

Open Minds Report

IO2: Collection and analysis of deradicalization pathways
towards Social Inclusion

A2: Life-stories collection and analysis



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Introduction

OPEN MINDS project aims to explore the socio-economic drivers of radical religious and political ideologies prone to incite or lead to violence. It analyzes exit strategies and disengagement from radical contexts and present complementary knowledge on non-radicalizing identity.

Through the activities of OPEN MINDS project and by exploiting its results and outcomes, young people living in urban and peri-urban areas and being at risk of radicalization / polarization will be able to develop socio-ecological resilience mechanisms that will allow them to effectively and easily disengage from radicalized behaviors. Young people will be able to develop their own exiting pathways having as a base both the life stories of former radicalized individuals and the games and training material that will be developed within the project. Once “freed” from such toxic behavioral patterns, young people will be able to develop active citizenship and democratic skills and, therefore, achieve and maintain social inclusion generating, among others, a range of economic benefits through strengthening social networks, increasing trust, and reducing barriers for young people to realize their potential.

IO2 focuses on collection and analysis of deradicalization pathways and exit strategies across age and gender in order to promote social inclusion of youth. The data source for narrative analysis of deradicalization pathways is based on online life stories of radicalization and exit experiences of former radicalized individuals. There are currently many online life stories and videos on a number of different websites but these have never been systematically collated and analyzed.

Subsequently, life stories of former radicalized individuals has been systematically collected from a large pool of existing online resources. These narratives shared in the current report will be systematically analyzed and thermalized and the output of this qualitative narrative analysis will be used to understand exit pathways and disengagement strategies from polarization and radicalization.

The main outcome of IO2 activities is to provide concrete and detailed information on the trends and determinants of deradicalization and non-radicalizing identities focusing on promoting social inclusion of youth, mainly by answering the following questions:

- How is social inclusion connected to pathways of deradicalization across age and gender and non radicalizing identities?
- How do different local actors adapt or take the distance from EU promoted schemes to counter/deradicalization?

- To what extent and which social inclusion policies and programs shape socio-ecological resilience?

Methodology

Life stories of the deradicalized individuals were collected from a large pool of existing online resources. These online resources include life stories of those who have exited radicalised milieu (in both written and video format). The project partners researched from wide variety of sources including NGOs and other ongoing EU projects as well as those completed in the past, with the aim of finding examples of deradicalized individuals.

Belgium

In most of the stories there is a similar basis regarding teenagers who get radicalized and separated from their friends, family in order to be brainwashed with the new believes. They are easy to manipulate because of the age, as most teenagers are looking for rebellion and it is often used in order to convert them in radicalized citizens.

Adam's story

Adam (not his real name) is a 28 years old, Polish Muslim convert, had been preparing to train as a jihadi fighter in Tunisia and hoped to end up in Syria.

"I was thinking I've got nothing to lose, and I have a lot to win. If I die, if they shoot me or anything, I'm not going to lose anything except my life," he explains.

He has been spending the past nine months with Mr Qadir, a youth worker who is trying to steer him away from radical thinking. Adam is on the government's secretive Channel programme, part of the Prevent agenda, which is aimed at stopping people being drawn into violent extremism. Because of its sensitive nature, details of people who are on the programme are a tightly-guarded secret and what actually happens to them is barely known to anyone outside those involved.

Mr Qadir knows what it's like - in 2002 he travelled to Afghanistan to fight for al-Qaeda, but quickly returned. He admits he was also radicalised and manipulated, but now works with the government to stop others taking a similar path.

Adam's been going through a sustained a period of "re-education" and what Mr Qadir described as "making him vulnerable to our mentoring". He explains: "It wasn't about changing his mind. It was about allowing him to critically analyse what he thought and what the reality is. So I would take him through the teachings of Islam and show him this is what the Prophet, peace upon him, has said about extremism."

Mr Qadir admits it has not been an easy process and "frustrating at times", with Adam arguing back to much of his tutoring.

Adam was sleeping rough when he was found by a youth outreach team, after coming to the country to look for a job. He was taken to the Active Change Foundation - a brightly-coloured youth centre full of pool tables and video games. The centre was set up for local youths by Mr Qadir when he got back from Afghanistan. Anyone can use it but it also receives government funding and describes itself as a place "where messages of hatred and violence can be challenged". Adam was quickly identified as potentially "on the edge" after alarming some people at the centre with his support for Islamist violence.

When he went on to strongly support the gunmen responsible for the murders at the Charlie Hebdo offices in Paris, group leader Hanif Qadir said he knew he had a problem case.

They discovered Adam had a complex background. He had become estranged from his family and ended up in France, where he says he was told about the war in Syria by a group of Muslims with extreme views. They showed him live headcam footage from other fighters there. They convinced him that no-one in the world was helping the Syrians, and he should.

"I was watching what is going in with the world and I see all the people, they like - they do nothing about it, do you understand?" he says.

Mr Qadir says he believes these people were linked to the Charlie Hebdo killers and "to some networks within Syria and Iraq".

"Intentionally he's not a terrorist," he explains. But "he was prepared to do something nasty. I've realised how easy it was for somebody to manipulate him".

After finding Adam, Mr Qadir approached the local authority and explained he felt Adam would benefit from being part of the programme. A panel meeting was organised which included the police and other statutory service providers like the local mental health trust and education services. A bespoke intervention was then designed to fit his needs.

Adam explains that he had converted to Islam in 2010 and before meeting Mr Qadir he had been "learning" about Islam. "But the books which I received, I didn't know they were extremist, you know? They were not saying directly kill the people or things like that because the book is very nice writing you know - in beautiful language. But it's just the way the book makes you feel after you read."

Mr Qadir says he also knows many people, Muslims in particular, do not approve of his work. Because Prevent requires schools and universities to look out for signs of extremism it is seen by some as a spying programme.

Mr Qadir disagrees. "Don't get me wrong, we've had parents who are very suspicious of why are their children looked upon by the police or by the local authorities as suspicious? Is it

because they're Muslim? But then the child's been taken through the process and admitted to the parents that they could have been in Syria. These parents don't understand the reality of the threat to their children and to our communities."

It is notoriously difficult to measure success in this kind of terrorism prevention work. And although Channel has been internally evaluated the results have never been made public.

When asked if he felt he had been "deradicalised", Adam states: "I am in the process. Sometimes the information I was studying in the books, they come in back to my head. I'm fighting with this and it's going in a good direction," he says.

Mr Qadir is more emphatic. He thinks without his intervention "he'd have probably gone abroad, and either been killed or killed others".

Maysa's story

Maysa, a teenager from Brussels, was a music fan and a 'ray of sunshine' at school. But an encounter on social media had changed her within a year. Maysa watches the streets of Brussels through the bus windows. Cafes, a town hall, shops, offices, pavements grey in the November rain. Her thoughts are elsewhere. "I was so nearly there, just hours from leaving. I was there in my head: in Syria, with Islamic State," the 18-year-old says.

Maysa had been like many other teenagers – at least those in her neighborhood on the outskirts of the Belgian capital. Her grandparents had come from Morocco almost 50 years ago, and her parents had been modestly successful in building careers and a home for their children. She speaks two local languages – French and Flemish – fluently, as well as Arabic and some English picked up at school and from music. Her parents are observant Muslims, but far from rigorous. Her marks at school were good and she had lots of friends.

"My teacher called me a ray of sunshine," says Maysa, whose real name has been withheld at her request.

A year ago, that sunshine dimmed. First she donned a jilbab, the loose gown and headscarf worn by some devout or traditional Muslim women. There was no more dancing or singing – favourite pastimes before – and no more cigarettes either. There was no more music, whether her preferred American gangsta rap or anything else. Maysa had never drunk alcohol but went out with friends who did. That ended too.

Only now is she coming to terms with what happened. "I look back and it is like a black hole," she says. It is impossible to corroborate all of Maysa's account of her journey into radicalism but social workers who know her well have confirmed many elements while experts say her story is "depressingly familiar".

The first approach came through social media.

Maysa had initially adopted the jilbab to “hide some weight I’d put on”, she says. But when she posted a selfie wearing her new clothes on social media, she was contacted by another woman also in her late teens. They chatted about her “new look” and agreed to go shopping together. Maysa was introduced to a group of young women from a similar background to her own. All except one, a convert, were of immigrant origin and lived in Brussels’s poorer, though far from desperate, neighbourhoods.

Maysa saw her new friend, and the group, increasingly often. They met in cheap burger bars in the centre of Brussels, or cafes, but never at anyone’s home, or mosque, or religious centre. First the conversation was about Islam, and the failures of many so-called Muslims. Then about politics, and the worldwide persecution of Muslims. Then finally about Isis, and life in the new “caliphate”, and how good life was there.

At least one of the women claimed to be in touch with Belgian militants in Syria, even boasting of making multiple trips to see her husband, a fighter there.

“They told me how there was no crime and no discrimination in the Islamic State. They spoke about relations between men and women, and said that I would find a good husband, even if I would be one of several of his wives. They spoke about fighting the unbelievers and the heretics, but never mentioned any violence or executions or anything like that,” Maysa says.

Within weeks, her new friends provided Maysa with a cheap mobile phone with a pre-paid sim card and told her to keep it secret. It was on this phone that she was contacted, usually by text message, and told where and when the next meeting of the group would take place.

“I now see I knew nothing about them, really. Just their first names. But I didn’t question it,” Maysa says.

It was clear that Belgium had an acute Islamist militancy problem well before the news that several of those who killed 130 people in Paris on 13 November had grown up in Brussels and possibly plotted the operation there. In the last 18 months a series of attacks have been launched in, or from, the country.

Through the last decade, Belgian networks funnelled volunteers to Afghanistan and Iraq. The current chaos in the Middle East drew a new wave. Up to 500 Belgians are thought to have travelled to Syria, one of the highest per capita totals anywhere in Europe. Among them are around 50 women.

This is not exceptional. Hundreds of young French and British women have also abandoned lives in the west to live in the territory ruled by Isis, which has claimed responsibility for the Paris attacks.

Some women drawn to extremism have disturbed backgrounds and marginal lives. One such was Hasna Aït Boulahcen, a French woman killed when police raided an apartment on the

outskirts of Paris five days after the attacks in the French capital. Boulahcen had arranged the bolthole for the suspected leader of the attackers, her cousin.

Friends described Boulahcen as an unstable young woman from a troubled family who until recently smoked, drank vodka and partied. Six months before she died, the 26-year-old swapped sunglasses, jeans and cowboy boots for strict Islamic clothing and sent texts indicating she wanted to travel to Syria. Her mother told media she had been brainwashed by extremists.

“The families simply don’t see it coming. Many are actually happy that their kids have calmed down and stopped drinking or getting into trouble,” says Bachir M’Rabet, an educator working with young people in the Molenbeek neighbourhood of Brussels, where many of the Paris attackers grew up and where many Belgian militants are from.

Yet many female recruits, such as Maysa, come from stable homes, even if relations with parents are sometimes strained.

Johan Leman, an anthropologist and veteran anti-racism activist who also works in Molenbeek, says recruiters often tell teenagers their parents do not know “true Islam”. “They give a typical adolescent process [of rebellion] an Islamic dimension,” Leman says.

Within weeks of meeting her new friends, Maysa’s schooling was suffering. Within months, she was in trouble for absenteeism. She added gloves and a full face veil to her long gown.

