

2.3 EDURAD MAPPING AND RESEARCH Analysis – Cyprus



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EDURAD: Educational Responses to Extremism

Full Title: EDURAD: ADDRESSING VIOLENT RADICALISATION: A MULTI-ACTOR RESPONSE THROUGH EDUCATION

Project Acronym: EDURAD

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Output 2.3

Team Information:

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Cyprus: EDURAD Mapping and Research Analysis 2.3

Description of Field Work

Ethical Consent

The research activities undertaken for the purpose of compiling this report adhered to all requirements regarding data protection regulations, as well as research ethics more generally. In the case of the questionnaire, prior to proceeding to answering any of the questions all respondents were provided with a thorough description of the EDURAD's purpose, aims and rationale. An outline of the EDURAD partnership was also given. In addition, the questionnaire also contained a disclaimer emphasising that data collection was anonymous and confidential and that any of the information ensuing from answering of the questionnaire was not to be used by any other purpose apart from those listed in the project description. Lastly, the questionnaire did not require responders to provide any personal information from which they can be identified.

In the case of focus groups, a similar method to the questionnaires was followed. Prior to the focus groups taking place, participants received an email invitation explaining the purpose, aims and rationale of EDURAD. Following their expression of interest to participate in the focus groups, participants received (via email) a link to a consent form, which they were asked to read and sign. In line with GDPR regulation, the consent form stated that the information provided during the focus groups will only be used for the purposes of EDURAD, anonymously and confidentially. During the analysis of the data and the writing of this report no information was presented in any way that it could be used to personally identify any of the participants. Participants were asked whether they have read and understood the terms listed in the consent form at the start of each focus group once more, with the researchers receiving a real-time confirmation that all participants were in agreement with the terms on which the meetings were conducted.

Finally, due to the situation with the Covid-19 pandemic and the health risk that a face-to-face meeting would present, all procedures described above were done online. Thus, no participant was put in any health risk by taking part in this research.

Rationale for selection of participants

The initial rationale for the selection of participants was set by the EDURAD project proposal; this rationale was further analysed and refined in EDURAD's Research Guidelines (WP2, Output 2.1) provided Maynooth University, the partner leading WP2. For both questionnaire and focus groups, participants were chosen because of their association (either professional or personal) to the pedagogy of young students. It is important to note that this association was conceptualised in broad terms in order to allow for a multiplicity of actors and perspectives to be part of the research activities. This multi-actor approach supported the primary purpose of the fieldwork to map out, as comprehensively as possible, the pedagogical gaps, needs, values and practices in the national context of Cyprus (as well as other partner-countries respectively).

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Following this rationale, the questionnaires were disseminated and completed by a wide range of actors, all related to the pedagogy of students in Cyprus; this included educators, parents/guardians, youth workers, social workers, youth mentors, religious leaders/guides, and policymakers. Even though the majority of respondents were professional educators working in formal education, nevertheless there was significant participation from other groups, thus ensuring cross-sectional responses to be recorded.

In the case of the focus groups, participants included educators (primary and secondary education teachers), youth workers, a youth mentor, a Member of Cyprus' Parallel Parliament on Civil Society, Human Rights Committee, and the director of a research institution specialising on (the prevention of) radicalisation. This selection allowed for a constructive discussion, wherein different perspectives on the topic of discussion were exchanged and analysed in depth.

Recruitment of Participants

In the case of the questionnaire, invitations were sent out using CSI's network of individuals and collectives who are active in the field of education (formal, informal, non-formal), as well as pedagogy more generally. In addition to utilising existing networks, the questionnaire was also disseminated in social media groups that are followed primarily by EDURAD's target groups.

In the case of the focus groups, a similar procedure was followed but in a more targeted and interpersonal manner. The reason for doing so was to ensure a) that the focus groups had a balance of different actors from different backgrounds and b) that a viable link was established between CSI Cyprus and the participants to the research. The latter point is significant insofar as it has resulted into the interest of the participants to follow up with the activities of the project after the focus groups.

Method (online/offline)

Given the current situation with the Covid-19 pandemic, both questionnaires and the focus groups were delivered online. In the case of the Focus Groups, they were conducted online using the *GoToMeeting* application. The first focus group had five (5) participants while the second four (4) participants.¹ To reach the indicators set by the project, a third focus group was held, attended by a youth worker that had previously expressed interest in participating in EDURAD's activities. All participants read and signed off an online consent form prior to their attendance to the online focus groups. In addition, the CSI researcher coordinating the focus groups verbally reiterated the contents of the consent form and received a further confirmation by participants, including their permission to record the meeting.

