



Preventing violent
extremism – children’s
perspectives.
Policy and practice.

ROBERT ÖRELL

- INDEPENDENT EXPERT
- DIRECTOR TRANSFORM
- CO-LEADER EU RAN
REHABILITATION

Goal of the presentation

- Introduction and overview of children in Violent Far-Right Extremism & Violent Far-Left Extremism.
- Rehabilitation and reintegration practices.
- Recommendations.



Prevention in practice and in policy


- From a **public health** framework:

Promotion - of democratic values and human rights

Prevention - of recruitment and involvement in violent extremist groups

Targeted interventions - towards individuals already involved





What defines success in exit work?

- Radicalisation - Deradicalisation
- Engagement - Disengagement
- Criminality - Desistance
- Social marginalisation - Reintegration
- Mental health

Tore Bjørgos model
of the five dimensions:

Effectiveness of rehabilitation & reintegration programmes

- Define and agree on the goals with rehabilitation & reintegration programmes.
- Lack of evaluations and data - need to invest more on evaluation.
- However, there are minimal requirements for RR practices.
- Can be applied to programs for children and women.



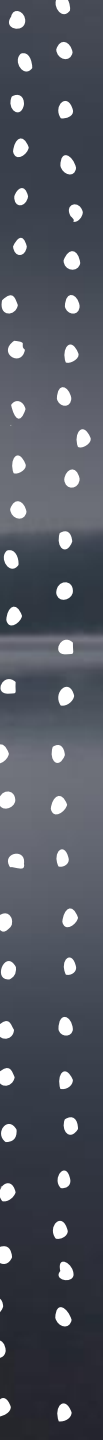
Children in Violent extremism

- Children are important for all violent extremist orientations. Seen as the future generations.
- Child raising from ideological orientation. What does this entail?
- Strict control of their members and children in the group on areas such as: social environments, sexuality, freedoms, etc.
- How to relate to others outside the group.
- Mentality: Dystopian world views. Apocalyptic. Ragnarök.



The effect of the pandemic

- Isolation.
- Digital presence of violent extremist groups.
- Lack of responses and presence online, only a few known practices.



Children growing up in violent extremist environments

- Sometimes referred to as 2nd generation.
- Don't know any other worldview.
- Learn to invalidate all other perspectives. Values and teachings in schools are seen as deceptive, hostile, fake.
- Psychological attachment is an issue for many 2nd generations members. Leading to issues with relational problems later in life.
- **Practice:** involve all relevant stakeholders as soon as possible. Careful regarding confronting the families worldview.



Children in violent far-right extremism

- Superior vs. living under a constant threat of extinction.
- Conspiracy theories are the truth.
- Disgusted over the current society.
- Gender perspectives: ultra conservative gender roles.
- Aggravated entitlement – perceived need of restoration.
- **Under researched – we don't have enough knowledge.**
- Diversification and changing landscape in the VFRE.



Children in violent left-wing extremism

- Oppression from the state.
- Fight for equal rights and minority groups.
- Validation of the use of violence.
- **Under researched - we need more knowledge.**



Children and adolescents recruited to violent extremist groups

- Distinguish between young children and teenagers. The later have a foundation of identity from before joining the group.
- Manipulation, grooming, accustomed to violence, distance, isolation, dehumanisation of enemies.
- **Practice:** intervene as early as possible. Involve family, school, social authorities, pro-social networks.
Engage in alternative pro-social networks and hobbies.
- **Example of practice:** working with creative arts, drama. Trauma informed care.

Children and adolescents recruited to violent extremist groups

- Support with mental health
- Unresolved traumas and conflicts
- Equip youths in critical thinking, intercultural competence, emotional intelligence, conflict management skills.



