



# PRACTICE

Preventing Radicalism through Critical Thinking Competences

## COMPARATIVE RESEARCH REPORT

### ON CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, CRITICAL THINKING AND RADICALISM PREVENTION

*IN THE ITALIAN, GERMAN, BRITISH, GREEK, DANISH  
AND AUSTRIAN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT*

*PRACTICE-SCHOOLEU*



Co-funded by the  
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INTELLECTUAL OUTPUT #1



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# ABSTRACT

Former research has shown that, in the past decade, radicalisation has become a rising and increasingly worrying phenomenon in Europe. Various forms of extremism have been manifested in Italy, Germany, the UK, Greece, Denmark and Austria, sometimes leading to incidents of violent radicalisation.

Even though school has an important role in the prevention of such phenomena, most of the participating countries do not have an official approach. This report aims to map the situation in the aforementioned countries regarding radicalisation, critical thinking skills and their contribution to the prevention and tackling of radicalisation processes in the school environment, as well as to explore similarities and differences amongst these countries.

The qualitative research that was conducted in the six partner countries, implemented in the context of the first Intellectual Output of the Erasmus+ Key Action 2 project 'PRACTICE – Preventing Radicalism through Critical Thinking Competences', included desk research on violent and non-violent radicalisation, relevant legal framework, prevention policies and Continuing Professional Development programmes and critical thinking teaching methods; the research also included interviews with teachers, school leaders and stakeholder, to investigate their needs regarding the prevention of the phenomenon, as well as possible connections between critical thinking skills and radicalisation prevention.

Results indicate that education professionals believe that there is a connection between critical thinking and radicalism prevention; however, there are no official methods for the prevention of extremism through critical thinking development. Thus, Continuing Professional Development programmes on the use of critical thinking skills for the prevention and combating of extremism, support from the State and NGOs, tools, strategies, materials and resources are needed.

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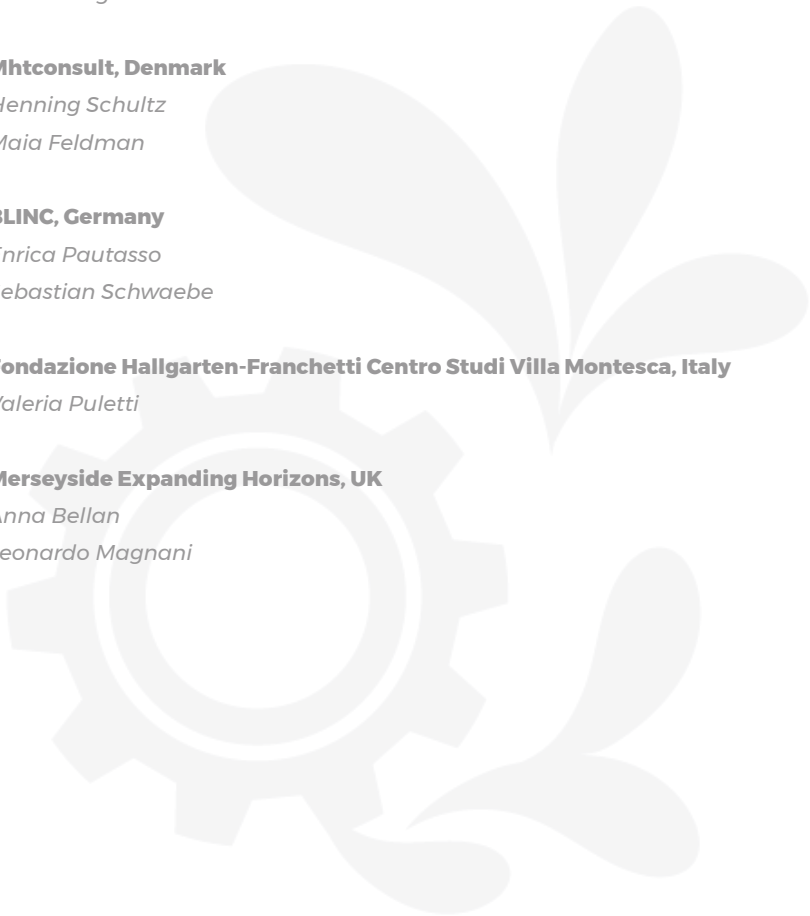
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# INTRODUCTION

## THE PROJECT AND ITS OBJECTIVES

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The Paris Declaration (2015) states that teachers need new skills and competences to deal with complex classroom realities and to confidently respond to diversified groups, meanwhile the available Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes have been recognised as not always being sufficiently related to teachers' needs and challenges they may face.

To respond to these needs, "PRACTICE – Preventing Radicalism through Critical Thinking Competences", a project funded by the Erasmus+ Programme – Key Action 2: Strategic Partnership in the field of education (Project No. 2015-1-IT02-KA201-015383) will provide innovative CPD approaches, whilst responding to the need for new teaching methods, applicable to diverse learners with the aim of preventing radicalisation.

Across Europe, schools have a key role to play in preventing radicalisation, by promoting common European values, fostering social inclusion, enhancing mutual understanding and tolerance, as well as developing students' critical thinking about controversial and sensitive issues as a key protective factor against radicalisation (European Commission, 2017).

PRACTICE addresses the current challenges and needs for the prevention of radicalisation in schools and for the provision of opportunities for teachers' continuing professional development in this area, by developing, piloting and disseminating an innovative approach, using participatory methods and collaborative processes, that involve 7 partner organisations and 35 schools at local, national and EU level.

The project aims at:

Developing an innovative and collaborative EU wide CPD programme on radicalism prevention within school education;

Empowering teachers through capacity-building activities aimed to equip them with better tools to address diversity in the classroom and to understand and prevent radicalisation processes in educational settings;

Enhancing the development of critical thinking skills and strengthening citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education in secondary schools;

Fostering the inclusion of students from all ethnic, faith and social backgrounds, creating a safe space for them to become active and responsible citizens and open-minded members of society.

## THE AIMS OF THE REPORT

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This Report aims to map the current situation regarding radicalisation, critical thinking teaching methods, Continuing Professional Development and existing gaps in Italy, Germany, United Kingdom, Greece, Denmark and Austria and the connection between critical thinking and radicalisation prevention in the educational context.

The research has been coordinated by KMOP (Greece), which has guided the partnership on the development of the current output.

Following specific guidelines developed by the Output Coordinator and with the contribution of all partners (Annexes 1 and 2), the research has been carried out in Italy, Austria, Denmark, Germany, Greece and the UK and was divided in two stages:



Desk Research on the project topics;

Primary research involving schools, teachers and school leaders or other stakeholders from the school education sector.

This Comparative Research Report

therefore aims to summarise the characteristics of the current situation in the six aforementioned countries, along with possible similarities and differences regarding their policies, practical implementation and students and teachers' needs for the prevention and tackling of violent radicalisation.



# TERMINOLOGICAL CLARIFICATIONS

According to Anagnostou and Skleparis (2017), the phenomenon of radicalisation has been prevalent in Europe for the past 15 years. The term ‘radical’ can differ depending on circumstance and time (Vidino, 2014). In certain contexts, radicalisation is perceived as ‘the wish to cause political change’ (UNESCO, 2017), while, sometimes, when referring to the prevention of violent extremism, radicalisation is used to refer to the process by which a person adopts extreme political, social or

religious ideals, views or practices to the point of legitimizing the use of violence (Vidino, 2014).