Then came word that a young man to whom Maysa had once been close had died in Syria. He had travelled to the conflict two years earlier with a group of teenagers from Brussels who all frequented the same martial arts club. The bad news was exploited by her new acquaintances. “You have to do your duty. You have to go to Syria,” Maysa was told.

She saw the “sisters” more and more. The pressure intensified.

There was no discussion of other militant groups, broader political issues in Europe or the Muslim world, or even the teachings of well-known extremist scholars. Everything was focused solely on Isis. There was little discussion, either, of the fundamental texts of Islam.

“Everything we spoke about or [the literature] they showed me was straight from [Isis], or that’s what they said,” Maysa says. “I just got to the point where going [to Syria] was all I wanted to do. I believed what I heard. When afterwards I saw the videos of decapitations I cried.”

This too is typical of the current wave of extremist recruits, experts say. “It is outside politics or religion. It is about certain individuals who come together for the thrill of being part of something bigger. It is a youth subculture ... and peer groups play a big role,” says Professor Rik Coolsaet, a Brussels-based expert on Islamist militancy.

The crisis came early this spring. Maysa was told the group would be leaving within days. She could travel whether or not she had documents as “crossing frontiers was no problem”.

Yet something held her back. Maysa asked her mother where her passport was. Suspecting something, her parents had hidden it. Torn, she asked the group's leader for time. There was none, she was told. And then came the threats: if she did not travel with them, Maysa would be tracked down, her family and friends too, and the consequences would be terrible.

This week Brussels remains on high alert with a "serious and imminent" threat of terrorist attack. It is seven months since Maysa smashed the "secret" phone she had been given on the rails of the city's metro. She has not heard from the former friends since and does not want to. Their threats may not have been realised, but she has not forgotten them.

Maysa now wears jeans, T-shirts and sweaters as before. The painted finger nails are back, and so are the cigarettes. A coloured scarf is wound around her head. She is studying again, but is restless. She wants to leave Brussels, even Belgium, altogether and dreams of living and working in London, perhaps in the music industry.

On her mobile phone are pictures of a very different woman, fully veiled and flashing a "V for victory" sign. "I was totally radicalised. I was not thinking my thoughts. I was not who I am," she says.

Mika'il's story

Mika'il was struggling with his identity as a Muslim teenager in Belgium. He found some radical Islamist teachings online, which made him feel part of a bigger cause.

Mika'il thought those views gave him the direction he had been missing. When Mika'il's teachers heard him make worrying comments about terrorism in class, they referred him to the authorities. He says "I almost took a wrong turn towards a radical, extremist ideology. These views I was exposed to had the potential to bring harm to others and myself."

We worked with our partners to find out what kind of support would help Mika'il best and he was offered a specialist mentor. They met weekly, so that Mika'il could talk about his worries and explore the future. Mika'il's mentor had been in a similar situation, which helped Mika'il feel less judged and more open to discuss his views. He explains "a significant reason why I felt the process I went through worked, was that I was provided with a mentor coupled with excellent support from my school teacher. It meant I had positive influences that overcame the negative ones." Working with teachers at his school, Mika'il went on to study interfaith reconciliation at university – and is now thinking about a career in counter-extremism. "Having completed the Prevent programme I can truly say that it has benefitted and helped me have a clearer idea about my future."

Bulgaria

In the stories there is the common theme of the importance of the family and school environment for the people going through such difficult periods of time. In the cases below we will see the importance of the personal strength and help from the outside work in order to break the radicalization and take a different way.

Yordanka's story

Yordanka Alexieva is a Roma -born girl from Bulgaria in a kardarashi family. She has been radicalized by her family from a very young age to steal in order to raise funds to live with. Actually this is the term "kardarash". In addition, traditionally in these families, the girl marries while she is still young, and at the discretion of his parents. They choose who to be their daughter's husband and she has no choice but to agree with it. The wedding itself is an expression of "sale", and to give their daughter, such radicalized families sell her for yolks of gold and jewelry.

Forced to live according to these distorted and radicalized principles, Yordanka faces the fate of a Roma girl who has no right to educate, develop and make decisions for her own life.

She realized that the situation she has fallen into is quite serious when her family decided to marry her for a person she doesn't even know while she is still 14 years old. She was sold for 140 gold coins, in exchange for her freedom and life. Going to a foreign home by force, she continued to be driven to steal to bring money to her husband's home. 18 years of her life were full of violence, encouraging theft and pressure to give birth to children. Left without any other choice, Yordanka decides to break away from all this, not having a different way out other than escape.

The process of deradicalization in Yordanka's life has not been encouraged by her relatives, and on the contrary, she realized that her lifestyle is detrimental and, in addition to harming herself emotionally. She also damaged innocent people when stealing from them. And, if she didn't steal ... she has been beaten by her husband's family. In order to escape from all this, Yordanka decides to escape abroad, she begins to change her life and from a "bird to cage" as she called herself, now he slowly builds a new life path, working and starting from the beginning. Forced to leave her children, she faces this difficulty of life and today seeks her rights, living honestly and sharing her story so that she can help other young girls escape from the Kardarash radicalization in Roma society.

Nowadays , she is working honestly, living normally and hoping that the power of the law will bring her together with her children. Yordanka's story is a different story about radicalization and deradicalization, which is, however, equally significant and pressing as a problem in society.

Mareshka' story

Mareshka Bardem is a chechen girl that escaped in Bulgaria from radicalization in religion in her own country. Her family has been radicalized in Islamic religion and that's why she was forced to get married for a person she didn't even know, left without any education and any other choice, Mareshka ended up engaged and married young for a person who not only doesn't love her but also abused her everyday.

As part of the Islamic religion and radicalization, Mareshka was not allowed to communicate with any other people except her husband's relatives. She hadn't got contact with anyone else she was not allowed to work, or even to dress as she wanted and to wear perfume.

Once she was forced to get married, Mareshka's life became full of violence, fear and difficulties. She had no control over her personal situation. And the change came when she gave birth to her son. The parents of her husband took the baby and didn't permit Mareshka to take care of it. Realized everything she started to rebel, but nothing came out except threats of murder.

Mareshka's only possible escape and path to deradicalization, out of that radicalized social group, was moving far away. This important action she made, knowing that there is no way going back. Unfortunately there was no chance of taking her child. Even though she decided to escape in Bulgaria, realized that her previous life was a total nightmare that would only lead to death. Not only Bulgaria became a shelter for Mareshka, but it also became a place she could finally feel deradicalized and free, a place where she can start from zero and stick to life. Nowadays, the story of Mareshka who has escaped from radicalized Chechnya is so popular in Bulgaria. She had the strength to change her life 180 degrees. Now she is a singer, model and she also had taken part in a Bulgarian reality show. She is an example and role model for all the girls that are going through a similar situation.

Mareshka herself says that: " Finding a path out of radicalization was the thing that saved her life, and the biggest happiness will be if one day she could be together with her son- Amir."

The story of Mareshka is remarkable because it shows the strength of a woman, who decides to save her life and to defeat the radicalization. The best of it is that it is continuing to gain popularity and is a light beam for all the girls that are in the similar situation. This story also teaches that radicalization isn't the right way of living life and if there is a desire for change it could be hard but it can happen.

Asen's story

The story of Asen is a story about both radicalization in a religious plan and drugs. Asen's real name is Hasan, he is a boy borned in Bulgaria with mother that is Bulgarian and father that is

Arab. His father left him and his mother, when Asen was little. When he started going to school he was bullied by the other kids because of his name, this later reflected on Asen's thinking and manners. He slowly started to be rude and aggressive with his teacher, mother and friends. Furious at his mother for growing up without a father and not understanding his origins, Asen started to do drugs. Like that the nightmare of radicalization started...the boy wasn't able to see his life from a different angle except the one with drugs and aggression. Every time when there was a problem he had taken drugs and beaten his mom, the problems at school didn't come late. Asen was so close to being expelled when the change in his life finally came and this self destruction started to vanish.

Psychologist from school started working with Asen in order for him to stay at school and continue his education. Like that with external help he slowly understood that his origin isn't something that he should be ashamed of and his mother is the person who loves him the most and doesn't deserve this kind of attitude. Asen found that drugs aren't the right escape from reality and they only damage his body and brain.

Step by step he improved himself during this journey of change and stopped doing drugs, he found a way back to communicate with his mother and even tried to contact his father. All of this was possible because of the correct way of help from the institution school. From this story we could see that there are also other ways of decentralization besides the personal way. There are institutions or specialists that are able to help the person to escape this nightmare. Nowadays, Asen is a happy person, who gave up the drugs, who communicates perfectly with his mother and who most importantly managed to find the way back to himself. He has a stable job, a nice girlfriend and he says that one day he will give the best for his children in order for them to be happy and in a good relationship with their parents.

Asen's story is a story about pain, trust issues, self destruction and aggression, which changes its path because of adequate help. It shows that the only killers of aggression and radicalization are love and support! A few people manage to escape from all this, but Asen himself says: "I had never understood how bad was my life philosophy, that was full of aggression until I met an external support and started to change". That's why now he would like to help people in a similar situation, because nobody knows better what it feels like than someone who has survived it.

Cyprus

Through the stories we will see how things can change and how important is the public opinion and action in such situations.

Ala's story

Ala was a student at the Apostle Barnabas Lyceum in Nicosia who was born and raised in Cyprus, originally from Syria. In September 2019, and while starting the new school year, the new principal of the school called her in front of the whole school to immediately remove the hijab from her head. When she refused, he asked her to call her parents to come by the school to pick her up. In his conversation with Ala's father, the principal was blunt, stressing to him that either she would take off the hijab or he would not accept her in school again.

Despite the principal's hopes for support for his act from the rest of the students, they reacted in a very intense way, telling the principal to stop the racist delirium. While they protest against the principal, he had no intention to step back. When the media asked him for the incident he answered: *"I just told her to take out whatever is on her mind. I have no problem with the student's religion. I spoke based on the prefectural Ministry of Education and said that students should have their heads uncovered. Then the student's father came and I told him if he has any complaint to report it to the Ministry. I just respect the prefectures"*.

While many people were giving congratulations to principal for protecting the Christian-centric school, the protest against him became bigger. Organized parents, student and teacher organizations became even more vocal on the issue. In the first year, the result was that the Ministry of Education was forced to speak and take a position. He fired the manager and emphasized to the protesters that the ministry never supports such actions and if the regulation says something so wrong they will change it immediately.

At the end of the incident, the principal backed down and accepted the student and non-religious students in general at his school. In fact, the ministry contacted all the schools to emphasize to the principals that racism and extremism towards these students would not be acceptable. Ala's adventure became the reason for many Muslim students to stop being victims of racist violence and ridicule from teachers and teachers.

Andreas's story

In 2015, the young theologian and Politician, Andreas Pitsilides has been excommunicated by the Church of Cyprus: "for the malpractices, deliberate misinterpretations, ambiguous interpretations and disparaging way of reporting on many subjects, such as on the subjects of abortions, Confession, the Eucharist, homosexuality."

The decision of the church to excommunicate A. Pitsillides was considered by many as something insignificant and necessary like the time of Teukros Anthia, in 1931, where the poet was excommunicated by the church and stigmatized as an anti-Christian traitor.