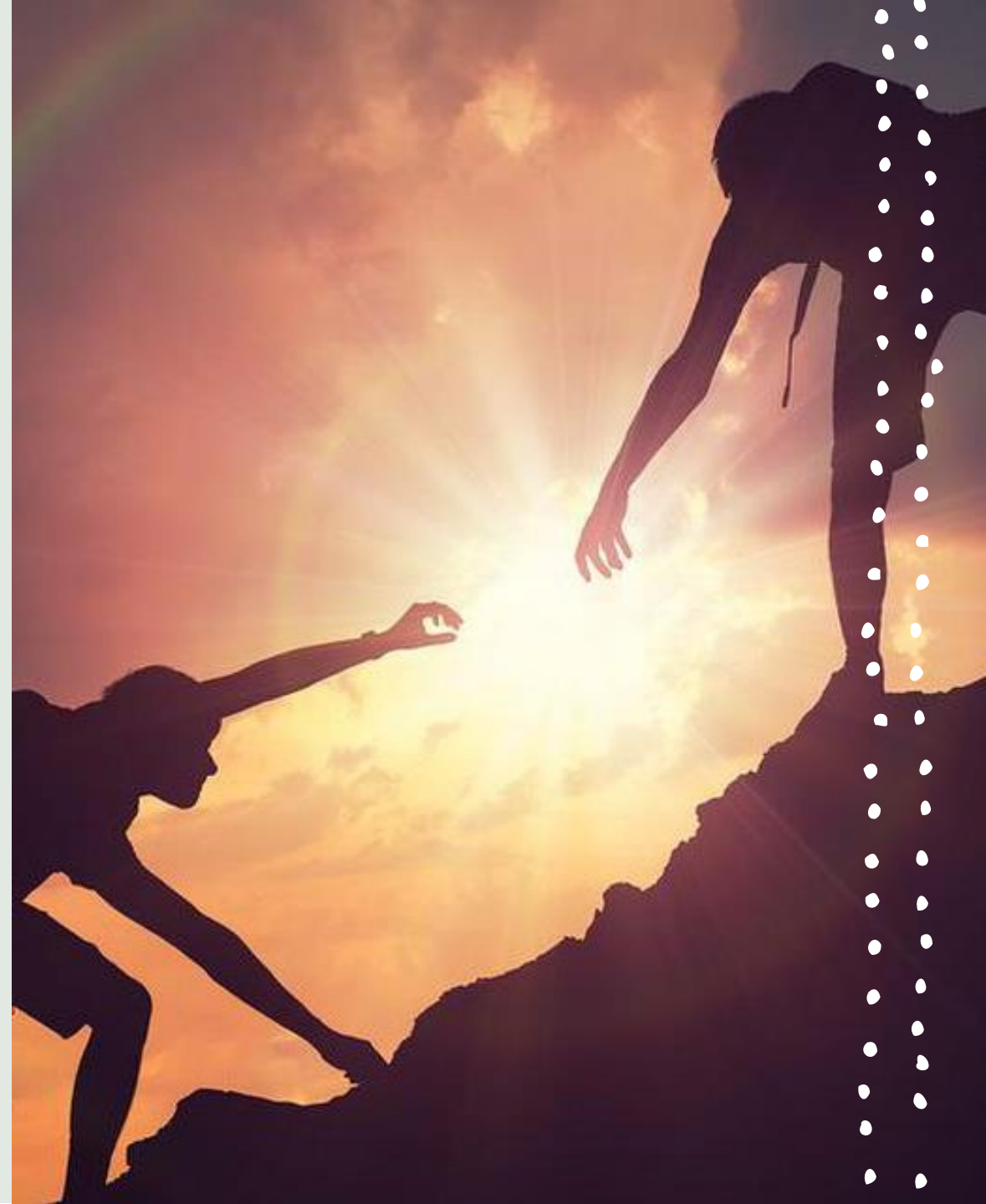
Case example

- - Identify the situation of the child/adolescent. Gather as much information as possible to be able to create a suitable response.
 - Flexibility and adaptability.
 - Important to build trust and relationship. Especially challenging with children growing up in violent extremist groups.



Recommendations for RR

- Individual adaptation of responses and support
- Age sensitive responses.
- Multiagency and multi-disciplinary, informed by trauma and the knowledge of violent extremist environments.
- Equip professionals to properly identify and respond to the children's situation and needs.
- Work out safe protocols for information sharing between stakeholders.
- Invest in long-term programs.
- Invest in evaluation, study visits, and cross-leaning exercises.