In the existing literature, radicalisation can be defined as “the process by which an individual has radical views in comparison to the existing state of affairs”, whilst violent radicalisation as “a process by which individuals come to undertake terrorist activity, or directly aid or abet terrorism” (Bartlett, Birdwell and King, 2010 & Marone, 2016).



# METHODOLOGY

The research was coordinated by KMOP (Greece), which has guided the partnership on the development of the current output. The main aim of the research conducted was to investigate the current situation regarding radicalisation, existing critical thinking teaching methods and Continuing Professional Development programmes in each partner country. For this purpose, qualitative data was collected from secondary school teachers, school leaders and education stakeholders. The research encompasses needs assessment (desk research) and field research (focus groups and/or interviews – with the use of semi-structured questions that can be found in the Annexes 1 and 2) as a background of national reports.

The needs assessment included literature review on the current national situation, radicalisation, relevant laws and provisions, existing critical thinking teaching methods, CPD programmes and practices for the prevention of radicalisation in schools. The field

research included the conduction of focus groups and/or interviews with teachers, school leaders and education stakeholders, in order to record their views and needs for the promotion of critical thinking inside the classroom, the ways this can facilitate the prevention of radicalisation, available CPD programmes and possible recommendations for further training. For this reason, all partners contributed to the development of the questionnaires (Annexes 1 & 2) in order to achieve a more in-depth exploration of the aforementioned topics. Upon the completion of the research, a national report was produced for each country, that can be found in the annexes.

During the research, all partners followed the guidelines and tools that were developed in the beginning of IO1 and all education professionals that participated in the research were informed about the project and signed the relevant consent forms. Participants were recruited via the snowball sampling, dissemination activities

and acquaintances.

A total of 40 schools and 108 teachers, school leaders and stakeholders in the field of

education have been reached and interviewed.

The number of participants in each partner country can be found in the table below.

Country	CSC, IT	Villa Montesca, IT	BLINC, GE	MEH, UK	KMOP, GR	MHT Consult, DK	Verein Multikulturel, AU
No. of schools	8 (7 public, 1 private school)	4 (3 public and 1 charter school)	9 public schools	4 public schools	4 public schools	5 (public and private schools)	6
No. of teachers	13	7	10	7	10	8	8
No. of school leaders	3	4	2		5	2	2
No. of stakeholders	2	3	2	5	2	5	8

More precisely, the stakeholders that participated in the research conducted by Villa Montesca (IT) were the Councillor of Education Policies of Città di Castello Municipality and two University Professors (Professor of Legal Data processing at Milano University and coordinator of ISLC research centre in Information Society Law and member of the Ethical Board of VOX-Pol Network of Excellence on Violent Online Political Extremism; and the President of the Philosophy Degree course at University of Perugia), while a

university professor of psychology and pedagogy and an expert of the local educational system, psychologist and representative of the Regional Scholar Office took part in the research conducted by CSC (IT). One School Counsellor and one University Professor of Diplomacy and International Relations have participated in the research conducted by KMOP (GR). Three psychologists associated especially with schools and prevention efforts and one expert on children’s digital life took part in Germany.

# DESK RESEARCH RESULTS

## RISK FACTORS TOWARDS YOUTH RADICALISATION

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Research indicates that the precise factors leading to youth radicalisation cannot be defined, as radicalised individuals differ from one another and may have different socioeconomic background and live in different contexts (Germany: Extremism & Counter-Extremism, ND). Research has tried to identify several key factors that may lead to radicalisation. According to Ranstorp (2016), there are nine types of factors contributing to radicalisation; individual socio-psychological, social, political, ideological/religious factors, culture and identity crisis, trauma and other trigger mechanisms, group dynamics, radicalisers/groomers and social media. According to Malkoutzis (2011) and the English Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, political instability, insecurity, lack of prospects due to high

unemployment rates, social exclusion and lack of sense of belonging, as well as absence of policies are some of the contributing factors that may lead to marginalisation and, eventually, radicalisation. As indicated by Save the Children (2018), 1.2 million children and adolescents live in absolute poverty and are at risk of social exclusion, while educational segregation increases inequality.

Greece and Italy have been facing a financial crisis, instability and economic stagnation for the past decade. In 2009, Italian economy suffered a 5.5% contraction and has not presented any recovery since then (Focus Economics, Italy Economic Outlook, 2018). In 2013, the unemployment rate was 12.5%, whilst in May 2018 youth unemployment reached 31.9% (Statista, 2015). Likewise, Greek youth unemployment rates have

increased up to 20.6% (ELSTAT, 2018).

In Greece, the financial crisis, poverty, lack of social inclusion and social support, as well as discrimination are some of the factors that may lead to youth radicalisation (Centre of Security Studies, 2016). As the latest data of the Eurobarometer (2018) reveal, 16% of the Greek youth, aged between 15-24 years, believes that 'their voices count in the EU', in contrary to the average of 48% of young people in the EU. The Counter Extremist Project (2019), as implemented in Greece, reported that right wing and anarchist extremists have an active role. Significantly, in 2015 the far-right wing party 'Golden Dawn' came third in the parliamentary elections, despite the arrests of the group's leading members.

In Italy, more than 70% of people believe that too many migrants live in the country; the perceived proportion of migrants is 24%, while the actual number is up to 7%. Moreover, the idea of migration and terrorism being linked is well rooted in public opinion, even though no official data supports this assumption

(Special Eurobarometer 469, 2017). In a survey conducted by Istituto Giuseppe Toniolo (2018) on the attitude of the new generation towards politics, more than 40% of the interviewees showed a disaffection from all existing political parties and a tendency to support those who protest. Distrust and fear were the most widespread feelings amongst young people, who perceive migrants as a source of economic problems and insecurity. According to the study "I and the others: young Italians in the vortex of change" (2010), more than 45% of young Italians are xenophobic or racists, 15% of whom are Roma-Romanian-Albanian phobic. Another 10,7% presents homophobic behaviours, anti-Semitic impulses, the perception of superiority of themselves and inferiority of women. After the 2013 elections, the Italian anti-establishment political party 'Five Star Movement (M5S)' has risen, while during the general elections of 2018, a new government was formed, with the coalition of M5S and the Lega Nord Party, a national far right party, with clear positions against the EU and migrants (Corbetta, Colloca, Cavazza & Roccato, 2018).

Regarding violent radicalisation, the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (2018) points out that the terror threat, mostly militant Islamism, is significant and assesses that the threat from persons with right-wing extremist views has increased. At the recent elections for the Parliament, an extremist party (Stram Kurs) ran for elections and got 1.79% of the votes, the party has risen through the weekly Quran burnings accompanied by loud hate speech at weekly public and social media streamed manifestations by the racism sentenced head of the party. The party advocates for a definition of Danish citizens and associated rights based on ethnic descendancy, the banning of the religion of Islam in Denmark, the annulment of citizenship and deportation of up to 700.000 persons etc.

