
WomEx - Women / girls in violent extremism

The neo-Nazi terrorist death squad NSU (national socialist underground/ Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund) which was uncovered in 2011 in Germany after having killed ten people – nine of which were perceived foreigners – in execution manner, over a period of some twelve years, while also producing denigrating and cynical videos about their victims, consisted of two men and one woman. The NSU gang was part of a wider under-cover militant neo-Nazi network, encompassing approximately 20% females, with tendency to rise.

Contrary to general perception, girls and women have long proven capable of fierce physical attacks, from their teenage days on, and have engaged in various sorts of terrorism throughout Europe. Moreover, women in violent extremist movements seem to assist in preparing and committing crimes, provide ideological support, and strengthen the social cohesion within the movement. This is particularly true for the current development of mainstreaming in which rightwing extremist attitudes and lifestyles infiltrate the middle classes in certain parts and districts of Germany and firmly install xenophobic, hateful and anti human rights stance in general community discourses. Here women seem to play a crucial role.

We do not yet know enough about how and why quite a few young women move into violent extremism – while, in general, women, mothers, families are regarded powerful factors of prevention. Above all, however, we don't know much about what the gender aspect may mean methodologically for employing impactful interventions of deradicalisation and hate crime rehabilitation – be it in prison, probation or community, both with women and men.

Nevertheless, there appears to be many pockets of specialized experience on the part of first-line practitioners throughout Europe who work directly with violent and/or extremist girls and women in various work areas and milieus – be they afflicted by political, religious or any comparable form of violent extremism. These colleagues need to be brought together and exchange about their work experiences and principles.

Plus, existing best practice research in deradicalisation and hate crime work with men has in various instances given evidence indicating that issues of gender, family, biography, and social milieu may be of particular importance for processes of deradicalisation and rehabilitation. Especially in Germany there seems to have developed a rather solid tradition of gender methods in the prevention of hate crime and violent (rightwing) extremism.

Not coincidentally, the first movie about a young neo-Nazi women – “Die Kriegerin”/ “Combat Girl” – was released in February 2012 in Berlin, thus signaling a general readiness of both public and specialized practitioner discourse to more intensely investigate gender methods in deradicalisation.

The two-year ISEC national starter measure WomEx will

- identify existing pockets of specialized knowledge about interventions with violent extremist girls/ women – mostly in right-wing extremism and general hate crime offenses
- identify and interview practitioners, statutory or grass-roots organisations' practitioners, who work in women prisons, correction-, pre-arrest- and probation institutions, and in preventative community and NGO organisations,

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- interview female ex-offenders/ at-risk young people about the patterns of female radicalisation, the function of girls/ women in violent extremist milieus, and disengagement experiences,
- produce case study materials about successful interventions, good practice and lessons learned,
- describe the first-line practitioners' work-contexts, approaches, methods/tools, and levels of awareness, and identify issues/ criteria of quality control,
- develop guidelines for deradicalisation and anti hate crime work with girls/ women,
- estimate to what extent women prisons are places of radicalisation, and formulate recommendations
- compare existing research and identify added value from deradicalisation work with girls/ women – and pursue indications as to whether sustainable measures need to be 'inter-sectional' and 'systemic' in nature, i.e. incorporate issues of gender, biography, race, class, group dynamic and family history,
- research intrinsic interrelations of “women as victims and perpetrators”,
- probe assumptions about a 'female deradicalisation potential',
- acquire female 'deradicalising narratives' (formerly called 'counter narratives') from girls/ women who disengaged and cooperate with website tools of deradicalising narratives (EDNA),
- cooperate with the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) inaugurated by the EC, DG Home Affairs
- liaise with university research and prepare application for additional academic funds
- identify possible partner organisations in some neighbour countries, meet for practitioner exchange, and prepare a strategy for transfer and network building
- and prepare for building up an EU-wide network on deradicalisation and gender issues.

Drawing on CI's and affiliates' previous EU best practice research and interventions' development, cooperating with the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN, EU Home Affairs), liaising with the OSCE-ODIHR, consulting with specialized academicians (Prof. Michaela Köttig's “Net of Researchers on Women in Neo-Nazism”) and practitioner experts, the WomEx-project will use methodologies from qualitative-empirical social, biographical, and action research.

Stakeholders/ participants are: deradicalisation practitioners/ trainees, law enforcement, (public) policy planners, NGOs, legal practitioners, university researchers/ experts, the media/ civil society – and the primary target group: young females and males in vulnerable sectors of European societies

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