CHAMPIONs

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Policy Recommendations

As part of the work in the CHAMPIONs project, the partner organized a series of roundtables with policy makers in order to discuss the initial set of recommendations

The policy-maker roundtables had a number of identified aims. Firstly, informing policy- and decision-makers about CHAMPIONs, the main objectives, activities planned, outputs produced and the deliverables of the project was one of the goals, as well as the dissemination of the project activities. Furthermore, one of the key aims of the roundtables was to receive feedback on the project and its activities, with a particular focus on identifying any practical advice that could benefit the implementation of the activities planned. It was also imperative to get the support of the interviewed policy- and decision-makers. Lastly, we believe that the roundtables also served to facilitate current and future implementation of the project. These are the key messages:

State of polarisation and radicalisation in the project countries

The state of polarisation and radicalisation and contextual circumstances differ significantly in the implementation countries. In Germany, there is a relatively steady proportion of people who hold anti-democratic opinions. Yet, right-wing radicalisation is gaining ground in Eastern states, also on a party-political level, especially since 2015. In addition, various other strains of extremist movements can be found across the country, such as Jihadist and Turkish nationalist, but sexist and homophobic movements are also existent.

In Hungary, radicalisation has intensified over recent years, especially since it is uniquely fuelled by the governing parties and the government. Radical ideas and values are being mainstreamed by the governing political forces, and hence, hate speech, stigmatisation and discrimination became widely accepted. Radicalisation spreads in a top-down manner.

Similarly in Poland, the present government plays a role in advancing radicalisation in the country and mainstreaming such ideas in the political discourse. This is done by not acknowledging radicalisation as a phenomenon to be addressed and by condoning the behaviour of far-right parties and movements. At the same time, the media and the Church also play a significant role in spreading radical rhetoric.

In Romania, and especially in Cluj-Napoca, where the interviews took place, the division of society on ethnic grounds is disappearing. However, there are still tensions between Romanian and Hungarian people in some parts of the city and the country. On the other hand, the exclusion of Roma people is still one of the most pressing issues and increasingly, division based on socioeconomic grounds is becoming discernible.

Recommendations for creating and maintaining local-level collaborations

For creating and maintaining successful local-level collaborations, one of the main considerations is which stakeholders to involve and engage in the project activities. Apart from inviting people from different fields and professions who may find the project useful for their work, it may also prove to be beneficial to identify people who are committed to the cause at the local-level, representatives of

marginalised groups and opinion leaders of the community. Furthermore, involving political actors, politicians, policymakers may also help to alleviate political divides, build trust between the different stakeholders and advance the cause of the project. Lastly, involvement of media outlets may also be an option to draw attention to the project activities and amplify the impact the project may have.

On the other hand, it is imperative that the implementing partners keep their independence from political actors, the authorities and the local council. The community should perceive the implementing partners as primarily working with and for the community. The role of the implementing partners is of a facilitator, thus, helping the realization of collaboration through dialogue and working together for a common goal. Therefore, trust towards the implementing partners from all different actors within the collaboration is highly important. The implementing partners, hence, should treat stakeholders with respect and empathy and strive to build strong connections with them. To achieve this, regular and in-depth contact and exchange is necessary with the FLPs involved in the collaboration.

Building trust is important not only between the implementing partners and FLPs, but between the different stakeholders, as one of the goals of the project should be community building and cohesion. Finding common values and goals and sharing experiences through dialogue helps create unity. For this, it is imperative to map the conflicts of the community and work together with stakeholders to find a joint solution. If this can be done in the early stages of the development of the conflict, it is more likely to yield a positive outcome.

However, mapping the tensions of the community must be done with care and considerations, as the locals may deny the existence of such tensions. In terms of the content of the roundtables organised for FLPs, it is recommended that the information transfer is adapted to the needs of the participants. Building a strong basis of in-depth knowledge should be done keeping in mind the practical use, the long-term approach and the effectiveness of it.

Recommendations for Public Advocacy

In order to make CHAMPIONs attractive to local, national and EU-level policy- and decision-makers and to encourage their participation in the project, concrete and practical benefits need to be identified for them. If politicians can see the direct advantages for their own work, they will be more likely to advance the goals of the project. Such concrete benefits may be the successful implementation of a pilot project, which could be transferred to different localities. Moreover, collaboration between the third sector and policy-makers are often founded on individual level connections.

For this reason, building trust and maintaining personal connections with interested policy-makers on a local, national and EU-level is paramount. The language used for public advocacy, policy-making and political communication was also deliberated over: focusing on one type of radicalisation and extremism, based on religion, nationality or any other factor, could unduly stigmatise groups of people and create divisions. A non-polarizing and non-political language, thus, needs to be adapted for the advocacy and communication of the project. It needs to be highlighted that the issue of radicalisation is a cross-partisan problem, not limited to only one end of the political spectrum or to one type of radicalisation. With such framing of the issue, NGOs also may be more likely to engage with policy- and decision-makers to a larger extent. Lastly, as emphasised by German policy- and decision-makers, the current project-landscape in the country with an overabundance of projects, public advocacy should focus on finding synergies and striving for cooperation between different initiatives.

CHAMPIONs - Cooperative Harmonized Action Model to Stop Polarisation in Our Nations

The main objective of the project is to develop collaboration models for establishing working groups between first-line-practitioners. The offline approach is supported by collaborative online tools, practitioner trainings and digital services.

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