Since 2014, the German Federal Criminal Police identified the Islamist terror attacks as the main threat, as in 2018, 25,810 followers of Islamism or Islamist terrorism were living in the country, with 760 being considered capable of violent acts. Germany has also

experienced far right and far left extremism (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz), and even though there are still attacks against refugee accommodation, far-right extremism has decreased by 34% (Counter Extremism Project). During 2017, Germany experienced a small raise of far-left attacks, however this rise is correlated to the protests against the G20 in Hamburg (Online Focus). In Germany, the sense of belonging and identity are considered to be important factors regarding radicalisation. Muslim youngsters are frequently asked whether they adhere to the sharia or the German laws and Constitution (Fobo, 2017, p. 5). Other than the social and psychological factors, the UK Parliament recognises that there are three other factors that may lead to religious radicalisation; namely, matters of identity, foreign policy and socio-economic factors. Thus, the current situation in the aforementioned countries presents several risks that may lead to radicalisation, including lack of sense of belonging, social and political instability and insecurity.

# STATISTICS ON THE RECENT INCIDENTS OF VIOLENT RADICALISATION

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In almost all participating countries, cases of political extremism have been recorded and religious violent radicalisation. Italy is considered to be vulnerable to acts of Islamic extremists, while far-right extremism has re-emerged, amid the influx of refugees and the struggling economy (Gaston, 2017). According to the Italian antifascist organisation Infoantifa Ecn, 182 attacks were recorded by neofascist groups, since 2014. In 2016, OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), which monitors hate crime, reported almost 800 cases recorded by the police, with the majority based on racism and xenophobia. Fourteen foiled, failed and completed terrorist attacks took place in Italy during 2017; out of the total number, eight were connected to left-wing extremism, one to jihadism and six remained unspecified in terms of affiliation. During the same year, 26 arrests related to jihadism,

11 to left-wing and two to right-wing extremism were recorded; 23 concluded court proceedings were registered. Furthermore, 67 deportations for security reasons were listed and 125 foreign fighters were monitored (Europol, 2018 & Italian Department of the Interior, 2017).

During 2016, 3,768 extreme right-wing attacks against centres for asylum seekers were recorded in Germany, including physical assaults, arson attacks and others (Pro Asyl, 2017). Regarding Islamic extremism, 40 jihadist terrorist plots and attacks have taken place in the country, causing 14 victims, while during 2016, five terrorist attacks linked to ISIS have taken place (Frankfurter Rundschau, 2017). This is characterised by an attack in the Christmas market in Berlin, by an Islamist terrorist who drove a truck into the crowd and took the lives of 12 people and injured 48 more (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2016).

During 2015-2016, a total of 7,631 people were subject to a referral due to concerns that they were vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism in the UK, with the education sector making the



most referrals (33%), followed by the police (31%). The majority of these people (56%) were 20 years old or younger, 65% were referred for concerns related to Islamist extremism and 10% for right wing extremism, while most (78%) were male. From 2001 to 2016, there were 54 deaths as a result of terrorist acts in Great Britain (Home Office, 2017).

In Greece, violent radicalisation has been present from the mid-1970s; it is, however, very limited (Anagnostou & Skleparis, ELIAMEP 2015). Political radicalisation is the main form of extremism demonstrated. For the years 2012-2016, there have been 85 arrests for terrorist activities, 49 of which were cases of left-wing and five of right-wing radicalisation. For the same years, there were 70 convictions for terrorist activities; namely left-wing radicalisation (Europol TE-SAT, 2017). It should be noted that far-right wing incidents that may take place are not recorded; for example, many argue that the assassination of Pavlos Fyssas, in 2013, by a member of the political party Golden Dawn was a far-right wing attack. Hooliganism is also a form of radicalisation manifested in Greece; from the

majority of organised fan clubs, 7-15% from young hooligans are “the most violent, and have already been convicted in the past for provocative and aggressive behaviour” (Anagnostou & Skleparis, ELIAMEP 2015, 2017). Even though religious extremism is one of the main threats of the Mediterranean region, “the threat level originating from Islamist radicalisation in Greece is ‘very low’” (Anagnostou & Skleparis, ELIAMEP 2015, 2017).

According to the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET), there were 10 arrests and three convictions in 2016 and six arrests and 13 convictions in 2017; all cases were related to Islamic extremism (PET 2016,2017).

In late 2014, the Austrian National Security carried out a number of arrests of suspected jihadists and financiers of foreign fighters traveling to Syria. According to crime statistics, there is a decline in the number of arrests related to radicalization over the last years; from 139 in 2014 and 59 in 2015, to seven during the first six months of 2016 (IOM, 2018). As reported by Europol Te-Sat, during 2012-2016, the court results in Austria showed

63 cases of jihadism – 30 of which took place in 2016 -, three cases of left-wing extremism and four cases of separatism. The number of verdicts for the same years,

were 107 cases with affiliation to jihadism, one with affiliation to separatism and one was not specified.

## OVERVIEW OF THE RELEVANT LEGAL FRAMEWORK

All participating countries have incorporated provisions, to prevent and combat the phenomenon of violent radicalisation and/or terrorism, based on the forms in which

the phenomenon is manifested. Each country has developed the legislative framework according to the existing needs. Some of the relevant laws can be found in the following table.

COUNTRY	LAW	DESCRIPTION
ITALY	Decree Law 374, October 18, 2001	Codification of the crime of conspiracy to commit an act of international terrorism
	First counterterrorism legislative package	Permission to the authorities to use wiretaps and to prosecute any individual promoting, creating, organizing, or financing terrorism
	Law 438, 2001	Permission to authorities to surveille and intercept communication of terrorist suspects
	Decree Law 27 July 2005 N. 144 (Pinasu's Law)	Amendments on the Criminal Code: inclusion of examples of punishable terrorist offences
		Struggle to international terrorism
	Decree Law 18 February 2015 N. 7	Punishment of lone wolf terrorists and foreign fighters, making it illegal to partake in a conflict in a foreign territory in support of a terrorist organization
	UK	Urgent measures for the fight against terrorism, extension of the international mission of the Armed Forces and the Police
Law 28 July 2016 N. 153		Ratification and enforcement of other EU and International Conventions and Treaties
UK	2015/2063(INI) European Parliament Guidelines	Resolution on the prevention of radicalisation and recruitment of European citizens by terrorist organisations
	Counter Terrorism and Security Act (2015)	Defines that specified authorities (including primary and secondary schools) have an important role in the prevention of people being drawn to terrorist activities  Foresees that the Secretary of State may issue guidance to specified authorities about the exercise of their duty

GREECE	Law N. 3251/2004	European Arrest Warrant Modification of Law N. 2928/2001 on criminal organisations and other provisions
	Law N. 3691/2008	Prevention and combating of money laundering from criminal acts and funding of terrorism and other provisions
	Law N. 3875/2010	Ratification and implementation of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto and other provisions
	Article 187, Penal Code Article 187A, Penal Code	Criminal organisations Terrorist acts
	Law N. 4049/2012	Prevention of sports violence, Doping, pre-arranged games and other provisions
	DENMARK	Anti-terror Package 2002
Anti-terror Package 2006		Criminalisation of terrorist training activities Facilitation of greater intelligence sharing between PET (Security and Intelligence Service) and DDIS (Danish Military Intelligence Service) Permission of suspect wiretapping
Penal Code § 136, part. 3		Banning of foreign religious preachers from entering the country
National Action Plan on preventing and countering extremism and radicalization		Authorisation of PET to block webpages with terrorist content (Aslam, 2017)

Germany is divided into 16 federal states; each of them has its own Prime Minister, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Social Affairs. The main actors involved in Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism (CVE & PVE) are the Federal Ministry of Interior, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, and the state-level Ministries of Interior and Social Affairs. Even though there is no formal national strategy on CVE & PVE, there is a common framework of guidelines, since the federal government cannot force States to adopt all its policies. On this line, since

2012, several counselling centres for radicalised persons and their families have been established at local level (Said & Fouad, 2018).