In the end, things in this case were not so convenient for the Church of Cyprus. While for many years the absolute mass of Cypriot society strongly supported positions of the church that violated the rights of homosexuals, religious minorities and others, this "medieval" decision, as characterized by the media and the people, gave the stimulus to start a challenge period.

On TV, radio, press and even on the streets for some time the big topic of discussion was the extremism of the church against social minorities. In fact, to a large extent, they even discussed the logic that we should probably re-approach as a society our positions on homosexuality and equality between gender and racial differences.

The most important event of this period was that it came to be associated with the debates in Europe about the cohabitation contract and the right to marry for homosexuals. In 2016, the public opinion that previously was radically against homosexuality and in general against the church, closed its ears to the voices of the Priests and let the parliament pass the law on cohabitation with a majority.

How is that story connected with re-radicalization? To answer that question we must first answer another question: Does Andreas pitsillides should consider a re-radicalization hero in Cyprus in the topic of LGBT minorities? The answer is obviously no. The fight to re-radicalize the strict anti-LGBT, extremely religious society in Cyprus was a long-term struggle of the LGBT community and NGO's. That incident however was the great opportunity for society to question the strict way that Cypriot Church was facing the topic. If the Archbishop so tyrannically excommunicate a beloved member of the church for no good reason, maybe it was a good idea to re think about some decisions of the past.

Football fen's story

On December 2017, during a football match at Tsirio Stadium between AEL FC and APOEL FC the fans of the two teams decide to solve their difference in the stadium using violence, pyro, handmade explosives, and dangerous objects. During the events, players, fans, and even workers of the stadium get hurt and some of them end up in the hospital with major or minor injuries. Unexpectedly, as long as there were no seriously injured players, the match continued and finished without any serious consequences for the fans. For a few days onward the fans of the two teams were exchanging attacks between them in both Limassol (home city of AEL FC fans) and Nicosia (home City of APOEL FC fans).

After the events of that match, football officials and stakeholders in Cyprus decided to forward the proposal they had for many months in their shelves, the Fan Card. A long discussion took place regarding the fan card, mostly focused on privacy and distrust of the fans on how the

government will handle the matter of Personal information. Unexpectedly very important was the role of the ex-hooligans getting in the positive side of Fan card.

In 2017 again, a few days after the events of Tsirio Stadium and during the discussion on how to solve hooliganism issues in Cyprus, ex-hooligans started to share their experiences with the media. One of them, a man who was described by the media as "the most dangerous man in Cypriot Football" decide to send a message to one of the most popular radio programmes focusing on football. The message say the following statement:

"In 2001 I was considered the most dangerous fan in the Cypriot stadium. 17 years later and now that I have a family with children, I see football with a different eye and sensitivity. What I did in those years, which I have regretted for a long time, I would never want my own children to do. I also wouldn't want them to know what their father was doing on the Cypriot pitches. Everything starts from the family and not from the stands of any team. I'm terribly sorry. When I did my own episodes and there were other young kids and healthy sports fans around, I might have hurt them without realizing it. Today I give them a public apology. So what I did in those years, I would never want my children to do. With the violence in the stadiums, all I had won were personal arrests and the loss of thousands of pounds I had paid in fines. After all that, in the last few years, I have only won friends from all the football teams in Cyprus. The enemy of Cyprus is across the street and not in our neighborhoods"

After that statement and many others, fans and generally the Cyprus public opinion starts to feel less concern about the Fan card. Giving personal information to Cyprus Football association was a small price to pay for protecting football and family.

Of course, at it was expected the myth of the ex-hooligans continuous to be a myth as many people believe that these ex-hooligans are nothing more than imaginary hooligans that government and media create to justify the law for Fan Card and preventing real hooligan activity. On the other hand, people claimed that as active members of football fan clubs during the period, they now those ex-hooligans and are real, but no one ever will to share their personal information with the public.

In general, the Fan card became in 2018 and for almost five years the statistics shows that the conflicts and violence into football stadiums decrease. Hooligans stay out of the Stadiums and the whole plan was totally successful. No one knows if we will find any more information about those ex-hooligans (and if they were real existing football fans) but at the end of the day, winning the public sphere, play a key role on de-radicalize the Cypriot football atmosphere in a way that someone can enjoy a football much freely.

Denmark

Due to the high number of immigrants and different cultures, races and religions in the country, there are various examples of radicalization. It is often seen among young people, ideas about radicalizations are spread via the social media and organizing events for the radicalized people. There are also number of examples of successful de-radicalizations and that there are state programs helping the victims to get back their life.

Marwa's story

Marwa is an Afghan woman living in Denmark. In 2017 she tried to enter the Islamic State's caliphate. She did not succeed and instead she went to prison in Denmark.

Marwa was born and raised in Denmark as a child of Afghan refugees. She describes the childhood home as dysfunctional. She never really fitted in because, according to Marwa, the parents didn't know enough about what it means to be parents. Marwa's childhood is the typical story of the generation gap between refugee parents and their children. About parents who are mentally still in Afghanistan and exercise social control, while the children grow up in other settings. Marwa's rebellion began while she was in the 9th grade. As Marwa puts it, she missed care and love. "I needed some in my circle who was optimistic. Someone who could lift me up and who didn't just stomp on me while I was lying down," she says.

It was during this time Marwa became acquainted with the so-called sisterhood – a social circle of young girls who in many ways shared her fate and who had found a community in extremist Islam. To the surprise of many of her classmates and to the disapproval of her parents, she found the answers here.

At school, her classmates thought that Marwa's parents had started forcing her to wear a headscarf - later she became even more covered. But Marwa's parents did not practice Islam in the same way and did not like her starting to go to the mosque. "But it gave me strength and calmness, even if I received a lot of criticism from my parents, my teachers and people on the street. 'Is it Halloween today?' they asked mockingly, alluding to my black hijab." For Marwa, her new style was more about the community spirit than about Allah, she explains. It was a natural choice. The way young Danes have parties and drink a lot of alcohol never appealed to her.

She tells that the "sisters" accepted her as the one she was. She felt free and valued when they met for barbecue or at private events to talk about Islam. "It was exactly what I had been looking for. A place where it was not wrong to be me," she says of the time that laid the foundation for her decision to travel to the caliphate.

Not everything was outings in the sisterhood. Marwa became a member of several closed Facebook groups. Among others, "Ahl ul-Ghurabaa" and "Ahl ul-Sunnah", who in those years

daily preached about the responsibility of the individual Muslim to make a difference on the Syrian battlefield. While jihad was referred to as the duty of all Muslims in the fight against injustice and the infidels, the sisters began to meet in the "Explore Islam" group several times a week. It put Marwa's parental rebellion in a frame. The parents could not match the Islamic State community, where no one would judge anyone for going too far. For Marwa, Islamic State's anger fueled her own rebellion. Soon the Islamic State became her checklist and compass. The Islamic State was very good at showing all the good things the movement stood for. It all just seemed like pure Islam,' says Marwa about the messages that got her on board. This is how many young Muslims felt in many different countries after the Islamic State declared the establishment of a caliphate under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Anyone could volunteer, and on the surface, it was a society where every Sunni Muslim, regardless of skin color or background, became part of the brotherhood and sisterhood. Women in the niqab would always be protected unlike in the Western countries where they were mocked and looked down upon. The Islamic State acted as a magnet for the seekers, the frustrated, the angry and the humiliated. Marwa was among many thousands who sought the caliphate. She saw the Islamic State as an organization that could free her from all that she loathed at home.

She chose to ignore the fact that Islamic State's social control of the movement's members was far worse than the one her parents practiced. She accepted that the videos released by the Islamic State of executions were justified in the closed groups with arguments that the bombing of Muslim countries by Western countries is worse at any time. The terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels were justified with the same argument. What are 130 lives compared to the many thousands of women and children who have died in Syria? "The community meant everything to me," says Marwa.

One spring day in 2017, 20-year-old Marwa's plan to cross the border into the Islamic State caliphate was foiled. She had boarded a flight from Copenhagen to Istanbul with two of her friends. Marwa was taken to the border by people smugglers but was captured by Turkish soldiers. Instead of crossing into the caliphate, she was arrested and sent back to Denmark, where she was put into prison.

Three years have passed, and the now 24-year-old Marwa has thrown away the hijab and turned her back on the Islamic State: "I do not support the Islamic State in any way at all,' says Marwa. "I am ashamed to have had those attitudes and that sympathy for the Islamic State. Today I am in a completely different place.'

It has taken time for her to regret it all. And it took courage to tell about it. Unlike many others who have taken the same journey, Marwa stands by her own mistakes. She places the

responsibility first and foremost on herself "At that time I felt that the more people were against me, the more I felt on the path of truth," she says. "We all took part in brainwashing and recruiting each other." But she wishes someone had grabbed her then and shaken her well and said: "Listen, dear, this is not the truth.'

But in the closed extremist environment, persons to say this did not exist. Marwa remembers that the Islamic State's genocide of the Yazidis in Iraq was explained with arguments that the Western media lied to have Muslims exposed to public contempt. However, she herself often had doubts when the Islamic State published execution videos. She never saw them through. She couldn't. But none of the sisters, and Marwa neither, dared to seriously criticize Islamic State's methods. They found themselves in a closed world where almost everyone else was an enemy. "You wear blinders," says Marwa and remembers that she was afraid of being ostracized.

There are several reasons why Marwa ended up traveling to Syria. One of them was that she wanted to get away from her family. Another is that, as a Muslim with an Afghan background, she did not feel accepted in Denmark. She explains that, like many others with an ethnic background other than Danish, she was often *too* Danish in the Afghan environment and *too* Afghan among ethnic Danes. Other reasons, according to Marwa, were that she could not bear to see the suffering the Syrian regime subjected women and children to, and that she herself was not accepted in the mosque environment. She found it liberating when the Islamic State criticized and directed its anger at the established imams. The Islamic State turned everything upside down.

A few months had to pass before she began to change her attitudes. And admit his mistakes. When she was transferred to the Danish prison, she was still hard-bitten on the surface. All others were infidels or whores, and she would not speak to them. She prejudged them. But as the walls of the caliphate fell in Syria, she also began to lower the parades herself. Ironically, the first two fellow inmates to offer help were a prostitute and a Shia Muslim. The prostitute had told Marwa that she herself had converted to Islam, but Marwa thought: "To hell with her." Until the day she reflected herself in the prostitute.

"We were in the gym, and then she started hollering and taking my hand, and then she said: 'Marwa, I know you're judging me. And I know that you think that I'm just a clingy whore, but I've had a fucking hard time. And when she said it like that, I could recognize myself," Marwa says.' Another incident that caused Marwa to revise her own views was an encounter with one of the male inmates. He had asked if she had anything against Shia Muslims. Almost by reflex, Marwa had replied that she hated Shia Muslims and that they are all infidels. Then the man had pulled up one of his sleeves a bit and showed his tattoo that read Hezbollah, the name of

the powerful Shia Muslim organization in Lebanon. "I remember thinking all night about that incident. Because he was a nice and polite guy.'

Those incidents caused Marwa to revise her relationship with the Islamic State and with herself.

