

Newsletter

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

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### Educational Responses to Extremism in Ireland

By Aislinn O'Donnell

#### What is the approach to preventing extremism in Ireland?

Unlike the majority of EU Member States, however, Ireland does not have a national policy on preventing terrorism and/or a national policy on countering violent extremism and radicalisation that leads to terrorism.<sup>1</sup> The absence of a Prevent Strategy means that it is difficult to locate PVE-E in a broader policy context. It is noteworthy, however, that in various fora state authorities have sought to lay emphasis on the need for a **multidimensional** approach in preventing and countering violent extremism, with 'policies concerned with integration, equality, combating discrimination and building positive relationships with our minority communities' being seen as central to this.<sup>2</sup> While the role of

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#### THINKING ABOUT EXTREMISM

Fügen Sie hier einen Beschreibungstext ein, um das Interesse der Abonnenten an Ihrem Thema zu wecken.

education has not been addressed directly within this broadly integrationist approach, statements made by Ireland in the UN on countering and preventing violent extremism have sought to underscore the 'key importance of human rights education' in preventing violent extremism (Ireland, 2016).<sup>3</sup>

The most recent TE-SAT report (Europol, 2020) notes a rise in far-right extremist activity and anti-migrant rhetoric in the country, however, these remain on the fringes of society without popular support. However, grassroots movements have also highlighted concerns about racism and 'othering' practices, including in education, and the need to *re-imagine Irishness* so that it reflects the plurality of the Republic.

### **How did participants in Ireland conceptualise extremism and violent extremism as educators?**

In the survey, a number of ways of understanding extremism emerged in response to the question of what is seen as extremism: 1. Systems and environments that *normalise* different forms of extremism, including *prejudice, xenophobia, and intolerance*; 2. *Positional extremism* on a spectrum of social behaviour or norms; 3. *Dehumanisation, intolerance, hatred, disrespect and degradation of others* on the basis of minority or group identity with an emphasis on harm and even potential violence to others; 4. *Ignorance and lack of awareness*, in particular for adolescents, where upbringing and frustration may play a role.

However respondents also underlined that in the case of young people, there are a number of motivations and factors for engagement in language and attitudes that initially appear extremist, and were *unwilling to categorise* young people as extremist. A number of responses framed instances of extremism (for example, racism, sexism and homophobia) as an expression of individual personal prejudice rather than due to systemic structures.

### **Is there evidence of (violent) extremism in Ireland?**

No evidence of violent extremism was provided by participants, and participants were keen to engage with the question of extremism educationally. There was some difficulty raised with the "negative" and anticipatory framing of the term "*prevention*" and a sense that more positive ways of approaching these issues might be more helpful. This meant for a number of participants examining the meaning of the term "preventing extremism". In this regard, in one focus group, it was seen as more helpful to reframe the educational task as one of "*unpacking extremism*" whilst also exploring as professionals what prevention and protection *mean* in education. Participants were keen to reflect on what prevention and child protection mean in a *holistic* sense.

### **What would be helpful for practitioners and policymakers to engage with the issue of extremism educationally?**

A number of themes emerged in the focus groups. These were:

1. Importance of a *critical examination* of key concepts by practitioners and with young people
2. *Belonging, diversity and inclusion*
3. Facilitation of discussions about *controversial* and *sensitive* issues

4. The importance of self-awareness, self-reflection and communities of exchange for practitioners
5. Duty of care to the young and their empowerment

Overall, the research suggests a positive educational engagement with these issues is one which: 1. Supports reflection, dialogue, and relationships (a “self-other-us” framework); 2. Develops capabilities for facilitating and engaging with difficult conversations, including hate speech, racism and sexism, on both an individual and collective level; 3. Addresses prevention and intervention differently, acknowledging the tensions; and 4. Cultivates the imagination and explores questions of identity, belonging, meaning, agency, and purpose, individually and collectively.

There was an appetite to create communities of practice with practitioners of diverse professional backgrounds to share knowledge, ideas and practice. It was felt that it is important to include the voices and ideas of young people in discussions about these questions, and there was a need for further discussion about the question of harm, power, agency, parameters for engagement, and clarity in terms of best approaches to working with stakeholders, including those from the criminal justice system.

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