Austria has an extensive legal framework to resist the spread of terrorism, including the criminalisation of trainings in terrorist camps; wiretapping of individual suspects or small groups upon the permission of an independent judge or ombudsman; prohibition of use and distribution of ISIS or al Qa'ida symbols; prevention of minors exiting the country upon suspicion of participation in fighting

activities abroad; and citizenship withdrawal from an Austrian dual citizen who voluntarily and actively participates in terrorism activities (United States Department of State, 2018).

## **OVERVIEW AND EVALUATION OF DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PREVENTION OF RADICALISATION INCIDENTS IN SCHOOLS**

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Most of the participating countries have official preventive methods of violent radicalisation in schools. In the UK, Germany, Denmark and Austria, actions regarding the prevention of relevant incidents in schools are established, while Denmark also encompasses measures to combat such incidents. Italy and Greece do not have official national services integrated in their action plan.

In Italy there are no national services for the prevention of radicalisation in schools. The National directions for the curriculum define that children should develop competences,

such as a first awareness about rights and duties, rules of common life, cultural diversity, existential and religious topics and justice. The directions also foresee that primary and upper secondary school should lay the foundations to the exercise of active citizenship promoting a social and cultural basic literacy, through intercultural education. However, specific objectives for the education to a civil coexistence are only set for middle school (12-14-year-old students); particularly, each school of this level must organise educational and didactical activities for development of relevant competences. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that each school may participate in relevant projects, trainings and events, organised at national or regional level. For example, the region of Lombardy, in cooperation with the Regional Education Office, run a project for the “Education to the differences to fight violent extremism” ongoing (Campanelli, Chinelli, Casavola).

In Greece there are no relevant strategies foreseen by the law. However, there are provisions on the prevention of delinquent behaviour of minors (Article 11

v.3860/2010), which follow the European Union (EU) guidelines for preventing youth radicalisation (European Commission 2016).

The Department of Education of the UK government published advice on the prevention of radicalisation, elaborating the ways schools and childcare providers can protect children from the risk of radicalism. They have also set up a helpline for schools and relevant organisations. Moreover, the website [educate.against.hate](http://educate.against.hate) provides information and advice for teachers, parents and school leaders on the prevention of the phenomenon. PREVENT – The Government’s strategy to prevent terrorism works with individuals and communities to encourage them to challenge extremist and terrorist ideology and behaviour and increase understanding of frontline staff and community members, through training and events.

The German National Prevention Programme against Extremism, launched in 2018, includes actions in local communities and online activities. The current government, the “grand coalition”, updated the National Action Plan

against Racism in 2017, aspects of which include political education (USA Today, 2017). In addition, democracy building is included in the educational curriculum; however, teachers usually find difficulties in integrating relevant activities to the lessons, while schools often have insufficient personnel resources (Fobo, 2017). Most of the relevant activities are implemented by civil society organisations; associations, such as the Violence Prevention Network, DEVI (Verein für Demokratie und Vielfalt und beruflicher Bildung) or ufug (Arabic for “horizon”) try to reach young people to draw their attention to radicalisation processes.

The Danish School – Social Services – Police collaborative system is responsible for the municipal preventive effort, which identifies risk and supports protective factors. At a local level, the system deals with reports of concern about radicalisation that can be made by parents, relatives, teachers and social workers, and the professionals have a legal obligation to report. The interdisciplinary staff assesses whether the report is a case of extremism or a case of social or

psychological problems of the adolescent. The staff visits schools and supplies teachers with specific knowledge about radicalism. Schools contribute to the prevention of such phenomena, through the development of social competences, critical skills and sense of responsibility (Rambøll 2018). The Ministry of Education has initiated a project 2017-2020, aiming at strengthening the resilience of children and youth against extreme positions and movements, and negative social control.

The Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with the Islamic Faith Community continued its information campaign in Islamic organisations, community centres and prisons, which included education outreach to encourage Austrians to recognise the differences between Islam and what Austria describes as violent extremism. The Integration Office developed an educational programme for German language acquisition and education on Austrian values, in an effort to counter violent radicalisation of newly arrived refugees. Furthermore, the Austrian government maintained

a counselling centre and a de-radicalisation hotline for friends and family of potential terrorists (United States Department of State, 2018).

## **OVERVIEW OF CRITICAL THINKING TEACHING METHODS IN SCHOOLS**

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The Cambridge dictionary defines critical thinking as “the process of thinking carefully about a subject or idea, without allowing feelings or opinions to affect you”. All countries, except Greece, have incorporated critical thinking teaching methods in the educational curriculum, focusing on the acquisition on global citizenship skills, the provision of Continuing Professional Development to teachers, non-formal education and promotion of relevant values and skills.

In Italy, critical thinking is linked to the acquisition of citizenship and global citizenship competences and represents the key for young people to find, select and organize their knowledge to solve problems (MIUR, 2016). The National Teacher Training Plan 2016-2019 also promotes the introduction

of critical thinking development in education, while it provides teachers with tools to encourage a dialogical role of the students.

As reported by the British Council, some of the methodologies used in the UK are problem-based learning, traditional theory-based lessons combined with group seminars and one-to-one tutorials that develop students' analytical and communication skills through discussion. Between 2017 and 2018, the British Council's Connecting Classrooms Programme involved 800 teachers in a Continuing Professional Development programme empowering them with practical strategies for the promotion of critical thinking; all participants had to implement one or more aspects of the course in their classroom. The programme "Critical Thinking for Achievement", funded by the Department of Education, trained educators to help students, amongst others, to tackle complex issues more independently, make adept use of data with a critical approach and construct arguments based on evidence (Geographical Association).

The platform "Extreme Dialogue" –

developed as part of an EU Project with a German partner – offers a collection of didactic videos regarding extremism. Based on true stories, the material will be used to trigger the classroom, raise awareness and help students recognise extremists and recruiters (cultures interactive, 2016). The use of critical thinking has always been part of the teaching, but the intensity is increasing. The general teaching methods for critical thinking range from initiated discussions to role-playing (Clearing House Unterricht, 2018). Even though school counsellors and teachers insist on the importance of critical thinking, no official critical thinking teaching methods have been integrated in the Greek educational system (Vourloumi 2018 & Theodosiadou 2012). Theodosiadou (2012) also suggests that the term 'teachers' training' encompasses professional training, but also a deeper need in education, which involves preparing students for their life after school.