"Marwa has broadened her view on people whom she didn't know at all before she entered the prison. Back then she just went with the pack and couldn't back out. She doesn't do that anymore,' says Bettina Østrand, a psychotherapist who met Marwa through her work in the prison precisely during the period when she began to have doubts. "It's easy to judge persons you don't know, but when you meet people, you meet the soul they are. And Marwa is really a dear and honest person,' says Bettina Østrand.

A male officer from Copenhagen Police has also got to know Marwa in prison through his work with de-radicalization: "Gradually she changed from hijab to hoodie. And then, after a year or a half, she was also without the hoodie. In terms of attitude, she has also changed a lot,' he says and adds: 'I would definitely describe her as de-radicalized. There is nothing extreme about her.'

Marwa herself says: »I have been fucking naive. I've been brainwashed once, it won't happen again. I have learned a lot from this. And I can understand if people think, "how could you travel to join the Islamic State?" I can also understand that people get scared, but I have never wanted to participate physically in the war, and I have never killed anyone.'

Thomas's story

Before the time when Thomas sang patriotic songs with his friends on the beach and stood in a rank and shouted "Heil", before he knocked down a "colored" young woman and tearfully repented in the courtroom, before he feared that anti-fascists would gather in front of his windows, before all that, Thomas lived a quite ordinary Danish life in a provincial town. He was playing Minecraft and he went to role play.

Thomas was bullied in primary school. "I have never been able to see when there is a limit and stop a joke that has gone too far – and then I have a quick temper on top of that." So, when Thomas was bullied at school, he would ignite into a destructive rage if someone took his pencil case. "I couldn't see the fun in that at all." As a consequence, he had to change schools several times. But he was also much smarter than most of his age. According to himself, his intelligence quotient is measured at 133, so in the 7th grade Thomas went to a fine private school. It was only later, when Thomas hung dark carpets in front of the basement windows of the room in his parents' house, that things began to change.

When Thomas got home from school, he would go down to his basement room and play Minecraft and first-person shooters until he tossed and turned in bed. "It was my escape." The blankets came up in front of the windows. The isolation set in. Thomas was already politically alert at that time. In primary school, he became active in Denmark's Communist Party. But the "red ideals" disappeared, one day he was out with his father "and was attacked by a 'gentleman of another ethnicity'". It was with that experience in mind that he became a member of a group on Facebook, where young people with different political observances discussed politics. Here some boys ravaged the comment tracks with "fuck wogs" comments. "They were rougher than the others, which made it more fun," Thomas says. The boys were banished from the group and they joined forces in a new Facebook group.

Through his acquaintance with the members of the Facebook group, Thomas soon became entangled in a network of right-wing radical YouTube channels and Nazi forums. And because there weren't that many Danes, a few handfuls at most, he quickly got the names of the Danish Nazis hanging out in the forums. "At that time, I felt powerless and ordinary: I went to school, worked, played a lot on the computer. I had friends who were good at football, guitar, could draw and paint – what could I do? I could barely play Counter-Strike. So, I found another way to feel better: the colour of my skin at least."

He called himself alt-right, which he explained was "young Christian people who think the traditional right wing is too moderate". Alt-right is an abbreviation for the alternative right, young right-wingers who experience political correctness, feminism and immigration as a threat to traditional white, Christian identity.

In private messages, Thomas exchanged emails with the Danish Nazis on the forums, and plans were made to meet. In 2015, Thomas gathered around 20 Nazis, including two women, for a beach party. "I was the youngest, so there were grown men who thought I was cool. It was absolutely crazy to me. I've always been geeky and different and now finding guys who like you and think you're cool and have a lot to offer meant everything." Over the barbecue, the Nazis talked about how they could attack the Danish leftwing youth. Thomas had become a Nazi. He had found the community he had longed for.

However, Thomas kept a secret. His mother had had an affair in the USA and Thomas grew up with a half-brother. A colored half-brother. It wasn't something he told his new friends about. Conversely, he did not tell his mother about the friends either. She had noticed he had stickers from the organisation Nordfront in the room, but didn't ask about it. Not even when he got angry with her and called her a coal burner – a term used condescendingly for white women, who have sex with black men. "At the time, I had a lot of false studies thrown into my head, which showed that mixed children have a greater risk of becoming disabled and having lower

intelligence," Thomas says. "The only problem was," he laughs, "that my older brother is two meters tall and slim, and I'm two shits tall and fat." In addition, the brother is "really intelligent". "So how could I be this ridiculous idiot and say all black people are stupid?" The solution was not to say anything at all. He ignored the existence of his colored brother.

After elementary school, Thomas wanted to become a carpenter. In his class at the vocational school, there was a black student with whom Thomas argued. No one in the class had any doubt that Thomas was a racist when he called the student a nigger. "But they didn't know I was active and met people. They just thought I was playing the computer and doing nothing." In 2017, Thomas was at a tramper concert with the Nazi milieu. He had been thrown out of his home and wanted to get "pissed and have a party". Thomas had also taken Ritalin, a drug that acts as a stimulant like cocaine. As the hours passed, the Nazi friends left him, one by one, into the night. In the end Thomas went himself. He came out into the street and in the distance some silhouettes called out. He yelled back and a young colored woman stepped out of the darkness and approached him. Thomas shouted at her to go back home to where she came from. She shouted back. He punched her, right in the face.

The woman reported him, and in the courtroom, Thomas repented and cried. "I simply broke down." What had started as jokes with crude Hitler memes now cost him a conviction for violence. In addition, Thomas received community service: 40 hours of work at a Danish-Turkish friendship association. "I went from shouting "heil" at the weekends to suddenly coming to a place where there were Turks, Somalis, a few Danes – and everyone treated me very well." The cheese bell was lifted. On his first day, the men asked Thomas to have a break and a soda and a smoke. Thomas kept hidden from them who he was. Instead, he shopped, changed light bulbs, cleaned windows. "I began to think that those I had called degenerates (degenerates due to inbreeding, ed.) were not as bad as I had imagined. As I drove home, I thought, I don't care about that Nazi shit. It was too ridiculous and narrow-minded."

The de-radicalization took off when Thomas started frequenting a bigger city, where he saw old friends from the role-playing environment. In his childhood town he only knew heterosexuals and Thomas was only friends with heterosexuals. In the new town he had made new kinds of friends. "One of them turned out to be trans, another gay. I got a shock, mostly because I hadn't noticed." As a Nazi, he would instinctively have to distance himself from his friends' sexuality. "But I had no reason to be angry with them, because they were nice to me. Quietly, I found out that it was neither cool to be xenophobic nor homophobic, because what do I get out of it? In the past, it gave me a sense of superiority to face someone and call them a goddamn gay."

The hatred – to all who were not like him; who did not share the same opinions – which had filled him up, faded away. When his girlfriend finally left him, Thomas knew it was serious: if he didn't want to make people who cared about him sad, he couldn't be a Nazi. It was that simple. After one last city trip, where the Nazis wanted him to get cocaine, amphetamines, or whatever Thomas could get his hands on, he looked around at the men. “After all, I sat with what were almost sub-human from the lowest caste that exists. It became difficult to take them seriously when they talked about racial purity.” When Thomas drove away – he had stopped drinking in the meantime – he deleted his playlist of brutal right-wing music in the car. Now he wanted to hear Wafande.

Now Thomas got a new problem: How could he withdraw from an environment where everyone is paranoid about stabbers, anti-fascists and the police, and where the punishment for treason can be violent? The solution was to do it slowly, undramatically. He stopped coming to the meetings – the Northern Front recruitment meeting he had planned, he cancelled. He stopped being active on the forums. Instead, he completed the carpentry course and became a journeyman. Got a new girlfriend, visited his older brother, and he resumed his old hobby: role playing. At a medieval market, he sold mead for 200,000 kroner in the summer of 2017. He was skilled. Life was good. Until it wasn't anymore. On a construction site, where a multi-storey building was erected from the gravel up, he got work – and it became a flashback from the trauma of the school yard. The carpenters teased him with his hammer.

"Gay hammer, gay hammer,' they shouted at me." The "bumpy" thing about the hammer was its head, which was not for the kind of construction they were doing. "I couldn't handle it at all." One morning Thomas could not get out of bed. Before that, he had had a breakdown at work. The bullying ate him up. "I felt like if I had to show up one more day, I would throw away my fall protection and jump off the second floor we were building on and not care about it all." Thomas was admitted to a psychiatric ward. Here he was, at the age of 20, diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, which is a kind of autism that makes it difficult to interpret the intentions and behavior of other people.

After hospitalization, Thomas was bedridden, and friends from the role-playing community contacted him. They asked if he was okay. The Nazis also called. They wanted to hear when he would come to the gym. “They said I should get a backbone and come down and exercise. That was the last thing I needed to hear.” Today, Thomas is back on his feet. The RPG environment has completely replaced the Nazi environment, and he has been at a construction site for the last time. The dream is to become a guard. "It fits well with my Asperger's that there are rules for everything I have to do. It is control and order.”

A lot has happened, "I've been mad at everything and everyone, a stupid, stupid Nazi." He says "I'm not angry and bitter anymore, but happy and embracing that there are people who are different."

Asked what a parent, friend or colleague can do if you fear that someone you care for, isolates and shows signs of radicalization, he says: "You have to listen to the person. It will first show in the use of language, for example when I called my mother a coal burner. Instead of ignoring it, ask what it means, and then put the person in the shoes of how much harm it causes to say it, and what historical context it attaches to. If he likes to play computer games, take him to big LAN parties where there are other gamers. If he likes to play football, take him to matches. I sat in my dark basement behind the blankets and wrote crap on the internet all day, and it made me angrier and angrier at the world." Sometimes", Thomas concludes," all you need to do is lift the cheese bell that the person is trapped in – and allow some fresh air to get in."

Nedim's story

Nedim was a young Danish man with roots from Turkey who throughout his life had taken part in the gangs in Copenhagen. He portrayed his way in and out of these radicalized environments in a book called "Roots – A Gangsters Way Out".

The first chapter in his book is called "You will die" which seems to be quite a dramatic title when knowing that he got shot by the extremist environment he just had cut his relations to, years before in the day he launched the book.

After his years of being radicalized into the gang environment and taking part in several criminal actions, he started a radio show called "Police Radio". This was a channel for him to speak up about the extreme environment he had been a part of, and somehow trying to warn other young people to be careful when getting to know people from these environments.

Nedim lived in an area of Denmark which was known to be a socially vulnerable area, where some young people ended up in gangs or in a criminal environment. He grew up hanging out with many older friends than himself and already in sixth grade he was expelled from school after threatening another student. This is a sign of a really early influence of the radicalized environment he grew up in, which was primarily build on distancing to the broad society and being critical towards the systems. Already when he was 15, he became a part of a motorcycle gang and was a part of that for 10 years. In that age, people are very easy to influence, and young people tend to be eager to fit into their surroundings which means that a person like Nedim might not have seen his radicalization process himself. This happened to him when he was just a child and when a lot of his other friends chose the same path as him.

Nedim was sentenced at the age of 25 for extortion and violence and was imprisoned. After serving his sentence, he signed up for an exit program, which Denmark is very famous for and here his deradicalization process began. Nedim Yassar felt during this period that he wanted to reach out to other people who might have the possibility to get into this radicalized environment and began as a mentor for vulnerable young people. After a while he started the podcast show where he talked to police officers about the gangs in Denmark and taught both the guests in his podcast and the listeners about the dangerous environment.