Short Summary and Analysis of findings from Questionnaires

Participants' Characteristics

The questionnaire was completed online by fifty (50) respondents in total. Even though these respondents came from a broad range of practices, a strong majority was formed by the 24 educators and 11 parents/guardians who represented 48% and 22% respectively of the total sum of people who

¹ One expected participant did not attend the meeting.

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answered the questionnaire. The other groups of participants numbered as follows: 5 youth workers (10%), 4 youth mentors (8%), 4 youth mentors (8%), and 2 religious leaders (4%).

3. Ποιος ο ρόλος σας στην παιδαγωγία νεαρών μαθητών;
50 responses

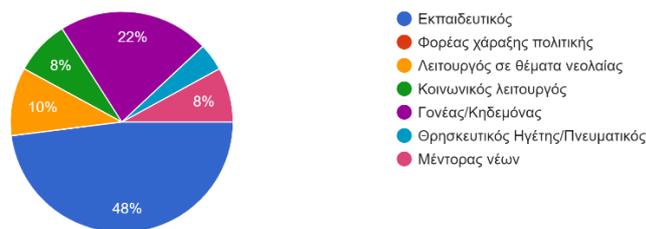


Figure 1: Participants' role in the pedagogy of young students

Approximately half of the respondents (46%) replied that they had more than 11 years of experience in their role, and only 12% of them had fewer than three years' experience. In addition, most of the respondents (58%) worked or were otherwise associated with young students aged 10-17. A more precise breakdown of this statistic shows a relatively even divide between respondents associated with youth aged 10-11 (20%), 12-14 (16%) and 15-17 (22%). Finally, only a very small portion of the total respondents worked solely in rural areas (6%), with 70% working in an urban setting and 24% in both urban and rural areas.

4. Με βάση την απάντησή σας στην ερώτηση 3, πόσα χρόνια εμπειρίας έχετε στο συγκεκριμένο ρόλο;
50 responses

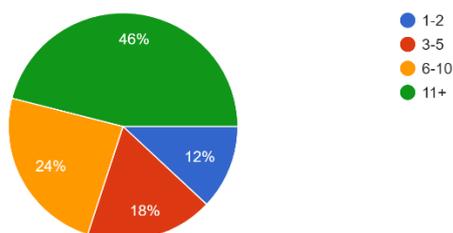


Figure 2: Participants' years of experience

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5. Με ποιες ηλικιακές ομάδες εργάζεστε/συσχετίζεστε;
50 responses

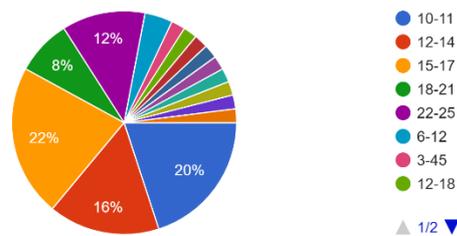


Figure 3: Participants' association with youth age-groups

6. Ποια είναι η κύρια τοποθεσία της εργασίας σας/ στην οποία συσχετίζεστε με νέους;
50 responses

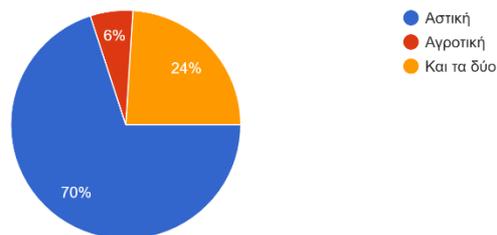


Figure 4: Participants' location of practice

Defining Extremism

To the question regarding the forms of discriminatory incidents among youth they have encountered in their line of work or personal lives, the respondents' replies mainly focused on three of the options provided: racism (68%), homophobia (64%), and sexism (58%). Conversely, dogmatism and alt-right were more rarely encountered, with only 5 (10%) and 2 (4%) respondents respectively reporting to have been confronted with such incidents.