The Danish official learning objectives for students have integrated Klafkis' didactical approach (Fælles mål, 2014). This approach focuses on critical

thinking, teaching students to learn to identify major challenges for humanity and form their personal opinion about key issues. In the most recent learning goals in the subjects of Danish and history, emphasis is placed on the critical approach to sources, and the development of skills in critical communication (Forebyggelse og bekæmpelse af ekstremisme og radikaliserings. National handleplan 2016, s. 21). Nonetheless, some researchers report that the main challenge is that the didactics are relatively methodologically undescribed (Jensen & Oestergren-Olsen, 2017).

In Austria, actions for the support of mutual understanding, respect and cohesion are being organised, aiming at the prevention of the development of prejudiced attitudes and violent behaviour. The actions engage young people, families and the entire community in a dialogue for the prevention of hate crimes and countering violent extremism (Famira-Mühlberger & Leoni, 2013). Private comprehensive schools emphasise on students' development social skills, self-confidence and critical thinking, following the official Austrian curriculum (OECD -

Innovative Learning Environment Project, ND).

The schools of today and tomorrow have to prepare students for new social, political, and economic situations.

## **OVERVIEW OF POLICY AND PRACTICE ON CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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All countries foresee the provision of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes to education professionals, for the acquisition of skills and competences, personality and professional development and support. A variety of training topics are offered to teachers, including methods, global citizenship, foreign languages and digital competences. In most countries, namely Italy, Germany, Greece and Austria it is foreseen that CPD is compulsory for teachers, while in Denmark, teachers have the right to an individual CPD plan and in the UK they are offered awareness raising activities and e-learning training.



The Italian Law No. 107/2015 foresees that CPD is compulsory, continuing and structural for teachers. Each school defines the CPD activities to be implemented and establishes networks with other schools of the region. However, activities must be in line with the priorities set by the Ministry of Education, as indicated in the training plan, which is published every year. The priorities for the years 2016-2019 include foreign languages; digital competences and new learning environments; school and work; autonomy; evaluation and improvement; competence-based teaching and innovative teaching methods; integration, civic competences and global citizenship; inclusion and disability; social cohesion and prevention of youth discomfort (MIUR, 2016). Italian teachers have the right of a five-day exemption from service to participate in relevant programmes (Eurydice, 2018). Moreover, law N. 107/2015 foresees a financial support for the participation of teachers to trainings, in a form of electronic card, to purchase books, hardware and software, to attend courses and cultural events and to carry out activities, which are in line with the school's educational

plan and the National training plan.

Also in Germany, in-service training is compulsory for educators. The Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs is responsible for the provision of the training programmes, which are organised at central, regional or local levels, or within schools; sometimes they are organised by universities and non-public or other organisations (Eurydice, 2018). The topics of the trainings focus on the inclusion of students with disabilities, general and school pedagogy, didactics, intercultural learning and new technology (European Foundation for Democracy & Counter Extremism Project, 2016).

The UK Department of Education recognises that a cooperation between school leaders, teachers, CPD, training or consultancy experts is needed for a CPD programme to be effective. Professional development should focus on the improvement and evaluation of students' outcome, be supported by data and experts, include collaboration of experts and be sustained over time (Department of Education, 2016). The UK government's strategy

for the prevention of violent radicalisation, PREVENT, includes raising awareness amongst education professionals on the ways they can contribute to the prevention of vulnerable people being exploited for terrorist purposes, while the Home Office has developed an e-Learning training course, addressing all forms of terrorism and non-violent extremism (Finish National Agency for Education).

The Greek Law No. 250/92 foresees three forms of compulsory professional development for educators; introductory training of at least 100 teaching hours for Primary and Secondary Education candidates to be appointed, periodic training, in two training rounds of each academic year, of up to three months for permanent teachers and specific short-term training programs, from 10 to 100 hours for all educated teachers and up to 200 hours for teachers attending special education. However, CPD is optional in Greece and it is provided by school units, regional educational centres, universities, technological educational institutions, higher school of pedagogical and technological education and the

Institute for Educational Policy, after the trainings have been approved by the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs (Eurydice, 2018).

According to the collective agreements between the Local Government Denmark and the Teachers Union, all teachers have the right to an individual plan for CPD; the teacher and the school leader must negotiate a CPD plan, taking into account the goals of the individual teacher, as well as the tasks they are responsible for. The part-time programmes are usually financed by public funds and take place in universities. The topics of the CPD programmes must be in line with the government and Local Government policy and priorities; the main priority for the current period, until 2020, is for 95% of the educators to teach the subjects they are specialised in (Strategier for læreres og pædagogers videreuddannelse, Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut, 2013).

The new Austrian Service Code foresees that teachers are obliged to participate in further part-time development. Such activities may be offered to teachers of one school, or to teachers of several schools (Eurydice, 2018) .

# OVERVIEW OF PROJECTS, RESEARCH AND REPORTS FOR PREVENTING AND COMBATING VIOLENT RADICALISATION

In addition to the national action plans, methods and strategies for the prevention and tackling of violent radicalisation, several projects and research have been implemented towards the exploration of the phenomenon and the provision of support

to teachers and students for the acquisition of skills and competences, in order to contribute to the aforementioned aim. Indicatively, some of these projects can be found in the following table.

COUNTRY	PROJECT	DESCRIPTION
ITALY	The Avanguardie Educative Project (Research Project)	<p>A movement of innovative schools being researched by INDIRE, aiming at studying how teaching and organizational changes may be implemented within a school and mainstreamed to other schools</p> <p>The 'manifesto', developed by INDIRE and the 22 advanced schools, defines seven pillars that inspire activities and practices, and these underpin the "gallery of 12 innovative practices"</p> <p>Students are active members of the learning process, developing critical, reflective and creative thinking</p> <p>(<a href="http://innovazione.indire.it/avanguardieeducative/debate">http://innovazione.indire.it/avanguardieeducative/debate</a>)</p>
	Making Learning and Thinking Visible in Italian Secondary Schools (MLTV) Project	<p>Development of an innovative educational model, able to valorise and capitalise on disciplinary knowledge and skills, to develop a variety of ways of thinking</p> <p>Exploration of how Making Learning Visible and Visible Thinking can be adapted in Italian public secondary schools</p> <p>Support and promotion of the creation of a culture of schooling, schooling based on thinking patterns and deep understanding (<a href="http://www.indire.it/en/progetto/making-learning-and-thinking-visible-in-italian-secondary-schools/">http://www.indire.it/en/progetto/making-learning-and-thinking-visible-in-italian-secondary-schools/</a>)</p>
	Buon senso project By the Ministry of Education, University and Research and Laterza publishers	<p>Provision of students with tools to decode the flow of information and develop a complete opinion on topical issues and communicate with others</p> <p>(<a href="http://www.miur.gov.it/-/buon-senso-al-via-progetto-miur-laterza-br-sperimentazione-in-nove-scuole-studentesse-e-studenti-a-lezione-di-pensiero-critico">http://www.miur.gov.it/-/buon-senso-al-via-progetto-miur-laterza-br-sperimentazione-in-nove-scuole-studentesse-e-studenti-a-lezione-di-pensiero-critico</a>)</p>

