countries, there are even challenges convincing those tasked with prevention of extremism that it is a legitimate problem. Local government often has to be convinced they have something to gain from tackling a problem of far-right extremism in a community.

Governments are often operating with narrow definitions of extremism, and fail to see them as anything other than neo-Nazis and skinheads. In Slovakia, police don't include anti-Roma groups as far right, and in the Netherlands government doesn't include anti-Islam groups in their definitions of far-right extremism. In some contexts, like Germany and Hungary, groups countering the far right struggle with government labelling them as extremist. This is complicated by the fact that in some places, anti-fascist activists have engaged in violent methods to tackle far-right extremism, which undermines the work of front-line professionals.

## Key approaches

### 1. Monitoring

*Aims to monitor how public agencies tackle the far right and handle both high-profile and lower-profile cases.* This includes building an evidence base on government and police oversights or misconduct and the impact of these failures.

#### CASE STUDY

##### **Project name/Country:**

Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU), Hungary

##### **Aims/Objectives:**

To enable and empower Roma communities, raise intra-community awareness of fundamental human rights, and shape public opinion to reduce discrimination against Roma people.

##### **Description/Activities:**

Established in 1994, the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU) is a human rights watchdog working to strengthen civil society and the rule of law in Hungary. They monitor government statements and rhetoric regarding the activities of the far right, to record when basic human rights legislation is contravened. The programme aims to empower Roma communities and activists by: reversing the process of criminalisation of poverty; utilising effective communication and campaigning to shift opinions against prejudices and discrimination; and drawing attention to 'double standards' within law enforcement, administrative authorities and the judiciary.

HCLU have used video testimony from the victims of racist attacks to raise awareness of hate crime and improve societal understanding of the problem. They also use video testimony as material for the judiciary to use as evidence during legal proceedings. They maintain a regular and visible media presence using visual testimony, video messages and blog posts.

Particular emphasis is placed on monitoring legislation and law enforcement measures which directly affect Roma communities.

## **2. Policy advocacy or political advocacy**

*Aims to lobby government to raise far-right extremism onto the political agenda, and push government to act where it is not.* This includes fighting for justice in the aftermath of high-impact cases, like the National Socialist Underground murders in Germany.

## **3. Mobilising the public**

*Aims to raise public interest in an issue, and de-facto garner the attention of political leaders.* If the community is concerned, politicians have to act.

### **CASE STUDY**

#### **Project name/Country:**

Communication Center X (XKK), 'Their Skin Was Their Only Sin,' Hungary

#### **Aims/Objectives:**

Aims to use methods of communication to generate positive changes in social and democratic issues. XKK represents the communication interests of the Roma community during crisis periods.

#### **Description/Activities:**

In Hungary in 2008 and 2009, a series of ethnic-related attacks took place against Roma people, leaving six dead and many severely injured. XKK

made four short moving films to commemorate this, involving emotive visuals of individuals recounting the attacks with projections of violence flashing over them. The films openly comment on the failures of the state and the police surrounding the murders. XKK launched a campaign

disseminated on Facebook and in the Hungarian mainstream media. The campaign was carried out in three spheres: Hungarian and international media, Facebook, and offline events; XKK also launched a Virtual Commemoration Campaign. They asked companies, churches, and NGOs to take an active role in remembering the victims by posting and sharing the films on their web and social media sites. The campaign won numerous awards and reached over 1.2 million people, and the general public reacted.

## Getting it right

### **How to do it**

It is best to start advocating where there is some buy-in, whether this is at the national government or local government level. In some cases targeting politicians is the best approach; at other times working with policymakers directly will be the most useful approach. Carefully consider the end goals to decide on an appropriate response. Advocating for change from the top can be most effective. This is particularly relevant when working with hierarchical institutions like the police, but also when working with civil servants.

### **Working within government rather than outside it**

Though there are often disagreements between government and civil society when it comes to dealing with far right extremism, practitioners can in some cases have a greater impact by working within the confines of the system, using the language government uses. Whether the compromise is worth making will depend on the context, but those that choose not to work within these constraints can find themselves cut out of decision making circles. It can also be important to involve governments in design of the programme, to provide a sense of ownership.

### **Creative use of video and social media**

Videos distributed via social media can be used to lobby governments for victim justice. In addition to the films distributed by Communications

Center X, the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union has published videos of witnesses' testimonies in several controversial hate crime cases to lobby the government for action.