The way of deradicalizing people have a very clear structure in Denmark as they become a part of an exit programme which is a collaboration between the police, the municipalities, and the criminal justice system.

- **Step 1 – Signing up for the programme.** This can happen by the criminal/radicalized person themselves or by the authorities if they have an idea that this person needs their help.
- **Step 2 – Test of Motivation.** Motivation is the only requirement to attend the programme and there is a quite long phase where the individual's motivation is tested. In the case of Nedim Yassar a part of this was that he was isolated for 10 days.
- **Step 3 – Agreement of cooperation.** If the individual are considered suitable for the programme they get an agreement of cooperation.
- **Step 4 – Safety assessment.** Based on the individual's background a safety assessment is created in order for the authorities to take best possible care for the person who are in the exit programme. In the case of Yassar, the police considered his safety much at risk and therefore he was isolated and hidden after his time in jail, where he was also moved to times. The police feared that his former friends in the gangs would take revenge and take Yassar's life. He was not even allowed to speak to his son, as he would also then be in risk of danger.
- **Step 5 – Loneliness.** A warning before entering the exit programme is that it can appear quite lonely. A part of the safety assessment are often that many relations are cut and that you cannot live near your family and friends or be seen in public if the extreme environment you have been a part of have violent tendencies. This is a psychological important factor which is also why the individual's motivation are tested very early because people tend to break in loneliness.
- **Step 6 – The continuation.** The deradicalization process and the distancing to one's former life in an extreme environment does not happen overnight. It is an ongoing fight and cooperation with the system, that in Yassar example, he was very much against

before. People tend to be in the programme for between 12-24 months depending on their past and threats but are continuing fighting with the past in the time that comes after as well.

From 2014 till 2016 60 people finished an exit programme while 30 were cut. This means that they might have gone back into the extreme environments they were a part of before if they felt too lonely or lacked the motivation or got too scared to leave.

Nedim Yassars life turned dramatically after his time in jail. He wrote a book as well that is written to teach people about critical thinking and distancing themselves from the gangs and their actions. For Nedim, his life was brought back on track but still ended up suffering from the consequences of his criminal past and extreme environment. On the day of his book release, he got shot in his car and got killed from it. The end of his life was more or less the most visual symbol of how dangerous and extreme the gangs are and how strong their relations to each other appear to be.

Greece

One of the most important issues in Greece is the political violence. The causes are varied, socio-political and anthropological. What is certain is that it is not a product of the economic crisis. The roots of terrorism and the modern arena that results from the fact that there is a certain victimhood atmosphere within which this political violence takes place, while here we must remember that we have never seen a large-scale protest against political violence, terrorism, in the country, regardless of where it comes from. Violence produces its own audience.

In Greece, the phenomenon of extremist violence and radicalisation is intense, and the solutions are non-existent. It is a worrying phenomenon that from a very young age, people are initiated and embrace far-right or far-left attitudes. There are political parties that start their activities and the spreading of their ideas from schools. The phenomenon becomes more pronounced in the universities, where through the student parties, many promote their later trade unionism. The problem starts when the "seniors" in the hierarchy of the political parties purge divine individuals in order to put their own ideas into practice.

A young man from Thessaloniki's story

"The truth is that I spent a week before coming in contact with the party watching documentaries and interviews about the neo-Nazi party. Statements such as "We are not racists but a homosexual does not fit in our party. Images of MPs in front of Hitlerian flags,

bullying of journalists to the point of falling down, attacks on theaters, violent blockades against refugees and slogans such as "Blood, honor, golden dawn" were for me stimuli of thought."

"It has taken 7.5 long years for justice to be served for the brutal murders and how many other crimes that have been covered up over the last decade. I can say that on the day of the ruling, when I happened to be on the street covering the anti-fascist marches, the feeling of relief and justice went through me strongly, yet in the back of my mind there is still an afterthought for those who voted for and continue to support it."

"We heard a lot, we read even more, some people were milestones of the time, unlike a prosecutor who tried until the last minute to grant extenuating circumstances to those who violated democracy. Certainly, many incidents were 'covered up' and never surfaced."

"I was at a very young age when I joined Golden Dawn. At that time, I was approached by several people at school. My views generally leaned towards the extremes, so one day after 7 o'clock, I had gone with a classmate, older than me, to my local office and attended a meeting they were holding, to inform new members about how they operate and what the party stands for. At that first talk, generally the people in charge explained what we needed to do to safeguard the country from various threats such as foreigners, refugees and the biggest enemy being the leftists. We (the younger ones) were instructed to keep a close eye on members of leftist factions to find out where they hang out and what they do so that we could inform our superiors. Occasionally, we were also told to hang out with them to make their job easier.

The procedure to enter the offices was relatively simple. A trusted person from the party 'followed you' and you, as a prospective member, had to do various activities with him or her so that he or she would trust you enough to allow you to move on to the next step, which was joining the organization. These tests lasted for about a month and then you had to be interviewed by the bureau chief to complete the process. The activities in the beginning were mild e.g. distributing brochures, civic briefings, evening meetings. We were given various 'books' to learn the history of the party and the country so that we could be watered down with their beliefs. They had created in us the idea of "doing everything for my country". The country was presented as something sacred."

"Group attacks in general were more frequent and mainly involved marches or rallies held at the offices of left-wing parties. "We were told to strike quickly; leave quickly"."

"After a certain point I couldn't keep up. I understood that the hatred they were sowing for foreigners was a lie, since they themselves were exploiting them. We were beating up Pakistanis and breaking up the stalls selling things, while they themselves were giving them things, from the theft that was going on, to sell and asking them for a percentage of the profits. Somewhere in there you realize there's no cause. They were just beating and killing people.

Just to satisfy some animal instincts. Which, between you and me, even animals would do just to survive.”

“That's how I decided to leave the organization as I had lost my life. I constituted a threat to my family's safety, my physical integrity, everything. I expected to be hunted down, and that's what happened at first. But I wasn't really involved so I wasn't much of a threat.”

[An Ex-member of the Thessaloniki's Golden Dawn youth party's story](#)

"I was at the party for two years. From 16 to 18. I think the first time I was beaten up was in a SYRIZA group (ideologically opposite party). We knew where they were - outside a school - handing out leaflets. We waited for them to finish so we could go to where they were hanging out. There, we did a sort of ambush type of thing, we hit them, took their stuff and left. That was the order. The most violent scene was on Str St.Demetrios. I remember we took a "walk" there and we observed people of another nationality sitting in the churchyard. After a while we were given the signal to go and storm the place with helmets, chains and iron bars. At that time, I felt that I was doing the right thing, because the scene started after they took down the flag and pissed on it, which did happen. And once we beat them up it was like a weight lifted off our shoulders. Now, I regret it."

“If you ask me why I became a member, I will tell you that there were no clear reasons at the bottom of my mind. I was simply convinced by some children who came to me and told me about the problems Greek society faces. Due to ignorance and based on some incidents in my life, foreigners and refugees are a serious problem for Greek society. I come from a family that up to a point embraced such views but not to such an extent. So, I had no moral barriers. I thought I was taking it a step further”.

“I.K. and N.M. were promoted by senior members of the movement as leaders of a great idea. I thought that they would clean up the country, that they were generally regarded as heroes, as gods. In my eyes, they preached their big idea, which was love of the fatherland. They said that if they got into parliament we would progress as a country, and Greece would once again belong to the Greeks. Most people there were more brutal in my eyes. They had tattoos of crosses, shaved heads (most of them). A savagery everywhere even towards us. Always only informed about historical facts but not properly. Many were low educated from villages in the surrounding areas and quite old. Many times, the seniors would bully us (new members), they would arrange on their own to beat each other up to toughen us up. They shouted like mad over our heads, they were generally very aggressive, they wanted to show permanently that they were stronger than us. I didn't know if I admired them, feared them, respected them, or if I had simply fallen into a vicious cycle that I couldn't escape."

"A day at the office consisted of martial arts and general woodworking instruction, thus passing on to the younger ones the protection of the homeland. This was followed by regular briefings on human targets and how to approach them"

"After a long period of time, slowly the senior members selected the most 'daring' - loyal - determined to commit even dirtier deeds. I felt then that I must be chosen, that I would be chosen. They trained them well for self-defense with instructors, if not two, at least once a week in the mountains. So, they learned how to make group attacks quickly and efficiently. They passed it off as physical education. That way we didn't know each other. They told us we were brothers and of course we believed it because we all had a common goal, to protect Greece. The younger ones, we didn't have any confrontations, we came to an understanding with each other. With the older ones, most of us just had a hierarchical relationship. We didn't talk much. Respect, or rather fear, prevailed."

"I left because as time went on it became clearer in my mind that the whole party thing didn't represent me. It looked more like a criminal organization than a party. At some point they all had to be blamed for those violent incidents against ordinary people who were against the views of H.A. I even put myself in, for following that "idea" at the time. At first there was annoyance after I left the membership. However, after a short time I left Greece, and they could not find me. Since then, they did not try to approach me again, neither me nor my family whom they had threatened in the beginning. I was lucky that I had acquaintances within the police and spoke to my father in time. My opinion of the decision is negative. All those people should live the rest of their lives in prison. Because when they get out again, which I believe will be soon, they will again influence public opinion, they will again find a weak social group to feed hatred and discord."

[Interview of a former member of Golden Dawn's story](#)

"I was member in the Golden Dawn for about a year and a half, saw a lot and experienced up close the people of the local organisation, in which the murderer of 34-year-old Pavlos Fyssa, was deputy leader.

The assault battalion of the Nikaia's local organization, under the leadership of the murderer and the leadership of the member of parliament, has the hierarchy, structure, and organization found only in paramilitary criminal groups. Their headquarters are their offices, from where orders are given for attacks against foreigners and other actions. There they keep clubs, daggers, and folding clubs, which 'disappear' when police checks are imminent. If the chief gave the OK, we would take to the streets either to write slogans on the walls or to pick on Pakistans."

"The officer in charge of Nikaia has set up a closed cell. A revelation that confirms everything that has been revealed about the Chrysautian assassin, who may have said he was not a member of the organization but even has a party identity, as the former Golden Dawn member tells the newspaper. "In G. P. 's car and in his mother's house we put our weapons when we had to hide them," he says."

"My neighborhood has faced some problems with immigrants. I learned about their actions so my ignorance and frustration led me to believe that they are the solution. I think that the easy way to become a member is very appealing. To become a member, you pay 20 euros, show your Greek identity card and sign up. Your membership card says which organization you belong to and you have a membership number. But, to join the hard core you have to have a strong stomach. You have to accept everything. You're a zero. Do you know what it's like to be told to get down and do push-ups and get kicked in the ribs in front of everybody? You're nothing and whatever they tell you to do, you have to do. You don't have an opinion. It's an order, it's over."

In Greece, one could say, observing the above interviews, that the phenomenon of extremist violence with a political background has been somewhat underestimated. In all the above interviews, violent events are described as something expected and somehow normal, based on the psychology of the individual during this period. Furthermore, from their testimonies occurs that they were convinced that their goal is for the team to act as a punisher against the flawed and corrupt Greek political system. But the lurking dangers of gaining such power, affect the entire population.