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7. Στην σχέση σας με νέους, αντιμετωπίζετε οποιαδήποτε από τα ακόλουθα περιστατικά;(επιλέξτε όσα ισχύουν)

50 responses

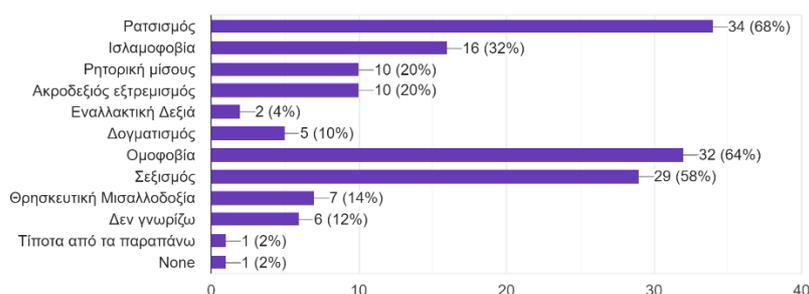


Figure 5: Participants' encounter with discriminatory behaviour/attitudes

When asked which type of discrimination listed above (Figure 5) they would *not* consider a case of extremism, most respondents replied that all of them constitute a form of extremism due to the fact that they sustain practices that are, or have the potential to be, aggressive and violent.

In general, when asked for a definition, respondents did not associate extremism with a particular extremist ideology, movement or group. Instead, the association they established was between extremism and the hostile *manner* in which certain views were expressed as well as with the capacity of those views to become violent. In other words, rather than identifying the concept of extremism as the operation of specific ideological structures, respondents understood it principally in terms of behaviour, tendency, and mindset. This approach was especially evident by replies that described extremism as involving the *aggressive* rejection of alternative views, a *negativity* towards engaging in constructive dialogue, and a predisposition to support *hateful* speech or practice against other groups.

Responses to the question of how participants would describe a person with extremist views were consistent with this behavioural or attitudinal understanding of extremism. The majority of the answers used adjectives such as “aggressive”, “arrogant”, “combative”, “intransigent”, “inflexible”, “totalising” and “fanatic” as the main characteristics of an extremist person. These responses are suggestive of a different point of departure than security-based conceptions of extremism and extremist persons, which regularly define the latter primarily with reference to participation/affiliation with more or less known extremist groups. This difference can also be observed from the fact that terrorism – which is a staple feature of securitised notions of prevention – only featured once in the definitions offered by respondents. Instead, what was presented as a central issue with extremism and in the behaviour of someone with extremist mindset, was the overall rejection of difference and diversity in their community. Many of the responses noted that this rejection is often maintained through *ignorance, inflexibility and forcefulness of one’s opinion*.

Another point that was raised across the board was that extremist behaviour can be defined with regards to how it targets certain groups of people because of their difference. However, despite

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making this point consistently, no respondents make precise reference to what groups of people these might be. More attention was called to **the act of targeting** – as well as the potential of that targeting to be violent – rather than the ideological values driving it. This prioritisation of performativity² of extremism over ideology has meant that the definitions offered by respondents did not describe a particular ideological context for what they consider extremism; instead they recognised extremism principally in terms of its capacity to enact violent discourses and actions.

Finally, a significant point of divergence can be found in the respondents' answers on whether their understanding of extremism has changed over the years. A number of respondents (13) answered that their views on the matter has remained the same, while the rest reported changes over time. The kind of changes mentioned varied. Some stated that they came to realise that views they used to view as normal were actually problematic and possibly signs of extremist behaviour (with sexism and homophobia mentioned as examples). Others commented that they thought extremism principally in terms of political conflict – an understanding that has now changed to include also religious dogmatism and intolerance. In some of the cases where a change was reported, it was explained that living abroad and coming in contact with people from other socio-cultural backgrounds or reading and attending seminars, were determining factors for viewing extremism differently.

The Role of the Educational System

In the questions concerning the role and capacity of education to address extremism, the answers given by respondents varied considerably. Certain respondents wrote that extremism should be handled just **like any other issue** that comes up in the educational systems. Others, however, argued that responding to extremism is an especially **urgent** matter that needs to be prioritised. The reasons offered for giving priority to extremism also varied. For example, there were answers that emphasised the gaps in the educational system vis-à-vis extremism and the need to fill those gaps. A number of respondents cited the **risk** of extremist views to turn to **violent acts** as good reason for urgency; a similar view was that there are connections between extremism and violent behaviour occurring at school, such as bullying. There was also the view that extremism is different to other issues in education in that **it sustains hatred** and undermines **basic values such as democratic dialogue and empathy**.

Finally, a different approach to answering the question was that extremist behaviour should **not** be viewed as a **monolithic** issue, but each case of extremism needs to be examined within the context within it emerges. In turn, attention needs to be given to the specific circumstances that gave rise to each incident and educational responses need to be tailored accordingly.