Council of Europe

**Recommendation on measures
aimed at protecting children
against radicalisation for the
purpose of terrorism**

2021



Key principles

- The purpose is not to criminalise, on the contrary, the focus is on **protection** and **building resilience**.
- Extremist groups play on **emotions** and **conflict** – equipping adolescents with interpersonal conflicts management and emotional intelligence skills is key
- Focus on respecting **human rights**
- **Coordinate** and **sharing** policies and practices between member States
- **Long-term perspective** – prevention and intervention need resources and time

Chapter II -Evidence based approach

- 5. In order to be efficient, it is crucial that all policies and concrete measures aimed at protecting adolescents against radicalisation are based on **evidence-based scientific knowledge and a precise analysis of the local setting** in which they are to be implemented.
- 7. To this end, member States are encouraged to **carry out and promote research** into the drivers and mechanisms of radicalisation of adolescents.

Chapter IV–Development of strategies to prevent radicalisation of adolescents for the purpose of terrorism

- 14. Member states are invited to **develop strategies** for the prevention of radicalisation of adolescents, **while respecting human rights and the rule of law.**

As propagators of terrorism seek conflict and confrontation, such strategies should be **focused on conflict de-escalation, early prevention of violence, reducing polarisation** [avoiding ruptures and vulnerabilities], **conflict resolution** via mediation, **community building**, strengthening social cohesion and providing education for adolescents in democracy and **critical thinking**.

Moreover, the strategies should consider the need for, and right to, **social reintegration of adolescents** who have become victims of radicalisation.

Chapter III - Safeguarding children who have experienced or witnessed violence and trauma

- 10. ...should include **a multi-agency, development-focused and trauma-informed response**. Bearing in mind the **best interests of the child**, it is recommended that a single contact person deal with multiple authorities, support systems and possible investigations into the health, security, and needs of the child, as well as the risks he/she may be facing.
- 11. In supporting children returning from war or conflict zones, member States should carefully examine the possibilities **of reuniting children with their family, including extended family, when appropriate, and reconnecting them with their social networks** upon return. Breaking down **isolation and stigma** is necessary for successful rehabilitation and reintegration.



Chapter III - Safeguarding children who have experienced or witnessed violence and trauma

- 12. Children who have experienced trauma, relocation and possible family separation should not only receive appropriate support, including mental health support, but also **be engaged and actively involved in decisions that have an impact on their future**. This is important in order to create a sense of agency and control over their future decisions. Bearing in mind that violent extremist groups often exert strict control over their group members' freedom and ideas, in particular regarding children, empowering the independent decision making of children is therefore essential.

Chapter V –Roles of first line practitioners

- 20. Accordingly, first line practitioners should be **properly trained** to deal with **conflict resolution** and **mediation** and have the necessary **intercultural competencies and communication skills**. They should be equipped with relevant tools and **skills to identify and respond to signs** of an adolescent **being at risk of radicalisation**. To this end the availability of professional support through advisory units specialised in the prevention of terrorism, updated and **hands-on information** as well as collections of good and promising practices is essential for first line practitioners to respond in a swift and timely manner.



Chapter VI-Preventing and responding to radicalisation of adolescents

- 24. In developing and offering such alternatives, member States should put particular emphasis on the needs of adolescents as regards educational and social relations, **experiencing and handling strong emotions, unresolved conflicts and traumas**, and the adolescent's need for developing an understanding of the world and the meaning and purpose of his or her life. Due consideration should also be given to **providing the necessary support for parents and caregivers of adolescents at risk** of radicalisation.

Chapter VI-Preventing and responding to radicalisation of adolescents

- 25. Member States are invited to consider, in so far as is feasible and necessary, to **promote interdisciplinary** settings by associating **social workers, psychologists and other relevant first line practitioners with schools** in order to better identify and assist adolescents at risk of radicalisation.

Thank you for
listening!



ROBERT ÖRELL