### **When to do it**

It is important to harness the right moment, particularly during media frenzies or following traumatic incidences. These can be difficult moments for those working closest to the issue, but these are the moments when governments are pushed to respond and take action.

### **Transparency and evidence**

Front-line professionals will need to work hard to evidence their methodologies, and will need to be very methodical and transparent with numbers. Particularly those organisations protecting the interests of minority communities that are the victims of prejudice among the wider public, like Muslims or Roma communities, these statistics will be under harder scrutiny by those opposing them. Front-line professionals should aim to partner with academic institutions, which can be vital for validation of evidence, and producing quantitative evidence. Human testimonies can be evidence too. When confronted by media or other criticism about evidence, practitioners should stick to the script, and stand their ground – if the evidence is sound, there is nothing to be worried about.

### **Lead by example**

Even when the problem of far-right extremism has been acknowledged, questions often remain concerning who is responsible, and at which point interventions should be made by each actor. Local government may be scared to engage directly with the far right. Civil society can train up authorities on how to work with far-right extremists. For example, Cultures Interactive in Germany gives authorities guidelines and vocational training on how to work with young right-wing extremists.

### **Pushing for long-term structural changes**

Governments may be inhibited by structural discrimination or racism. Though there is a broad field of activists specifically tackling institutional

discrimination, working to monitor attitudes and get more minorities into key sectors, it is important for this to remain part of the discussion when dealing with far-right extremism. This has certainly come to the forefront in the aftermath of the National Socialist Underground murders and the Parliamentary Inquiry that followed along with its report published in August 2013. In 2014, the co-plaintiffs issued a public statement noting the absence of recognition for institutional racism and how it impacted the case and the treatment of the victims' families.

# Conclusion

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Violent far-right extremism continues to pose a threat to community safety and national security. Its impact is felt on a daily basis by individuals and communities across Europe. Though often rooted in its local context, far-right extremism has impacts across borders. It has been persistent and flexible, and tactics which appear in Sweden and Germany today are likely to appear in the Netherlands and Slovakia tomorrow. It is all the more important that good practice is shared.

This handbook has set out guidance for front-line professionals tackling different critical pieces of the problem of far-right extremism across Europe.

Though methods that have proved successful in one location may not have the same impacts if transplanted in the same form to a different context, there are several cross-cutting learning points that will apply across Europe and to all professionals encountering this issue.

- 1 The problem is no longer just local, so learning the ropes in the online space is non-negotiable.** Many front-line professionals struggle to grasp new media, alongside their traditional responsibilities. However, they need to make the time and investment to understand this space, and how it can be used to maximise their own work,

- 2 Context matters.** Every initiative to prevent or respond to far-right extremism needs to begin with a mapping phase, which identifies the context, the people and their capacity for action. Interventions need to be tailored to specific individuals or far-right groups. Far-right groups should be policed differently based on what methods they are prepared to use, and distinctions must be made between non-violent and violent far-right groups in order to avoid undermining democratic principles.
- 3 Consider who to target, and don't forget adults.** Perhaps for obvious reasons, prevention has tended to be carried out amongst young people; youth commit the overwhelming number of right-wing related violent crimes. However, adults are also susceptible to far-right ideologies and activism so there is a need to widen the focus for preventive efforts. Alternatively, most intervention and victims support work tends to reach adults. This may be due to state regulation which poses challenges to working with under-18s, or that programmes are simply not reaching young people who need them.
- 4 Staff need to be supported.** Coming face to face with extremism and hate can be an emotionally draining business. Some spend their entire career facing these difficult situations, and in other cases, teachers or other professionals may be newer at dealing with them. Front-line professionals need to prioritise their own health and well-being, and should ensure they have a support network in place to allow them to speak about their work and if necessary seek longer-term counselling.
- 5 Think about safety.** Working on prevention, intervention or response to violent extremists comes with its risks. Safety should always be a consideration when devising project methodologies, communications strategies and in particular, direct interaction with far-right extremists.
- 6 Front-line professionals need to put aside differences and work together.** Those in the not-for-profit sector will know competition for funding is always a concern. In addition, front-line professionals often disagree over definitions of right-wing extremism and over methods that should be used within the field. They need to put these differences aside and work together where it can enhance their impact. There are too many enemies working against those countering far-right extremism, that they cannot afford not to work together.

