



# The importance of language and location for radicalisation

**While perceptions of radicalisation and its characteristics vary dependent on the local context, the Champions project found a unanimous agreement among first line practitioners over the importance of public discourse and those that shape it.**

The Champions project aims to bring Firstline practitioners together to develop effective detection and response solutions to counter polarisation and protect vulnerable groups and their local communities. The project is still ongoing but has already produce some interesting insights, through a series of interviews.

## The interviews

In total 58 interviews in Germany, Hungary, Poland and Romania were conducted by the project. Those interviewed came from a variety of professional backgrounds, which have brought them into contact with the issue of polarisation and radicalisation. Amongst them were teachers, members of the police, psychologists as well as women's rights activists.

## Main findings

The interviews revealed country specific differences in regard to the perceptions of radicalisation. As such, anti-Muslim sentiments, racism and fear of Islamist extremism was prevalent in Germany and Hungary. On the other hand, in Poland and Romania hatred towards the LGBTQ+ community was the dominant issue. Nevertheless, sexism, gender issues and women's rights were a concern in all surveyed states. However, the perceived degree of the problem varied. Thus, interviewees from Germany specifically mentioned the growth of "everyday sexism", while the Polish and Romanian participants emphasised the connection between public discourse on gender roles and the alarming number of domestic violence.

Thus, radicalisation can have many faces and regional or local characteristics. Therefore, it is not surprising that most of the first line practitioners are calling for the development of a common understanding of what "radicalisation" really means and to increase efforts to understand the reasons and drivers behind this societal problem.

Hence, the language used to describe the phenomena is of vital importance in itself. As such, German and Hungarian interviewees suggested to avoid the term "extremism", as it implies an exclusive focus on marginalised groups. Similar concerns were expressed towards the term "radicalisation".

Indeed, it might be the ambiguous and undefined nature of the topic, which has so far led to a general lack of awareness of the precise dangers and mechanisms of the



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process. Thus, those interviewed put a significant emphasis on “awareness-raising activities”, particularly with a focus on younger audiences.

However, those that do speak about the topic or in public in general also need to be more aware, highlights the study. Beside the local differences in the perception and characteristics of “radicalisation” a unanimous agreement on the important role of public discourse and those that shape it emerged. As such figures like, political actors, representatives of the mainstream media and in Poland and Romania the churches bear a great responsibility, according to the interviews.

This responsibility develops out of their influence on shaping the political and public discourse. According to the interviewees the use of violent and radical language in this discourse has led to the spread of radical thoughts and polarisation into the mainstream.

Therefore, the interviewed practitioners suggested that those that shape the public discourse should be more aware of the impact and power of language. On the other hand, improving the analytical skills, debate culture and media literacy of the general population should be a greater priority. Hence, the interviews suggest that the focus should be placed on those not yet radicalised. through this approach, the rise of “fake news”, polarisation and radicalisation could be successfully countered.

However, such change is rarely achieved overnight. Rather, the first line practitioners suggest, a suitable long-term strategy needs to be developed to address polarisation and radicalisation.