Resources, needs and expectations to respond to extremism

One of the main insights of the questionnaire is that there are important limitations in knowing where to look for supporting information or material to address extremism through education. In answering this question, most respondents noted either that a) they do not know where such information/material can be found and b) that what is being offered by official channels is not enough

² "Performativity" in the sense that a person's speech, gestures, and attitude more generally, serve both as signifiers and as constituent elements of extremist behaviour.

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to cover their needs. Conversely, respondents who said they have had access to this kind of information they did so through internet searches of academic articles and research, books and online seminars. Only very few wrote that they have received information from structured training seminars for teachers.

Similarly, the majority of respondents commented that they have not received any training on how to respond to cases of extremist behaviour. On commenting on their expertise and knowledge to do so, most responded by citing the following: a) personal initiatives in educating themselves on the subject, b) knowledge they received when doing their university studies, c) experience gained by years of practice and d) no expertise or knowledge at all. In case there is need for guidance and support, most respondents answered that they would go to the school administration or more experienced colleagues. Another common response was that they would reach out to the internet and relevant bibliography if they felt they needed additional support. Only a few responders wrote that they might contact the Ministry of Education but, at the same time, noted that the Ministry does not provide clear instructions and guidelines on the matter. Overall, there was a coherent view being expressed that there are important **gaps and needs** not only as far as **knowledge, expertise, tools and resources** are concerned, but also in terms of having in place a **general strategy and culture of support**. For a lot of responders, these gaps mean that the conditions for an adequate, thorough and systemic response to extremism through education do not exist.

As regards what kind of solutions to existing gaps they would like to see become available, respondents offered a wide range of suggestions. Most prominent among them was the provision of seminars for both teachers, parents and students, and the compilation of children's books that would problematise the issue of extremism through an educational lens. At a different level, there were answers that pointed out that certain subjects (i.e. history and religious studies) need to be re-evaluated or even re-designed as they can lead to controversial discussions where extremist views might find expression. Finally, there was focus on the significance of the educational system offering support to students (and their families) who might exhibit violent attitudes because of their families social or financial situation. Other resources or tools that were cited as useful to have were the following: short videos with real-life cases; informational material relevant to the Cypriot context; interviews with people who used to hold extremist views before changing; pedagogical guidebooks and lesson plans; methods to develop critical thinking and to implement non-typical education; and online webinars or face-to-face interactive seminars with activities and scenarios that would help them to respond in situations of crisis in the classroom.

Finally, in relation to establishing a network with relevant stakeholders, many of the answers noted that a discussion forum would be helpful in that respect. A number of respondents said that communication and cooperation with policymakers is important for the creation of a bottom up approach. This could include governmental institutions such as the Ministry of Education and the Cyprus Pedagogical Institution, public institutions such as Cyprus Youth Board (in order to engage the youth as well) and other relevant NGOs that have expertise on the matter to share. While most replies suggested the creation of a network at a national level, there was also the view that activities of communication and cooperation can extend beyond the scope of Cyprus to include also the exchange of good practices with other countries and their institutions and organisations.

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Conclusion (Questionnaire)

One of the key insights gained by the questionnaire is that the absence of an institutionally-based strategy of prevention in Cyprus has led to **pedagogical gaps** in its educational system; these gaps, in turn, have had a substantial impact on how practitioners find themselves limited when responding to incidents of extremist behaviour in the classroom. This impact manifests at various levels. For instance, institutionally there is a shortage of officially provided pedagogical material, or, at any rate, there is a gap in practitioners' knowledge of how to access such material. Relatedly, practitioners' expertise on how to respond to situations of extremist attitudes in the classrooms appears to be developed more through individual initiative and less through structural means provided within the educational system. At the level of cross-sectoral communication between stakeholders engaged in the pedagogy of young students, there also appears to be a gap, especially between practitioners and policymakers. Last but not least, at the level of pedagogy there is a reported need to start introducing new practices of teaching and learning that 1) are receptive to **alternative modes of teaching**, 2) strengthen and support the exercise of **critical thinking** among students and 3) enable the development of **skills** (both by teachers and students) that would make **constructive dialogues** about controversial topics and ideas feasible.