Another common element that the interviewees refer to in their speech, is the easy way for someone to become a member. It is easy to see, that if no difficulty is created for a young person, they will never have second thoughts. This is also a reason that most of these parties approach young people. The need of young people to belong somewhere in combination with the easy way they find to achieve it, increases the possibilities to try to be a member of a political party. So, it is important to create opportunities for young people for social inclusion and most important to be informed about these opportunities. If they are aware of them and they find them easier they would not seek a political party, just to belong in an acceptable group. Through the OPEN MINDS project, young people will have the opportunity to be informed about ways of social inclusion and also for the ways of deradicalization through social inclusion that each country offers.

Additionally, in Greece there are many families who live in marginalized areas. Most of them don't have access to different sources of information. It is not an issue of luck that most of the young people that become members of political parties come from families with low educational levels. OPEN MINDS project gives the opportunity through the online game, the first 'gaming for social inclusion', to gain knowledge about radicalization, extremism violence and avoid being convinced. Also, through the game they will be informed about the opportunities that each country offers for social inclusion. People in marginalized areas need more than any other group to be part of a group. So, it is necessary to find solutions healthier than the political parties and OPEN MINDS aims exactly at this.

In conclusion, when we look at ‘victims’ of radicalization in Greece, there is common evidence in their lives. It could be said that all of them needed to feel that they belonged to a group, that they were accepted. Additionally, the ignorance seems to have been a catalyst for all the interviewees to be part of a group with political background. OPEN MINDS aims exactly at these points with a view to preventing further such behavior by young people in the future. Through online play, which is an innovation, it aims to inform even young people living in marginalized areas who do not have access to all sources of information. It is a project that is expected to have the desired results in Greece as the problem is big and the existing solutions are minimal.

Italy

Although there is relatively little public information on jihadists who decided to leave Italy for Syria and Iraq, a few stories are sufficiently known. Not all these individuals were able to arrive in Syria and Iraq, despite their efforts. All these adults have been investigated in Italy. However, they must of course be considered innocent until proven guilty.

In addition, there are three real-life stories of young people on the road to radicalisation who have turned their lives round due to help and support from the Channel programme and Prevent. Intervention in cases of radicalisation varies on a case by case basis but these real-life stories show how the right support can make a real difference to young people:

The Sergio-Kobuzi family’s story

The case concerns an Italian national, her Albanian husband and her family of origin. Maria Giulia Sergio was born in 1987 in Torre del Greco, near Naples, to a Catholic family (father, mother and an older sister). Her parents came from a humble background and had various economic problems. The family decided to move to northern Italy around 2000 and settled in Inzago, a town between Milan and Bergamo (Lombardy Region). After high school, Sergio went to university but did not graduate. She also worked in part-time jobs. In 2007, she converted to Islam on her own initiative and took a new name, Fatima az Zahra. Over time, her religious positions became increasingly extreme. Her radicalisation process had a breakthrough in 2014, at the time of the rise of IS. In September, she married an Albanian citizen, Aldo Kobuzi, in a marriage of convenience, facilitated by a mutual acquaintance of Albanian origin. Unlike other ‘IS brides’, Sergio wanted to marry a man she met through personal contacts before her departure for the self-proclaimed caliphate, so as not to be compelled to marry a total stranger in Syria in circumstances that were out of her control.

Aldo ‘Said’ Kobuzi was born in north-western Albania in 1991. He worked as a mechanic in his country and moved to Italy for his marriage. His younger sister, Serjola (born in 1996), had already left for Syria in 2013 together with her husband (now deceased) and their child. Just four days after their marriage, Sergio and her husband, together with her mother-in-law, left for Syria, where they joined IS. They were reunited with Kobuzi’s sister. In Syria, Maria

Giulia/Fatima took up firearms training, in the hope of taking part in combat someday. She explicitly expressed her desire to fight. Maria Giulia Sergio is the first female *muhajira* with an Italian passport.

Aldo Kobuzi was sent to an IS training camp in Iraq in November 2014. He was exempted from fighting, however, because he had to take care of his widowed sister Serjola, who was pregnant. For this reason, he was, as mentioned, entrusted with religious policing tasks. One by one, all Sergio family members converted to a very strict form of Islam. In July 2015, Italian police arrested Sergio's father, mother and sister, as they were preparing to go to Syria, convinced by the young woman's pressing requests. This was the first case of radicalisation of an entire Italian family. Interestingly, Sergio's relatives had different attitudes and motivations. Her older sister, Marianna Sergio, was easily persuaded to leave for Syria: she was already showing sympathies for the cause of IS and, in addition, was apparently interested in finding a new husband after her divorce. By contrast, her father, Sergio, and especially her mother, Assunta Buonfiglio, were more sceptical and hesitant. In the end, apart from the emotional attachment to their daughter, they were also persuaded by the promise of a better social position in IS-controlled territory.

[The Brignoli-Koraichi family's story](#)

This case concerns an entire family of five. Alice Brignoli, an Italian citizen, was born in 1977 to a Catholic family. She worked as a secretary in a small firm and there met Mohamed Koraichi (born in 1985), a Moroccan welder who grew up in Italy. They got married in 2008 and had three sons. They lived in Bulciago, a small town in the province of Lecco (Lombardy region). Brignoli rapidly converted to Islam and took the name Aisha. She started wearing the *hijab*, the traditional Islamic veil. Alice/Aisha left her job and rarely went out of the house in order to dedicate herself full-time to their children. After Koraichi lost his job, the couple received welfare payments and financial support from their parents.

The gradual radicalisation of the couple became apparent around 2009-10. In February 2015, they left Italy with their children and travelled to the caliphate by car, stopping off in Bulgaria. In Syria, Koraichi received training and became an IS foreign fighter. He expressed the desire to die as a martyr.

In the caliphate, the couple proudly endorsed the jihadist indoctrination of their sons, in particular, the oldest. Moreover, according to intercepted conversations, in Syria, with the consent of Brignoli, Koraichi agreed to marry at least one other woman, Yassine, a young widow from the Netherlands, and adopted her three year-old son.

As will be seen below, Koraichi encouraged two other Italian residents of Moroccan origin, Abderrahim Moutaharrik and Abderrahmane Khachia, to travel to IS-controlled territory and, additionally, to carry out terrorist attacks in Italy, as wiretapping demonstrated.

Brignoli attempted to convince at least her mother to convert to an extremist version of Islam and travel to Syria and Iraq but unlike in Sergio's case, her efforts were not successful.

[The Bencharki-Moutaharrik family and Abderrahmane Khachia's story](#)

This case concerns a family of four and a family friend. Abderrahim Moutaharrik was born in Morocco in 1988. He is married to Salma Bencharki (Islamic rite only), and has two children. Moutaharrik and his wife were residents in Italy for many years. They lived in Lecco (Lombardy region). Unlike the other foreign-born jihadists in our sample, Moutaharrik obtained an Italian passport. He worked as a labourer and was a semi-professional kickboxer.

In early 2016, Moutaharrik decided to leave for the caliphate with his family and a friend, Abderrahmane Khachia. This young man, born in Morocco in 1993, lived in Brunello, a small town in the province of Varese (Lombardy region), not far from Lecco. He was the younger brother of a foreign fighter, Oussama, a friend of Moutaharrik, who, after his expulsion from Italy in January 2015 for his explicit jihadist positions, joined IS in August 2015 and lost his life in battle in Iraq in December 2015. His tragic death shocked his brother Abderrahmane but also had a profound effect on his friend Abderrahim. In all likelihood, it represented a powerful source of inspiration for their swift decision to take action.

In early March 2016, Abderrahim Moutaharrik and Abderrahmane Khachia, through Moutaharrik's wife, met Mohamed Koraichi's sister, Wafa, who was living in Baveno, a small town near Lake Maggiore (Piedmont region). Wafa Koraichi seemingly supported her brother's extremist positions, against the will of her father and her Moroccan husband. Through this woman, Moutaharrik and Khachia asked Mohamed Koraichi, who had already joined IS, to provide them with the *tazkia* (in Arabic), a sort of pass/letter of recommendation for their relocation to the caliphate.

Moreover, through Mohamed Koraichi, Moutaharrik and Khachia met an unknown jihadist, known as the 'Sheikh', who Italian authorities consider a "high-profile member" of IS. Through phone messages, the Sheikh invited the two friends to "avenge Muslims" in the West.

According to Italian investigators, Moutaharrik and Khachia were ready to leave for the caliphate, together with Moutaharrik's family, and carry out terrorist attacks in Italy. They were arrested in April 2016.

Moreover, investigators found out that the father of the Khachia brothers, Brahim, had supported both Oussama and Abderrahmane in their efforts to leave for Syria and Iraq. He

had already been suspected of Islamist extremism in Italy in the early 2000s. Eventually Brahim Khachia and his wife were expelled from Italy in May 2016.

The Pilè-Sagrari couple's story

This case concerns an Italian citizen and her Tunisian husband. Sara Pilè, an Italian girl, was born to a Catholic middle-class family in 1991 and grew up in Monticelli Brusati, a small town in the province of Brescia (Lombardy region).

She married Naim Sagrari, a 30-year-old Tunisian citizen, with an Islamic rite in 2010 and later with an Italian civil ceremony in 2015. The man worked for some time in the small company of Sara's father, a local entrepreneur. They lived together with the Pilè family until the man was thrown out, probably because of disagreements with Sara's father on lifestyles. According to the information available, Sagrari had a significant influence on Pilè. She converted to Islam, later left her job in a pastry shop, and lost contact with her friends.

She seldom left her house. The couple had few contacts with local mosques. However, in contrast, Pilè was active on the internet. In particular, on her Facebook account she expressed anti-Western attitudes and her desire to die as a martyr.

According to Italian investigators, by 2016 the couple was ready to leave for Syria, allegedly to join IS. They were interested in buying a car for the journey. The couple was arrested in June 2016. In Pilè's computer and smartphone, the Italian authorities found over 120 videos and 4,000 photographs regarding IS.

Sagrari was soon expelled to his country of origin and was banned from re-entering Italy for 10 years. Pilè was not considered socially dangerous but not imprisoned. She could not be deported in any case because of her Italian citizenship. However, the authorities identified the "concrete risk" that her pathway could "result in operative conduct". Therefore, in July 2016, she was subjected to special supervision for three years. This innovative measure requires that she cannot leave her town of residence nor use the internet.

Overall, as regards age, most jihadists were young, but five small children and a middle-aged couple are also present in our sample. With respect to sex, our sample includes both men and women. As mentioned, women have so far not been allowed to engage in combat for jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq. However, Sergio explicitly expressed their willingness to fight and even took firearms training in Syria.

As regards their origin, like most foreign fighters in Italy, almost all the adults in our sample are either second-generation children of Muslim immigrants or recent converts to Islam. The members of the Sergio family, Brignoli and Pilè were born in Italy to Italian families, but the other jihadists, regardless of their formal nationality (only Moutaharrik obtained Italian citizenship), are still "sociologically Italians" because they had been socialised in the country

since childhood. Only Kobuzi was simply a visitor; he arrived in Italy in 2014 to marry Maria Giulia Sergio.

The examples shown so far in Italy decided to embrace a behavioural form of radicalisation by joining (or at least planning to join) a jihadist armed group abroad. A minority (Koraichi, Kobuzi) even engaged in violence in Syria. However, at least some of them (in particular, Sergio's parents) did not display genuine and deep-seated radical beliefs.

