

# Using Internet opportunities to fight radicalization



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**Partners:**

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# Online radicalization

- ▶ Extremists and violent extremists are using the Internet and social media to inspire, radicalize and recruit young people to their cause, whether as passive supporters, active enthusiasts or those willing to become operational.
- ▶ Not enough has been done to date to tackle the use of the Internet and social media by extremists and violent extremists. Most effort has been focused on negative measures, such as take-downs and filtering.
- ▶ While this is important, more focus and resources need to be invested to enable the silent majority to be better equipped to see through extremist propaganda, take control of online spaces, and actively push back on extremist messages.



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# Strengthening digital and media literacy

- Governments should support mainstream digital literacy and critical consumption programmes through state schools and also support provision through youth and community organisations.
- Governments should support at arm's length projects working with at risk youth to deconstruct extremist messages.
- Campaigns like 'Humans of Tomorrow' and '2Think' (OSCE) are examples of civil society efforts to increase media literacy, particularly among young people. At its core, media literacy is the ability to assess information and its sources, credibility and value. This essential skill helps people effectively deal with news, information, and narratives that could potentially divide societies and promote violent extremist ideologies.



# Critical consumption and literacy skills (1)

- There is a growing need for services, products and programmes that will enable young people to critically engage with extremist propaganda online. Similar initiatives have been undertaken in other areas of Internet safeguarding, such as in relation to bullying, paedophilia, pornography and e-fraud, but there is very little tailored to the challenge of radicalisation. Such initiatives help young people by:
- Critical consumption skills: to help young people to see and understand the use of propaganda techniques online
- Digital literacy skills: to help young people to understand how the Internet works, how search engine results are generated, and how to use various online tools to refine their searches .



## Critical consumption and literacy skills (2)

- Deconstruction of extremist narratives: to help those most at risk to understand the narrative techniques used by extremists and how to see through them.
- Propaganda techniques: Teaching vulnerable audiences how to spot the use of propaganda techniques by extremists, thus enhancing their resilience to these messages.
- Source-verification: Providing them with basic source-verification skills to assess the validity, reliability and authenticity of the information they consume, on or offline.
- Understanding choice architecture: Developing an understanding of the architecture and functionality of the Internet and how this impacts the nature and quality of information presented to the individual user.







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# Increasing counter-messaging activities

- ▶ Such activities enable the design and dissemination of online products that counter violent extremist narratives or direct challenge via forums and social media platforms and promote credible alternatives (for example, NoNazi.net).
- ▶ Methods for counter-messaging activities:
- ▶ Government Strategic Communications Action- to get the message about what government is doing, including public awareness activities. The aim is to Raise awareness, forge relationships with key constituencies and audiences and correct misinformation.
- ▶ Alternative Narratives- Undercut violent extremist narratives by focusing on what we are “for” rather than “against”. This includes Positive stories about social values, tolerance, openness, freedom and democracy. Efforts are made by civil society and the government.
- ▶ Counter-Narratives- Directly deconstruct, discredit and demystify violent extremist messaging. Challenge through ideology, logic, fact or humour. Efforts are made by civil society. Examples: Radicalisation Awareness Network’s (RAN), Working Group on the Internet and Social Media, Against Violent Extremism (AVE) and Sisters Against Violent Extremism (SAVE).

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# Good practices

- Clarity of goals is essential: there are many distinct targets for counter-narrative work, which require different types of campaigns, tactics, and approaches.
- It's not about 'winning': It is important to remember that counter-narratives are not about winning the argument or winning over the target audience; they are about gradual movement in the right direction.
- Emotions are more important than evidence: given the types of thought patterns that extremists adopt, success is not achieved in counter-narrative terms through evidence, which can always be refuted and countered. Instead, they need to appeal to human emotions.
- Sustained rather than sporadic activity: be it maintaining an online community, a twitter following, or a chat room relationship, engagement must be sustained.
- Professionalism is essential: successful online counter-narratives share in common with their target content an effective branding campaign, often effective use of music, polish in production quality and compelling stories.
- Humour, shock and subversion: they will be more successful than worthy counter-narratives that will be a turn off to young people.

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