Short Summary and Analysis of Findings from Focus Groups

The focus groups comprised three online meetings: Focus Group 1 with five participants, Focus Group 2.1 with four participants and Focus Group 2.2 with one participant. In addition, the focus groups took the format of an open discussion involving not only practitioners (i.e. teachers) but also other relevant stakeholders. More specifically, the meetings were attended by five teachers (primary and secondary education), an educator in pre-primary education, a Member of Cyprus' Parallel Parliament on Civil Society, Human Rights Committee, a youth mentor, a youth worker, and the director of a research institution with specialty on radicalisation and the prevention of radicalisation.

Furthermore, the discussion in each of the focus groups unfolded as follows. First, at the beginning of the meeting, the coordinating researcher offered a description of EDURAD and its main rationale and purpose. Then the researcher posited certain question that would serve as a basis for discussion between participants. These questions sought to address the following themes/topics:

- Evaluation of main approaches and practice in the participants' fields
- The values the participants think should underpin pedagogical practice
- Pedagogical approaches they find useful, or not
- The greatest challenges/dilemmas in their work
- Where needs for support lie

After this introduction participants were encouraged to engage in an open discussion and exchange their experiences, insights and perspectives in relation to these themes/topics. A summary of the main points raised during the focus groups is presented below.

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Evaluation of main approaches and practice in the participants' fields

This was perhaps the topic that received the least time of discussion during the meetings, which is consistent with how current educational practice in Cyprus does not have a developed prevention mechanism. A relevant point was raised by a secondary education teacher, who noted that teachers in Cyprus now find themselves into an interim stage in their pedagogical practice. According to the teacher, recent years have brought a significant shift in the Cypriot education, which has involved a move away from the traditional system of teaching (which was more focused on academic achievement) and towards a system that seeks to teach students social skills. However, this movement has not been structured in any way, nor it follows any coherent strategy. The absence of strategy has created a confused situation, especially concerning the relation between students and teachers and how it should be formulated. As a result of this confusion, students often exhibit a **lack of respect** in the classroom. The teacher further noted that the lack of respect towards the educator is not irrelevant to extremist attitudes, because the former can create an environment in which the latter thrives.

In evaluating current educational practice, another of the teachers noted that one of the greatest challenges she faces is that schools in Cyprus are not entirely secular sites. This situation often leads to students of different religions to be excluded from activities during schooltime. The teacher supported this point with an example coming from personal experience. She recounted that once, she stopped dedicating time for the morning prayer – a longstanding tradition in Cypriot schools – because there was a student in the classroom from a different religious background who was being left out. However, when the teacher acted in this way, she met strong resistance from both parents and the school administration; they insisted that the practice of praying must continue despite the fact that it was not inclusive of all students (and even when the practice of praying is not obligatory under formal school regulations). Situations like these, the teacher argued, can be conducive to creating a school environment that marginalises or even alienates part of its student community.

In addition to the above, the youth mentor noted that teachers in Cyprus are often not willing or able to engage with a discussion about difficult topics or expressions of extremist views. Situations like this can arise, the youth mentor noted, because teachers don't have the time or the skills to engage in such types of discussions. This was a point that the director of the research institution agreed to, to add also that it is natural that educators have limits in what they can accomplish in the school setting. Instead, a multi-actor approach is necessary if any substantial change is to be achieved through education. Pedagogy, the director emphasised, also involves what happens at **home**, not only at school. If a student goes home after school and the pedagogical values learned at school are counteracted by other values at home, then it becomes really difficult to create a coherent pedagogy. So, in this instance, parenting skills is another dimension that this multi-actor approach might need to cover.

Finally, a **primary** school teacher noted that in their case students **don't often present extremist behaviour**. This is something one would usually encounter in later educational stages (i.e. secondary education). Nevertheless, they observed that in primary school one may encounter some of the first signs of discriminatory attitudes that might be more apparent when students are older. This

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observation re-surfaced later in the focus group when discussing about what the appropriate time for pedagogical interventions in education should be.

Values the participants think should underpin pedagogical practice

During the discussion in the focus group, a set of desired values and skills were emphasised by participants. These were values that all participants thought that should be either strengthened or introduced to the educational practice in Cyprus. More specifically, these values and skills were:

- Critical thought
- Dialogue and negotiation
- Acceptance of diversity & being aware of different positionalities in their group
- Thinking in a morally responsible way
- (Self-)Respect
- Communication (especially between different pedagogical actors such as parents and teachers)
- Empathy
- Constant (re)evaluation of the curriculum delivered in the classroom.