Like most home grown Italian jihadists in recent years, the radicalisation of the jihadists included in our sample did not take place in traditional settings, such as prisons. Unlike other European foreign fighters, none of these Italian jihadists had been to prison. Nor had any been involved in criminal gangs or drug dealing.

Many frequented Islamic places of worship or cultural centres. Maria Giulia Sergio attended a few mosques quite regularly. Brignoli and Koraichi frequented the mosques of Lecco and Costa Masnaga, in the province of Lecco, where Moutaharrik and Khachia met. Pilè and SAGRARI had few contacts with local mosques. However, in all cases, according to the information available, mosque attendance did not play a crucial role in the decision to join IS in Syria and Iraq.

Most jihadists in our sample exhibited outward "signs of radicalisation", in terms of changes in lifestyle, habits and social relationships. For example, Maria Giulia Sergio and Sara Pilè started wearing the *niqab* (the veil that covers the entire face with only a slit for the eyes). Pilè and Alice Brignoli agreed to spend most of their time at home and cut many of their previous social ties. Mohamed Koraichi left his full-time job as a welder because he came to see it as incompatible with his religious practices and duties.

These jihadists decided to take the leap from a (more or less intense) cognitive form of radicalisation to a behavioural form. In relation to cognitive radicalisation, all expressed serious grievances, some of a political/social or religious nature, often associated with strong emotional states. For example, in intercepted conversations, Moutaharrik and Khachia lashed out against Western "infidels". Others had a more personal tone. For example, Maria Giulia Sergio complained about intolerant and Islamophobic attitudes in the country.

Some of these grievances are not uncommon in sectors of Europe's Muslim communities. Moreover, Italy's strict naturalisation laws, largely based on the *jus sanguinis* principle, often exacerbate the sense of discrimination and feelings of frustration, resentment and anger. However, these Italian radicals framed problems, solutions and calls for action in the perspective of jihadist ideology, with its principles, narratives, and symbols. Thus, the transition from words to actions was presented as both possible and necessary.

All jihadists displayed their religious commitment, but none had extensive expertise in Islamic studies. There was no *taqiyya* (dissimulation of the Islamic faith). Furthermore, some of them

did not hesitate to advance their radical ideas publicly, at least to a certain degree: Maria Giulia Sergio gave various interviews; Moutaharrik displayed pro-IS signs in his sport competitions. 61 Many jihadists in our sample were active on the social media, where they expressed extremist positions, including incitement to hatred, particularly, Maria Giulia Sergio, Moutaharrik and Pilè on Facebook.

At some point, these jihadists decided to take action and leave for Syria or Iraq. They agreed to move on to a behavioural form of radicalisation by joining a jihadist armed group.

Their decision to leave occurred in a peculiar “geopolitical situation”. In fact, they were attracted by Baghdadi’s call and, unlike previous foreign fighters from Italy, arrived, or at least planned to arrive, after the self-proclamation of the caliphate in mid-2014, at the height of its strength. None of these jihadists had family or ethnic ties with Syria and Iraq. Like many aspiring fighters, they were not particularly focused on any one specific country of destination. For example, Moutaharrik and Khachia considered Libya for a while. In general, social networks can play an essential role in foreign fighter mobilisation. In particular, we know that in Europe the decision to leave a country for Syria or Iraq is often the decision of a small group rather than one individual. For example, “bunches of guys”, may get together in a neighbourhood, a mosque, school, sports club or prison. Group dynamics (such as “group polarisation”, the tendency to take decisions that are more extreme than the initial inclination of the members) can encourage the process of cognitive and behavioural radicalisation. Initially, many Italian foreign fighters travelled to the conflict area on their own. Unlike in many other Western European countries, peer pressure did not play an important role.

This important characteristic may be due to the traditionally small size, dispersion and fragmentation of the home-grown jihadist scene in Italy. In such a context, each potential foreign fighter is led to take action on their own. In fact, in previous years, many Italian *muhajirun* (such as Giuliano Delnevo, Anas el-Abboubi and Meriam Rehaily), who were not able to find significant contacts in Italy, sought connections abroad and finally decided to leave for the war theatre alone. Maria Giulia Sergio, too, contacted an Albania-based network and travelled to Syria with an Albanian man she had just met. In some respects, it can be argued that these individuals were unable to find a ‘breeding ground’ within the country, especially in terms of social networks. Interestingly, Delnevo decided to break from a small group of converts he had joined in his home city, Genoa, after he showed his willingness to join the jihad abroad. El-Abboubi tried to open an Italian branch of the radical *Sharia* franchise without much success.

By contrast, the dynamics operating within the Sergio, Brignoli-Koraichi, Bencharki-Moutaharrik and Pilè-Sagrari families and the friendship between Moutaharrik and

Khachiashow signs of group radicalisation in Italy. Group dynamics can take different forms. In particular, Sergio was ready to exploit the affective and emotional ties in her family to promote the jihadist cause. In the radicalisation process of Moutaharrik and Khachia, peer pressure dynamics between friends and the emulation of a role model (Koraichi and above all the late Oussama Khachia) were salient. In the case of Pilè and Sagrari, it is plausible to presume the influence of Sagrari within the couple. In the cases of the Khachia brothers, their father, Brahim, may have represented a role model.

The importance of pre-existing personal ties in the recruitment of terrorists is not new for scholars. This sort of relationship usually presents some elements that can be useful for the functioning and activities of clandestine groups, including mutual knowledge and understanding, trust, solidarity and a willingness to cooperate.

Pre-existing personal ties also play an important role in the ‘facilitation’ process of aspiring *muhajirun*. Unlike domestic terrorists, these individuals cannot directly join the ranks of a jihadist-armed group in their country of residence. They need the assistance of a ‘facilitator’ (person or group) who contacts, vets and finally helps the candidates transfer from their country of residence (Italy, in this case) or transit zone (for example, Turkey) to the combat area (Syria and Iraq). The facilitator connects the foreign volunteers with the armed group operating in the conflict area.

Facilitation fills two main functions. First, it provides information and resources related to the logistics of travelling. Second, it can help the armed group in the task of screening volunteers. Like other organisations, jihadist armed groups may rely on ‘guarantors’ to vet and select candidates. In fact, Koraichi, from Syria, vouched for Moutaharrik and Khachia and provided them with the *tazkia*, a sort of letter of recommendation.

According to the information currently available, these jihadist volunteers were not directly recruited by an armed group through a top-down process, but rather actively sought contacts with various facilitators, through a bottom-up process.

Interestingly, in some cases the facilitation dynamic was seemingly based on a relatively generalised mechanism of organisational ties that are potentially open and accessible to volunteers. For example, after reaching Turkey by air, Sergio and Kobuzi were assisted by a specialised agent named Ahmed Abu al-Harith, considered to be an “IS member” by Italian authorities.

On the other hand, in other cases, personal and, in particular, family ties played a significant role in facilitation. In particular, it is possible that at least in an initial stage, up to their arrival in Turkey, the Kobuzi-Sergio couple was helped by an Albanian recruiting network linked to his family. Moreover, the couple reunited with Kobuzi’s sister who, significantly, was already in

Syria. The role of close personal ties is also evident in the case of Moutaharrik and Khachia. They contacted Mohamed Koraichi in Syria, through his sister in Italy, in order to reach IS-controlled territory. Moreover, Khachia had already tried to find contacts through family connections in the preceding months.

Pre-existing personal ties facilitate forms of “bloc recruitment”. In other words, volunteers are mobilised in small groups (including families) – not as separate individuals travelling on their own, as was previously common in Italy. Interestingly, the use of personal ties in facilitation can somehow be seen as a substitute for the lack of ‘free zones’ that provide direct support and cover in the country of departure. For example, according to various accounts, the municipality of Molenbeek in Belgium represented an important recruitment area and a sort of safe haven for various jihadists, including the terrorists who carried out the attacks in Paris in November 2015 and in Brussels in March 2016. Places like this can be used as focal points for selection and recruitment. However, there do not seem to be high-risk neighbourhoods or suburbs like Molenbeek in Italy.

The presence of domestic organisations and groups that are able to connect supply with demand for of foreign fighters and *muhajirun* (like Sharia Belgium in past years in Belgium) is still weaker than in other Western European countries. The foreign fighters’ phenomenon in Italy has traditionally been characterised, largely, by the presence of *foreign* recruitment networks operating within the country.

Th us, it is not surprising that many jihadists who wanted to travel to Syria and Iraq sought contacts abroad to organise themselves and/or relied on pre-existing personal relationships. Sergio, for example, had various kinds of connections with Albanian jihadists.

In turn, unlike in previous years, there is evidence that some of these *muhajirun* from Italy committed to recruiting other people. Maria Giulia Sergio was able to recruit skilfully all her family and, in addition, helped indoctrinate other women from Syria via the Internet. Koraichi encouraged and tried to facilitate the departure of Moutaharrik and Abderrahmane Khachia to Syria. According to intercepted conversations, they were in turn ready to seek other potential recruits in the Lecco area. All these signs of group dynamics could prefigure an important development in the scenario of foreign fighters in Italy. In previous years, most Italian foreign fighters were not interested in preparing attacks on Italian territory. For instance, Maria Giulia Sergio was not involved in terrorist plots.

By contrast, wiretapping revealed that Moutaharrik and Khachia were discussing the idea of planning attacks in Rome, in particular on the Israeli Embassy. In this sense, there are indications that the threat posed by Italy’s jihadist *muhajirun* could become more serious at the domestic level.

These examples have explored the dynamics of group radicalisation of 'Italian' jihadists who recently decided to join IS in Syria and Iraq. Unlike in other Western European countries, the domestic jihadist scene in Italy is not only relatively small but also fragmented.

It is still dominated by single individuals or at most small "primordial clusters" often based on pre-existing personal ties. Connections among the different units are uncommon and in any case rather weak. A notable exception is represented by the links between Koraichi, Moutaharrik and the Khachia brothers. Overall, cooperation at the domestic level among aspiring jihadist *muhajirun* appears to be limited and rudimentary.

In this context, pre-existing personal relationships and, in particular, family ties can be salient. In general, this kind of bond can play a significant role in terrorist organisations. In addition, such relationships, and in particular, kinship ties can be even more important for the specific cause of IS, a "proto-state" which needs not only (young male) fighters, but also, unlike other terrorist groups, new 'citizens' of different sexes and ages, including entire families. However, pre-existing personal relationships do not automatically represent effective vehicles for political commitment, including the extremist cause of jihadism. They have to be specifically activated for this purpose, where possible. Alice Brignoli, Sara Pilè and Wafa Koraichi, for example, had to face the clear opposition of some of their relatives and loved ones.

Moreover, it is important to observe that strong ties such as family or close friendships present clear advantages but also significant disadvantages. In fact, as sociologist Mark Granovetter noted in his famous work, "weak ties", such as acquaintances, are generally better suited to facilitating the transmission of information and ideas across groups. An organisation that depends solely on recruiting operatives and supporters from highly dependable sources associated with kinship and friendship ties is likely to be limited in scope and reach.⁹⁴ Thus, pre-existing personal relationships may represent valuable opportunities but also significant constraints for terrorist organisations, depending on the circumstances.¹

From around the world

Kamran's story

Kamran is 14 and from the West Midlands. Social workers picked up on comments he made in support of Osama Bin Laden, joining Daesh and killing Americans. His school were aware of wider communication and behavioural difficulties, including autism. His mother was also very ill, and he had unsupervised access to the internet.