GERMANY	The Narrative Orientation method	<p>An educational model aiming at the development of a set of competences related to the empowerment and self-direction of the final user</p> <p>Use of biographical materials, such as novels, images, movies and new technologies</p> <p>Aims to make people aware and responsible for the life choices</p> <p>Suitable for all age groups and contexts</p> <p>(<a href="https://federicobatini.wordpress.com/2018/10/12/progetto-noout3-materiale-incontro-lettura/">https://federicobatini.wordpress.com/2018/10/12/progetto-noout3-materiale-incontro-lettura/</a>)</p>
	Clearing procedure and case management: prevention of violent neo-Salafism and right-wing extremism	<p>Launched in 2016 and aims at stopping radicalisation; it is currently set up in six schools</p>
	A Practitioner's Guide on Preventing Radicalisation in Schools (November 2016)	<p>The handbook provides a list of "challenges" about political and religious beliefs that may arise in a classroom and practical examples of answers and actions. Also, it provides a checklist of indicators of radicalisation.</p>
UK	T'ici Erasmus+	<p>Exploring the identity of young people living in multicultural societies to build with them positive identity strategies.</p> <p>(<a href="http://www.tici.eu/uk/">http://www.tici.eu/uk/</a>)</p>
	Building a Stronger Britain Together (BSBT)	<p>Support civil society and community organisations, working to create more resilient communities, counter extremism and offer vulnerable individuals a positive alternative</p> <p>(<a href="http://www.gov.uk/guidance/building-a-stronger-britain-together">www.gov.uk/guidance/building-a-stronger-britain-together</a>)</p>
	Let's talk about it ( <a href="http://www.ltai.info">www.ltai.info</a> )	<p>An initiative for the provision of practical help and guidance for the prevention of people supporting terrorism</p> <p>Focuses on building close relationships between schools, universities, prison, health and children's services, places of worship, community groups and other institutions; challenging extremism ideology by working with local and national agencies; and supporting vulnerable individuals through intervention projects</p>
GREECE	Youth Empowerment and Innovation Project (YEIP)	<p>An Erasmus+ project, aiming to design a youth-led, positive policy prevention framework for tackling and preventing the marginalisation and violent radicalisation amongst young people in Europe</p> <p>(<a href="https://yeip.org/about-the-project/">https://yeip.org/about-the-project/</a>)</p>
	Memory, Youth, Political Legacy And Civic Engagement (MyPlace)	<p>Exploration of the ways young people's social participation is shaped by the past, present and future and the impact of totalitarianism and populism in Europe</p> <p>Aims at contextualising young people's civic engagement, mapping and understanding the process of the (re)production, transmission and (re)interpretation of local, national and pan-European political heritage and experience and understanding the appeal of radical, extreme or populist movements to young people and its relationship to regional, national and European political heritage</p> <p>(<a href="https://myplaceresearch.wordpress.com/">https://myplaceresearch.wordpress.com/</a>)</p>
	Power2Youth - Freedom, Dignity and Justice project	<p>Aims at exploring the causes of exclusion of young people at three different levels of analysis -macroeconomic, Mediterranean and microeconomic- and the role of young people's collectiveness and individual contribution to the different forms of power and the prospect of their transformation</p> <p>(<a href="http://www.power2youth.eu/">http://www.power2youth.eu/</a>)</p>

DENMARK	Democratic communities. Prevention of Polarization and Exclusion (2017-2018)	A project developed by researchers from the University College Absalon and financed by the National Centre for the Prevention of Extremism, aiming to qualify teachers and school management at schools to work with antagonisms and polarisations in the classroom and develop democratic competences. It encompasses field research, a CPD programme and a variety of methods
	Rambøll Management (2016)	A review, funded by the Ministry of Education and Equality, of national and international research for the prevention of radicalization in the primary and secondary school and on high school level
	Nettets vildveje (Pitfalls of the Internet)	Online magazine, developed by the Council of media among children and youth, about youth, radicalization and extremism. Subjects are freedom of speech, hate speech, fake news, 'echo chambers' and 'filter bubbles', algorithms and digital foot prints  <a href="https://www.medieraadet.dk/medieradet/temaer/nettets-vildveje">https://www.medieraadet.dk/medieradet/temaer/nettets-vildveje</a>
	Hemmingsen, Ann-Sophie (2015)	Report on the Danish approach to countering Extremism  <a href="https://www.diis.dk/publikationer/the-danish-approach-to-countering-extremism-holds-potential-as-well-as-challenges">https://www.diis.dk/publikationer/the-danish-approach-to-countering-extremism-holds-potential-as-well-as-challenges</a>
	mhtconsult (2018)	Report 'Citizenship in Practice – teaching portal aimed at young people about citizenship, democracy, empowerment, interculturality etc.'
	Social Net Conferencing	Meetings between radicalised individuals and their social nets  Net conferencing offers incarcerated people the chance to develop, working with their net, a mandatory plan for their future, upon release; the plan is sent to the judge, who issues orders based on it, during the trial  The probation officer supervises the implementation of the plan  Main objective: create a change for the better for violent extremists, radicalised inmates, families, prison/probation/judicial practitioners
AUSTRIA		



# FIELD RESEARCH RESULTS

*As mentioned in the methodology section, the field research included the implementation of focus groups and/or interviews with teachers, school leaders and education stakeholders, in order to further investigate the results of the desk research, as well as education professionals' needs, experiences and views on the current situation. For the implementation of the qualitative research, semi-structured questions were used, to allow participants to focus on their preferred topic, based on their experience. Thus, interviewees from different countries focused on different issues, depending on the national situation and existing gaps and needs.*

## **SITUATION IN THE CLASSROOM: STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS OTHERS**

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As reported by the participants, Italian students tend to align their personal opinion with the views of the majority, whilst one educator mentioned the difficulty of their students to question their personal opinions and accept different viewpoints. Participants from Germany highlighted that students have difficulty in separating the teachers' opinions from the statements of others, while they are unwilling to share their views and need motivation from teachers. According to the teachers from the UK, students'

behaviour is influenced by their family context. Greek students seem to have an opinion and stick with it. Many reported that even though children express their opinion, they seem unwilling to listen to other points of view. Even though the climate of the classroom promotes free expression, only a few students exchange opinions, while sometimes they tend to question beliefs different from theirs. Young people have not learnt to discuss, read, reflect on different opinions and filter information. The will

of the individual educator was believed to be an important factor influencing students' behaviour in the Greek classrooms.

In cases of conflicts, Italian teachers usually try to moderate and observe the conversation, without influencing students with their personal opinions and encourage them to express their views. Serious conflicts and extreme opinions on sensitive issues did not seem being expressed in Italian schools; however, some incidents of 'jokes' and bullying were reported. It should be noted that schools have procedures and tools to manage relevant situations. Participants from the UK mentioned that there are sometimes cases of physical and verbal violence in the classroom. In order to handle such situations, they encourage discussions, freedom of speech and respect of other people's viewpoints. Greek teachers try to resolve the tension through dialogue, structured arguments and examples. Only a few use experiential exercises. In Austria, teachers try to encourage students to look at an issue from an opposite point of view, as it was proven to be a successful way of handling conflicts.