Pedagogical Approaches

In both focus groups, the topic of pedagogical approaches gave rise to a conversation about what the ideal time to introduce new pedagogical approaches should be. Almost all participants expressed the view that attempting to instil new pedagogical values in secondary education might be too late to have a formative impact on teenager students. What was suggested instead was that such interventions must be introduced at a younger age (primary education or even earlier). At the core of this discussion, lay the argument that some values – e.g. (self)respect, or learning about how to express individual freedoms within a group of peers – need to be cultivated early, gradually and continuously, not reactively, periodically and in haste. One participant understood the development of these values to be in itself a strategy of prevention and added that as a strategy it needs to a) start early, and certainly before the teenage years because if a student at that age expresses extremist attitudes then it might be too difficult to make a change through pedagogical means and b) pedagogical actors such as parents/guardians need to be part of promoting the same values, for the latter to have substantial effects.

The above was a position supported also by the youth worker, who similarly argued that a pedagogical approach against extremism needs to be **more than just reactive** to isolated incidents of extremist views expressed in the classroom. Instead, these approaches need to look at the problem **holistically and in-depth**. In other words, they need to investigate what the roots of the problem are and begin from there before addressing the eventual results of that problem. This line of reasoning also led to the view, expressed by the youth mentor, that taking examples from alternative forms of learning is crucial when looking for solutions to the shortcomings of the current education system. These alternative forms of learning (e.g. interactive learning, teaching through performances and critical thinking) can be more easily integrated in primary schools first, when students can more easily adapt to different modes of learning.

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Another contribution worth mentioning came from a secondary education teacher who noted that in many cases the problem lies in how students lack a space and the time to express their ideas and positions. As a consequence, when students initiate discussions between themselves, they often do so whilst not having the skills and knowledge to express themselves constructively. Highlighting the importance of allowing for student dialogue to take place, the teacher said that extra-curricular activities held in schools such as “Debate Clubs” or “Current Affairs Clubs” are very useful in this respect. These activities allow young students to expand their spectrum of knowledge, to develop skills in how to articulate their own views and also to understand how they can express these views while respecting someone in disagreement with them. Other participants agreed with this view, but also observed that the activities described are extra-curricular; the challenge remains to transfer their positive impact in the curriculum.

With regards to the nature and content of the curriculum, the youth worker noted that an important discussion that needs to take place is how we deal with our history especially when the latter is expressed in narratives that we take for granted. For instance, sources and sites of historical information that are often taken to be “objective” like museums promote certain narratives about the past; these *narratives* need to be critically evaluated, especially if they glorify historical events by effacing or obscuring violent practices of the past. The youth worker added that of course this kind of critical evaluation cannot be expected to happen overnight – it needs to occur gradually and be constantly revisited.

Identifying the greatest challenges/dilemmas in their work

The conversation of bringing about changes in the educational system so that it can act preventively towards (violent) extremism continued when discussing the greatest challenges/dilemmas in participants’ work. One participant mentioned that it is difficult to reform the educational system and its content in any significant way. She attributed this difficulty to the fact that the educational system in Cyprus is characterised by a natural tendency to avoid making changes; this kind of conservatism being especially evident in the case of systemic changes. In this context, certain participants noted that adherence to conventional methods of teaching and learning is an important issue when trying to integrate new ways of teaching. More specifically, the youth worker argued that the manner in which learning occurs in our educational system basically takes the form of students receiving content from teachers and memorising it without any critical discussion about that content. Students thus get too accustomed to accepting information at face value without questioning and thinking critically about it.

An additional implication of this general resistance against reform is that the educational content and practice in schools is not reflective of recent changes within the student population (e.g., in the case of Cyprus, the emergence of a more *diverse* student community with members from different religious or ethnic background). According to participants, the inflexibility to keep up with changes in the student community is not entirely unrelated to students expressing extremist views. One participant (teacher) observed that whether you encounter extremist attitudes or not, often depends on which school environment you work in. Schools that have a heterogeneous student population are more likely to have a problem with some students not accepting diversity within the school community. The teacher also noted that this kind of intolerance is not always connected to difference in race, religion,

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sex. Sometimes tensions and intolerance might find expression in terms of disparities in social standings within the student population.

What is perhaps an even more important challenge is that students are not the only ones in the school environment that might be reacting against diversity. A couple of participants (the youth mentor and a teacher) noted that teachers themselves might express intolerant, discriminatory and even extremist views. These participants described their personal experience of teachers expressing and replicating such views, especially in relation to topics such as homosexuality, religion, or national issues. The challenge here is not simply that teachers set a bad example for students, thus sustaining the problem of extremism. It is also that these teachers block solutions to extremism since they may not be accepting of views other than their own to be expressed in the classroom.