¹ Abstract from "Ties that Bind: Dynamics of Group Radicalisation in Italy's Jihadists Headed for Syria and Iraq" Francesco Marone, University of Pavia

The local authority referred Kamran to the Channel programme and with the consent of his parents he was taken on as a case and given a mentor, Daud, who was a youth worker.

Daud, as well as encouraging Kamran's passion for football, talked with him about Islamic teachings and accompanied him to the mosque. He helped Kamran see the positive aspects of being the only Muslim pupil at the school, and explored the possibility of holding an Islamic awareness day. Daud worked with Kamran's parents to build family relationships and manage internet usage, while the Channel programme organised for local Prevent officers to raise awareness of extremism and radicalisation at Kamran's school.

Over a period of time, there was a steady improvement in Kamran's behaviour at school and at home. Kamran no longer made extremist statements and learned to speak to his father if he saw something that he did not understand. Kamran's school even decided to make him a school ambassador so he can act as a role model and advocate for other students.

School staff and management have said: "He is a different student now to the troubled boy we knew six months ago. He has matured and transformed into the young man our school hoped he could be and we are very grateful for the success the mentor has achieved."

Yusuf's story

Yusuf is 24 and a postgraduate student at university. A university staff member, Claire, saw Yusuf in the town centre handing out leaflets for an education charity. She took a leaflet although he was initially reluctant to hand one over.

Later at home, Claire looked at the organisation online – it had a very well-constructed site but their aims and objectives seemed a little vague. After following several links, Claire was directed to an extremist website which promoted violence and homophobia. She reported this to the Prevent coordinator at the university, who contacted the police.

Previous concerns had been highlighted about Yusuf's behaviour in the university as he had become reclusive and on occasion very argumentative. The Student Services and Channel police officers determined, after interviewing him, that he was at risk of radicalisation. He was open about the fact that over the past six months he had been 'befriended' by older men at his mosque who were known to have extremist beliefs.

His mainstream religious views were gradually eroded and he had started to identify with an extremist ideology. Yusuf accepted support from Channel and Student Services, including chaplaincy and psychological provision. This support was provided for a year, until it was decided that Yusuf was no longer at risk. He went on to successfully complete his studies and has started a PhD.

Callum's story

Callum is a teenager from Luton. His teacher, Ruth, was told by another student that Callum had been promoting a Facebook page for a group called the Young Patriots. Ruth saw that the site contained violent language and links to extreme right-wing sites. When asked about the site, Callum said that he didn't have a problem with other races in general, just Muslims because they were not like "us".

He added that when he attended football matches, he'd walk to the ground through a predominantly Muslim area and see them "doing their Sharia law". Ruth asked him what that meant and Callum gave a confused answer about no-go areas.

Callum had met people at football matches who involved him in the Young Patriots Facebook page. He liked the attention and told his teachers excitedly about being invited to "secret" group meetings in pubs before and after games, without his parents. The school safeguarding lead reported the concern to a police liaison officer who confirmed that the Young Patriots site contained highly racist material and would need to be closed down.

Although Callum had distanced himself from his family and friends, they were able to convince him to talk to a social care worker recommended by the police liaison officer. It was quickly evident that Callum didn't understand the ideology of the group he'd linked himself to but he did have other personal worries, including finding work when he left school. The school's careers manager looked at future career options with Callum, including working for and with the Muslim community.

Outside of school, Callum agreed to attend an ethnically diverse youth group that gave him confidence in socialising with his own age group. An uncle and cousin started taking him to football matches so he had routine, role models, and the family bond that was so important to him.

It was later discovered that Callum had a flare which he'd intended to take on a march. The action taken by Ruth meant he was able to move forward positively and that others were protected from any violence he may have committed.

Slovenia best practise programs against radicalization

There are very few cases of deradicalisation in Slovenia and real life stories for (de)radicalised individuals have not been exposed in the media - not even in articles, interviews or other online publications.

Below you may find models for preventing deradicalization that are well developed and ready for implementation in Slovenia.

P-O-O model for deradicalisation²

A model for a society-wide response to prevent radicalisation leading to violence, adapted to the Slovenian context, was developed in 2018 by Rajko Kozmelj.

The model consists of three segments, namely

- (i) preventing radicalisation leading to extremism,
- (ii) warnings about radicalised individuals and
- (iii) how to deal with them.

The approach is primarily focused on the following four phases:

- (i) appropriate prevention - broader societal response (informal social surveillance). The aim of primary prevention and broader societal response measures is to create a resilient, stable and inclusive society that is able to detect and warn of radicalised individuals moving along the path of radicalisation towards violence and, to a limited extent, to respond to such a phenomenon in a (in)direct way. Informal supervision by family, peers, teachers and other educational workers, sports coaches, as well as public figures, politicians and the media, which define the boundaries of what is permissible and acceptable in society, play a major role in this respect.
- (ii) Secondary prevention - detection and response by appropriately trained professionals at local level (so-called first responders) with the aim of deterring further radicalisation leading to violence (specific initial intervention, working with vulnerable groups at risk). In secondary prevention, a mechanism for assessing the risks of the individual, working at local level, is of paramount importance. The objectives of this mechanism are preparation, such as risk assessments by the radicalised individual, action planning, monitoring of implementation, and analysis of successful interventions. Secondary prevention or formal surveillance is mainly carried out by state actors such as local authorities, police, prosecutors, courts, prisons, inspection services, customs, the army, various intelligence services, police forces, etc. It is important that these and other bodies are involved not only in repressive work, but also in prevention itself, which is aimed at protecting vulnerable groups and identifying individuals who have already entered the process of radicalisation.
- (iii) Tertiary prevention - preventing the planning and execution of crimes with violent elements. Aimed at early detection and prevention of (self-)radicalised persons intent on harming the health or life of citizens, the measures are implemented by intelligence and security services, police and law enforcement agencies.

² https://www.fdv.uni-lj.si/docs/default-source/zalozba/pages-from-radikalizacija-v-smeri-nasilja_knjizni-blok_tisk.pdf?sfvrsn=2

(iv) Preparation for the reintegration of the individual into society and the reintegration of deradicalised persons into the local environment (intervention targeting radicalised individuals with the aim of preventing recidivism). These are either foreign terrorist fighters who have completed their prison sentences, their family members after returning from conflict areas, radicalised convicts after completing their prison sentences, etc. This phase entails the reintegration of deradicalised convicted persons after completing their sentences. This process starts already during the period of imprisonment and is not only linked to the deradicalised individuals, but also to their families and immediate social circle. Preparations for reintegration must be personalised and involve a team of psychologists, the probation service and other actors selected according to the P-O-O model. The reintegration of deradicalised individuals requires a genuine readiness on the part of the individual and the environment to be readmitted, with close cooperation between all the aforementioned actors, who are responsible for supervision, support and mediation with the local environment. If reintegration is not well planned or implemented, it risks re-radicalisation (Kozmelj in Prezlj et al., 2021).

[Slovenian RAN \(Radicalisation Awareness Network\) platform³](#)

The Radicalisation Awareness Network is a network of direct practitioners across Europe working with people who have been radicalised or who are vulnerable to radicalisation. In 2016, the RAN in Slovenia was launched, but in recent years, due to informality and lack of recognition of the importance of such a focal point by the state, it has not made great strides.

- Focuses on right, left and religious radicalisation.
- Promoting research on the phenomenon of radicalisation in the immediate environment and sharing the findings with the profession.
- Identifying good practices.

[Youth counselling against radicalisation](#)

At European level, the umbrella organisation for this general service is ERYICA⁴ (European Youth Information and Counselling Agency). Its main purpose is to meet the information needs of the young population and to improve cooperation in the field of radicalisation. In Slovenia, there are general counselling centres that provide basic information and counselling to families who visit them to solve their problems and get help.

In general, the largest number of counselling services is in formal education (e.g., Counselling Services and School Counsellors in Slovenia).

³ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/radicalisation-awareness-network-ran_en

⁴ <https://www.eryica.org/>

Violent extremism and radicalisation in Slovenian legislation

In Slovenia, under Ministry of Justice, there is a Republic of Slovenia Probation Administration⁵. The probation services provide assistance, protection and supervision to persons under criminal sanctions, with the aim of helping them to desist from crime and to integrate successfully into the community, while at the same time pursuing the objective of making society safer. It is essential that the person remains in the environment in which he or she lives and works, and that he or she is not removed from the social environment and social relations as a result of having been punished.

In the context of international integration, Slovenia⁶ is the initiator of the Counter-Terrorism Task Force, which brings together the Western Balkans region, some EU Member States, Europol and Interpol. It is also the initiator of the Western Balkans Counter-Terrorism Initiative, which brings together more than 50 organisations and donors involved in counter-terrorism activities within the framework of the Integrative Internal Security Governance Initiative. It is also involved in the EU Radicalisation Awareness Network mentioned above. It also participates in the Global Coalition against Daesh, which meets annually at ministerial level (Ajdinović 2021: 19).

In the context of preventing radicalisation in schools, the possibility of raising topical issues in some social studies subjects, or workshops with external guests (representatives of the police, NGOs, experts, etc.) with which students talk about non-violent communication, drug abuse, migration, criminality, etc., is mentioned, but most of these activities are based on the teachers' own initiative (Prezelj et al. 2021; in Ajdinović 2021: 33).

Religious institutions do not have established procedures for dealing with cases of radicalisation, and faith communities add that they would deal with potential cases through conversations, greater involvement in the community itself and building positive things. They would also like to see more active cooperation at national level in defining and preventing radicalisation. They also draw attention to individuals and groups organising outside official faith communities (Prezelj et al., 2021; in Ajdinović 2021: 34).

Asylum systems do not address de-radicalisation themselves, as they have insufficient experience and knowledge of the legal underpinnings and limitations of their work, but staff receive additional education and training to respond adequately to the threat of radicalisation (Prezelj et al. 2021; in Ajdinović 2021: 37).

⁵ <https://www.gov.si/drzavni-organi/organi-v-sestavi/uprava-za-probacijo/o-upravi/>

⁶ <https://www.gov.si/en/topics/counter-terrorism-efforts/>

Summary and Conclusions

As it referred before in recent years, extremist violence has been of great concern to society. Based on the interviews above, there were different types of motivators for people to turn to radicalization. First and most important is the fact that, all the people stated that one of the main reasons which led them to radicalization, was the ignorance or loneliness. Ignorance combined with the naivety of age and the need to integrate a young person into a group is reason enough to embrace such views.

Another common theme that was noticed in the stories is about religion and families. In some cases young people got radicalized because of difunctional family situation, in others it was the family who was leading them in such path.

Some of the people managed to deradicalize when in prison, which is showing how important are the surroundings and how in some cases they can help for people to see the perspective and review their radical point of view.

At this point, the need for the implementation of the OPEN MINDS project in the partner countries becomes clear, as it will be a source of information. Young people need an authoritative source of information that will present the facts objectively without hiding bigoted motives. Hopefully, the objective information provided in the project will be a good resource for them to turn to when in such a difficult situation. They will at least see there were other people who were in similar positions and managed to get radicalized, how they searched for help and main of all that it is possible.

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