In Germany, conflicts of opinion are considered an important instrument for teaching; some teachers use this method to encourage students to participate in conversations and exchange ideas. In cases of severe conflicts, teachers need to moderate the discussion and encourage students to provide arguments, facts and think critically. Students from higher education rarely need a teacher to moderate the discussion; only in cases of imbalance the teacher needs to intervene. All students have the opportunity to speak freely, but extreme views need to be treated appropriately. Teachers need to provide facts and arguments, to promote critical thinking, meaning that, sometimes, they need to support the opposite part of the discussion. However, teachers face difficulties, since they are questioned by students, parents, colleagues and the public.

## **DIVERSITY: STUDENTS' PERCEPTION AND UNDERSTANDING**

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In Italy, cultural and religious diversity are the most common amongst students, according to the education professionals

who participated in the research conducted by Villa Montesca. As the school leaders pointed out, schools are inclusive and there is a general climate of acceptance; students were reported to find it difficult to talk about and understand diversity in a general and theoretical context. Some schools have created synergies with local authorities and experts, to identify and handle any physical and psychological discomfort students may experience. Noteworthy is the fact that, as some school leaders underlined, students with diverse backgrounds tend to exclude themselves from the group. Some of the teachers who participated in the research conducted by CSC reported that some of their students demonstrate extreme beliefs, such as the integration of the death penalty in the Italian legislation. Female students were reported to be more open-minded, especially in matters related to gender. Some teachers explained that students tend to understand diversity, mainly when talking about social status, while the majority supported that students accept foreign classmates and children are curious about different cultures and languages. Nonetheless, there were some

cases of students embracing far-right views about migrants, guided by the way news are presented by the mass media. Italian education professionals, interviewed by Villa Montesca, stressed that the acceptance of diversity is a trait that students acquire thanks to the good example of the entire education community, while some teachers, who participated in the research conducted by CSC, pointed out that students tend to, unintentionally, imitate the behaviour of adults.

German education professionals explained that there is an increase in the far-right way of thinking, but most students tend to avoid expressing them in school, while they have noticed a change in the behaviour of students when they are inside and out of school. At the same time, there is a decrease of tolerance towards others. One teacher working in a school with students of disturbed background stated that children are open-minded, but sometimes they may be prejudiced against someone or something; in these cases, they overcome this by listening to arguments.

In one of the UK schools, teachers



explained that students are often 'narrow-minded', as they are influenced by the place they live in and their role models; meaning that they usually have limited contact with diversity. This limited exposure affects their relationships with people with diverse background, as sometimes students exclude children with different cultural or religious background from their group; nonetheless, children with disabilities seem to be more prompt to be victims of bullying. Educators working in intercultural contexts stated that, in such cases, students do not perceive diversity as a problem, even though there are some cases of discrimination and bullying.

Some teachers and school leaders from Greece stated that students understand and are open to diversity, being more sensitive towards matters like disability. There were also some opposite opinions, supporting that students see diversity as something far from them and express extreme views towards migrants and people with different religious beliefs; one teacher reported incidents of racism and bullying in schools.

One Danish teacher and one school psychologist mentioned cases of students embracing Nazism, but the teacher did not consider it serious, as it seemed like a phase that would pass. Two more teachers shared their experience with a parent and a pupil, attending a private Arabic school, who became a member of Hizb'utahia and the school permanently expelled the student.

## **SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON STUDENTS**

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In all participating countries, education professionals consider the internet as the main source of information students use, which influences their opinions and views; in particular, social media is the main factor that seems to influence children. Some Italian participants underlined that students do not have any comparison with external sources, while this source does not stimulate reflection. In addition to the internet, for Italy, the UK, Germany and Greece family is another source, students use to get information. In Greece, Germany and the UK peer groups and friends also seem to influence

youngsters. A few Greek teachers also mentioned the school.

Students from Greece, Italy and Denmark seem to passively receive the available information, as many participants pointed out. One participant from Greece underlined the difficulty of adopting a critical approach to the information received by the family. One mentioned that students are capable to critically approach the available sources of information, when they are properly informed. Italian students were reported to be misinformed about current topics, such as gender and migration, as well as religion, especially related to Islam. One of the teachers described that sometimes students simply copy and paste information they find on the internet and cannot explain their meaning, while a few mentioned the difficulty students face when conducting a research. A few experts mentioned that since students have not developed their critical thinking skills, they tend to believe everything they hear. A few Italian experts highlighted the lack of para-verbal, non-verbal and face to face communication, because of the use of the internet. German teachers mentioned that

the extent this process influences critical thinking on information depends on the type of school. Teachers from the UK suggested that media education should be provided to students to help them understand fake news. Danish teachers stressed their concerns regarding students' life on the internet and the risk of extremism, due to the images that are being reproduced. Danish students do not seem to be able to critically approach fake news, or the difference between pranks and extreme views. This large degree of exposure, as one expert pointed out, may lead to the normalisation of violent phenomena and behaviours, as well as to the reproduction of abusive language and behaviour by students.

## **PROFESSIONALS' PERCEPTION AND PROMOTION OF CRITICAL THINKING**

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Participants from Italy, Germany, Greece and the UK stressed that the term critical thinking encompasses the ability to think rationally, without letting emotions and opinions affect the reasoning; the ability to question things and look at facts from different angles;

the construction and evaluation of arguments; the ability to filter information, evaluate and compare stimuli from different sources and their reliability; the exchange of views and ideas and listening to other people; and the process of self-reflection.

Some Italian teachers pointed out the different degree of critical thinking development, depending on the type of school; technical school students are reported to have fewer chances of developing such skills, due to the lessons they are taught. For instance, students who attend philosophical and/or sociological subjects may find it easier to critically approach information. Teachers of religion, humanities and social studies are believed to find the facilitation of the development of critical thinking easier, as students attending such lessons have already acquired the needed skills; nonetheless, a few Italian interviewees suggested that certain subjects could be more inclusive, such as the subject of religion, that should include information not only for the Catholicism, but also for other religions. Many Italian teachers stated that critical thinking skills are developed during the entire school

cycle, while a few mentioned that they are stimulated when teaching every subject; the school system can support such development. Some Austrian participants stressed that, in order to promote critical thinking, teachers should develop such skills themselves.

Education professionals from Germany stated that it is their job to teach students about the importance of critical thinking and, thus, it is important that teachers promote it during their everyday work. However, stakeholders mentioned that even though critical thinking is really important, it has become difficult to integrate it in the educational guidelines. On the other hand, Greek teachers did not seem to be able to identify their exact role in the process of promoting critical thinking, while it was reported that the Greek educational system does not promote the development of such skills.

Italian teachers try to facilitate the development of students' critical thinking skills, by supporting their soft skills in context of the school subjects; for example, with text analysis, group work, simulations, peer education, non-formal

activities and debates. A few mentioned other methods, such as encouraging students to read books and get involved in research and theatre projects, for instance about migration and the effect of fake news. One school leader mentioned the use of technology as a method to develop such skills. German teachers stressed that they use a variety of methods to promote critical thinking, however these depend on the type of school, the age and the interest of the students. They added a UNESCO curriculum, which encompasses matters of human rights, acceptance by others, environmental protection and fight against poverty and misery. Teachers from the UK explained that, in order to promote critical thinking, they try to provide their students with a safe environment, where everyone can express their opinion; to encourage the gathering of information from different sources; to support their students in self-expression, arguing that no answer is wrong; to promote communication and respect amongst students, as well as curiosity about 'what is different'; start debates and promote non-formal education. English schools also tried to introduce educational

methodologies to empower students to think critically and express different opinions.