Other participants noted that a *similar issue to teachers being the source of extremist views* can be observed in the case of parents doing the same thing. This was a point raised in Focus Group 2.1, where some participants added that having parents conveying such views to their children is even more challenging to address for two main reasons. First, because this creates tensions between, on the one hand, what parents believe and, on the other, what teachers might teach in the classroom. A likely result of such tensions can be that students gradually lose respect and/or interest not only for teachers and what they teach but also for their school as an institution more broadly. Second, parents lie outside the educational system's capacity (or teachers' more specifically) of prevention. Therefore, it might be impossible to engage and change extremist attitudes instilled by parents, and this has a considerable impact on the ability of teachers to do the same for their students.

To summarise, the major challenges described during the focus groups mostly related to the perceived inability to effect change in the educational system in an impactful way. This inability was attributed to institutional inertia,¹⁰ to the fact that teachers sometimes are part of the problem rather than the solution, and that potential sources of extremist views like parents are extremely difficult to address from an educators' standpoint.

Identifying where needs for support lie

In identifying where needs for support can be situated, the *lack of engagement in critical thinking* was a central topic of discussion, especially in Focus Group 2.1. In this group, participants noted that the capacity to think critically should be the founding stone of any attempt to resist extremist views. This point was raised while discussing the limits of current teaching practices, wherein learning processes take the form of assimilating taught content without any critical reflection on it. According to a participant (educator), *the problem with accepting content as true without actually questioning it, is that students nowadays are constantly exposed to information coming from any type of sources.* Placing this point to context, it was noted that an area where there is need for guidance is the use of social media. Social media have become a central part of students' life, but there is hardly any pedagogical attention on how these media are used. This is very important to consider because in using social media, students get access to all types of content without having the skills of navigating through all that information in a critical way. In addition, social media are an important outlet for extremist groups (or for groups expressing extremist positions) which make it all the more crucial to have pedagogical training on how students use them.

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Another participant of that focus group highlighted that need for support does not only exist in how students passively consume social media content, but also how they actively participate in using them. For example, there was a case in a school that she was working in where students used the Viber app to bully one of their female classmates. Because this bullying took place online and not on the school grounds, a lot of the teachers and parents were unaware of what is happening.

At this point, the researcher asked whether participants thought that actions like bullying are identical to extremist attitudes even if the former is not driven by a specific extremist ideology. And if they are not the same, are the supporting needs for both bullying and extremism different, or should a common approach be taken for both?

In answering the question above, one of the teachers noted that bullying behaviour is, from professional experience, a typical precursor to extremist behaviour. An act like bullying signifies and is based on the lack of respect for fellow students, something that can also be central to extremist behaviour. In addition, it was observed that bullying might not be identical to extremism, but it creates conditions in which extremism can thrive. For instance, when students think it appropriate to exclude or “punish” a fellow student because the latter is overweight, not good at sports and so on, they already create a climate of **non-acceptance and non-inclusiveness of difference**. In turn, this kind of climate gives fertile ground to extremist behaviour to appear and grow. The underlying ideological reasoning might be different in the case of extremism vis-à-vis bullying, but the (violent) actions involved are often very similar in their scope and character.

Another participant (Member of the parallel parliament) posited that extremist attitudes are often supported by patterns of behaviour which might not be identified as “extremist” at first. However, at the same time, these patterns of behaviour (for instance “implicit” racism, sexism etc.) create a discursive environment which can easily lead to extremist positions being maintained and expressed. In this context, if we take “extremism” to mean extreme behaviour involving violent outbursts, then bullying definitely is a form of extremism. Finally, it was argued by some participants that bullying might be a more challenging phenomenon to confront precisely because extremism and bullying are often seen as separate things. Violent extremism is something which is illegal and recognised as such by all – once it is identified, it calls for immediate action to be taken against it. Bullying on the other hand is a type of behaviour that is often normalised and is underestimated in terms of its harmfulness and negative impact it might have. Thus, in thinking about where pedagogical approaches might offer support, it might be more useful to see and pay attention to the links between the two (bullying/extremism).