There are also distinct sets of guidance for particular professionals groups.



### **Education and youth workers must:**

- prioritise experiential learning rather than simply myth-busting – myths will only be undermined by offering experiences and fostering relationships that shape attitudes
- recognise and acknowledge real and perceived grievances held by young people, and tackle them head on
- make good use of creative methods, including use of film, visuals and new media
- amplify voices of the most credible messengers, including former extremists, survivors of violent extremism, and popular figures known to vulnerable communities
- offer a competitive package to the offers of the far right, which might mean exciting activities, a sense of family or brotherhood, or opportunities to pursue new interests
- support peer education, where young people are better equipped to challenge their own peers, for a longer-term impact
- prioritise long-term programmes rather than one-off events, which often have limited impact



### **Local authorities must:**

- identify and tackle community grievances head on – ensure there are spaces for citizens to express their concerns and have their voices heard
- offer a competitive package to rival with the offers of the far right – whether this is options for concerned citizens to take action, or exciting activities for young people during demonstrations
- get the community involved in positive ways during far-right activities, as community mediators or organising alternative activities
- interact with the far right themselves to encourage change of behaviour, emphasising consequences of their action
- ensure a strong communications strategy is in place, prioritising accessibility, transparency and consistency of messaging
- prioritise long-term programmes rather than one-off events, which often have limited impact



### **Police must:**

- encourage self-policing and change of behaviour by engaging directly with far-right groups – even simple appeals or reasoning with them might make a difference
- demonstrate a willingness to protect vulnerable communities
- involve the community in public order management where possible, involving them in policing and liaison roles during demonstrations
- work with the community to increase the social costs of participation in far-right activities – communities will be willing to pitch in
- ensure a strong communications strategy is in place, prioritising accessibility, transparency, and consistency of messaging



### **Exit and intervention providers must:**

- approach clients with a non-judgemental manner – avoid using labels or approaching their beliefs as ‘right’ or ‘wrong’
- take advantage of the right timing – many believe the best time to do an intervention is when a person is on the way in or on the way out of a movement
- individualise support as much as possible – tailor a support package specific to a person’s needs
- focus on the future of the individual, rather than the past – identify goals, ambitions, and where that person would like to go in the future
- confront ideology with caution, and only when the time is right
- offer a competitive package to replace the main offers given by the far right
- prioritise staff well-being and personal safety – ensure that there are routes for staff to seek support and counselling as needed



### **Victims supporters must:**

- always adopt a non-judgemental approach when working with victims, with no expectations about their situation and background
- take the time to build a trusted reputation among the communities who might need support
- make creative use of new media to reach communities – to raise awareness, provide a platform for victims to ask for support, and build a stronger evidence base on hate crime and incidences

- allow police or prosecutors to take ownership of training sessions – this might improve their engagement with the content
- recognise the power of storytelling as part of a survivor’s journey – at the right time, storytelling can be important in the healing process
- prioritise staff well-being – ensure that there are routes for staff to seek support and counselling as needed



### **Campaigners and activists must:**

- organise positive alternatives to counter-demonstrations, which can sometimes lead to unexpected or counterproductive outcomes
- use creative methods, including film, visuals and new media to engage new audiences
- appeal to the emotions rather than just the facts – myth-busting is notoriously difficult to do, and appealing to the emotions can be coupled with facts to have a greater impact
- amplify voices of the most credible messengers, including former extremists, survivors of violent extremism, and popular figures known to vulnerable communities
- use existing platforms to disseminate information rather than setting up new ones
- public ownership or even anonymity of campaigns can be important
- focus on quality over quantity of messages – going viral is not always the aim

The problem of far-right extremism will not go away in the near future. This is no easy challenge, however this project aims to offer a platform for the good work that is being done across Europe to prevent, intervene and respond to this challenge. Cross-border exchange at the European level encourages innovation, will allow us to learn faster, and means that those with less experience can learn from those with more. This is the first set of resources in the FREE Initiative, which will grow over time as new methods are tried and tested and new lessons learned. Visit [www.theFREEinitiative.com](http://www.theFREEinitiative.com) for inspirational films, testimonies and case studies on tackling far-right extremism across Europe.



**About the author**

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