Another area in need of support concerned the need to develop mechanisms so that students are more meaningfully active in their school community. When thinking about relevant stakeholders, students are often excluded from consideration. Instead, it was argued that students should be decision makers in their schools. Not allowing the students to take decisions that will shape the activities of the school, participants posited, means that they are not often aware of the responsibilities and rights that are accompanied by processes of participation. As one participant emphasised, students should be aware not only that they have rights, but also what those rights are, in order to experience the implications of possessing rights and responsibilities. It was proposed that

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this kind of knowledge will have a definite impact on how young students understand and put into practice concepts like freedom of speech.

Finally, the discussion in Focus Group 1 focused largely on two areas in which change is needed. First, a need was expressed to establish a programme that engages multiple actors from relevant sectors. This programme should function organically within the educational system – with “organically” essentially referring to the need to integrate this system within education and not implement it as separate seminars/workshops that take place sporadically and without a coherent rationale. Second, there is a need to *continue conversations about extremism and, very importantly, to include students in those conversations*. In a lot of cases, participants observed, that young students regularly have very limited understanding of what radicalisation or extremism might be. For instance, there were cases that young people would refer to homosexuality as a form of extremism. Even students who might be supporting some kind of extremist position, do not have a clear picture of the ideology they follow and often cannot explain the content of those ideologies. Understanding what radicalisation or extremism might be is a crucial step in the process of resisting it, because it is only through such understanding that its violent content can be unpacked, problematised and a solution to it be found.

Conclusion (Focus Groups)

The focus groups conducted for the purpose of EDURAD proved to be a rich source of insights in understanding the current state of pedagogical approaches to extremism in the national context of Cyprus. The discussions held in each of the three meetings touched upon similar issues. For example, there was a common understanding and advocacy among participants in all focus groups about *which pedagogical values are both lacking and needed* to improve the capacity of the educational system to address extremism adequately. Correspondingly, there was also a shared view regarding the introduction of these pedagogical values at an early stage (primary education), as well as the limitations that teachers face in responding to extremist behaviour at schools. However, they were also areas of discussion where each group approached differently and developed separate arguments. Most significantly, when talking about needs and expectations, participants of Focus Group 1 emphasised the need for understanding extremism more, as well as building a more comprehensive and sustainable response by involving actors and institutions other than teachers and schools.¹¹ On the other hand, the discussion in Focus Group 2.1 focused more on the development and use of critical thinking as a tool of prevention and to recognising the underlying connections between extremism and other violent behaviour (i.e. bullying) at schools in order to develop pedagogical strategies that would respond to both.

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Conclusion

The results of the fieldwork conducted (both questionnaires and focus groups) were consistent with the findings of the desk research, with most of the participants noting the absence of an institutionally based strategy of prevention in Cyprus. The practitioners among participants reported that education in Cyprus has significant pedagogical gaps, which have had a substantial impact on the ability of educators to respond to incidents of extremist behaviour in the classroom. These main gaps that were reported involved the following: a shortage of officially provided pedagogical material on extremism and on how to handle incidents of extremist behaviour; unavailability of capacity building training for educators who; and the creation of a multi-actor network that strengthens communication and cooperation between different actors that are active in the pedagogy of young people.

In addition, the insights gained by both questionnaires and focus groups form a coherent picture as far as needs and expectations of practitioners are concerned. In expressing their views on what needs to be done, practitioners called for the introduction and implementation of educational practices that 1) are receptive of alternative modes of teaching and learning, 2) strengthen and support the exercise of critical thinking among students and 3) enable the development of skills (both by teachers and students) that would make constructive dialogues about controversial topics and ideas feasible. The focus groups also offered a strong argument regarding the timing and nature of educational interventions against extremism. More specifically, it was broadly maintained in the focus groups that attempting to begin an educational response in later stages of education (i.e. secondary education), would not be very effective. Instead, the suggestion presented by practitioners was to initiate such attempts at the level of primary education, which is more productive basis for the development pedagogical values.

In conclusion, this report showed that practitioners in Cyprus face important limitations in preventing extremist behaviour in their schools. However, practitioners seem to be aware of not only what these limitations are (as well as their sources), but also how their own position and role in supporting young students can be improved. Finally, the views expressed during the conduct of the fieldwork came from a range of practices. The strength of this cross-sectoral interaction enabled by this research is that it has allowed the articulation of issues and the exploration possible solutions from a multiplicity of perspectives. Considering that one of the major issues reported by participants was the lack of communication and cooperation among actors who are active in the pedagogy of youth, it is recommended that future activities of EDURAD continue bringing relevant stakeholders in contact and in communication.

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