Greek teachers try to promote the exchange of ideas, introduce different topics for discussion, provide stimuli and different opinions and arguments. One school leader tries to highlight that their personal opinion is not always right. According to the university professor that participated in the research, compositional exercises and collaboration amongst students, the elimination of the belief that there is only one educational manual that students should study from and that the familiarisation with a variety of sources could contribute to the development of critical thinking. Participants from Denmark recognised the importance of school for the promotion of critical thinking and shared that they try to do so by challenging prejudices, generalisations and by creating a climate of acceptance of different viewpoints in the classroom. Most teachers mentioned that they try to stimulate questioning about sources of information.

Austrian participants argued that the promotion of critical thinking

could be facilitated through the provision of tasks that require independent thinking and a climate of acceptance and free thinking in the classroom. The introduction of an independent subject on political education in the school curriculum and the communication with actors of civil society were also considered important. Austrian teachers mentioned that they try to present students how different sources may report about the same event with a different manner and tend to be misleading, in order to facilitate the development of critical thinking skills. A stakeholder mentioned that teachers should engage students in conversations in controversial issues and give them freedom to express themselves and approach topics on their own way.

Almost all participants agreed that there are certain skills students should acquire, in order to develop critical thinking. Italian teachers mentioned the ability to exchange views and opinions, active listening, personal readings and exploration and verification of different sources of information. School leaders added the ability to exchange ideas, while respecting the rules of a debate, as another

needed skill. Greek participants added the ability to reflect on other people's opinions and handle news that promote hate. Teachers from Austria stated that self-confidence and independence are two prerequisites for questioning personal opinions and actions. Justification of one's arguments was also considered important for the development of critical thinking. An Austrian teacher of students with a migrant background stressed the importance of basic skills, such as reading and communication.

## **CRITICAL THINKING AND PREVENTION OF RADICALISATION**

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Some Italian teachers and school leaders clarified that if radicalisation is defined as a violent expression of intolerance, no such cases have taken place in their schools; withal, if the term outlines the process of the adoption of extreme beliefs that promote an ideology, some incidents of exclusion and progressive marginalisation should be considered. Some interviewees mentioned that school is a controlled environment, where signs of radicalisation could be

detected. In fact, some schools have procedures to take care of these signals, in collaboration with local social and health services.

Worth mentioning is the fact that most of the Greek participants linked radicalisation to extreme views and behaviours; only one school leader and one stakeholder could separate violent and non-violent radicalisation. In fact, the school leader mentioned that having different views than the ones that are commonly accepted is a healthy characteristic of young people.

Participants from all countries believe that there is a connection between critical thinking and prevention of radicalisation. Italian participants underlined that radicalisation is usually a consequence of marginalisation and the need of the individual for a sense of belonging, while critical thinking facilitates the deconstruction of stereotypes and is the first step towards prevention. Teachers from Germany and the UK mentioned that such skills facilitate the understanding of different points of view and the questioning of news and information. Characteristically, a German teacher mentioned that

critical thinking “can also be seen as an antidote to radicalisation”. Greek participants highlighted that critical thinking and acquired knowledge can even contribute to the elimination of extreme views. One education professional from Austria also supported that these skills can contribute to the resisting to extreme ideologies. However, another one explained that they do not necessarily contribute to the prevention of radicalisation, but to the prevention of the consequences of the phenomenon to the individuals. Danish participants mentioned the important role of the school in such a venture.

## **CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES**

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Italian public-school teachers, interviewed by CSC, reported that the existing CPD programmes and their content is insufficient and does not meet their current needs, as the topics are often not up to date, whilst trainers are not always well qualified, as also confirmed by a headmaster. It should be noted, that such problems were only identified in public schools,

as private schools were reported to be more selective on trainings and trainers. Teachers, who participated in the research conducted by Villa Montesca, confirmed that there are no official programmes focusing on critical thinking, as the existing ones prioritise, amongst others, topics like integration, global citizenship, inclusion and disability and social cohesion. However, schools put in place procedures to take care of signals of violent radicalism, collaborating with local social and health services, police and local authorities and forecast the provision of psychological support directly within the school. In Germany there are training courses, but the content is ‘not always useful’, while support is considered necessary. Stakeholders stressed that far-flung training courses that require additional effort are less frequently attended by educators. The majority of CPD programmes are offered by the central state education authority of each Federal State. Greek teachers explained that they were not aware of any CPD programme provided by public authorities, but rather for several self-improvement seminars. Furthermore, the

school counsellor mentioned the lack of educational material. Some stakeholders from Austria explained that they provide trainings to teachers about the phenomenon of radicalisation and its process and counselling on solution-oriented approaches. Even though there are several initiatives, they run separately. English and Danish participants focus on the current needs regarding CPD programmes.

## **SUGGESTIONS ON CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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Italian and Greek participants mentioned that teachers should be trained on non-formal education; participants from Greece focused on the need to handle real-life situations and ways to implement theories through experiential learning, while one teacher underlined that it should be mandatory. A more consistent programme, a serious approach and the connection of theory and practice are necessary in Greece. Italian teachers stressed that training should take place during working hours, whilst a student-centred approach was

considered vital, as well as the involvement of the family, when creating such programmes. English participants added that a proper training programme and a designated training schedule are needed, instead of a variety of topics combined together. Some Italian experts suggested the implementation of trainings that will promote dialogue in current topics and students' 'reflection' and development of critical thinking skills, such as the maieutic method. Specifically for the development of critical thinking skills and radicalisation prevention, Greek participants mentioned the need of consistent training. Some Danish stakeholders stressed that teachers need to be trained to handle controversial issues, as well as their own biases and 'blind spots'. They should be able to critically approach their own norms and stereotypes. They also suggested for the development of a CPD on tools and methods for teachers to handle normativity in a professional way. Teachers suggested for a CPD programme on ways to promote critical thinking and provision of relevant material. Stakeholders from Greece mentioned that they could contribute to the provision

of such training to secondary school students. Constant update of teachers' knowledge, new stimuli, familiarisation with new approaches, tools and means were considered useful by the university professor. Italian teachers and stakeholders stated that a CPD on critical thinking skills acquisition and radicalisation prevention is needed and would participate with interest. German stakeholders suggested that trainings adapted to the teachers' needs should be further developed.

## **TEACHERS' NEEDS FOR THE PROMOTION OF A MORE INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT**

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Italian participants argued that they need support from experts, information/training on students' needs, psychology and perception, as well as classroom management. Support from external organisations was also mentioned as a method to stimulate students' curiosity, but only if it is in line with the pedagogical and educational policies and strategies of the school. Some teachers also mentioned the need of communication with colleagues, in order to exchange experiences and create a common



view on sensitive issues. A system of benefits for teachers who use innovative methods and a change of the evaluation system, to help teachers assess students' skills, should be established by one Italian expert.

A few interviewees from Italy and Greece underlined the importance of providing courses on intercultural competences not only to teachers, but also to students; an Italian expert also mentioned the eight key competences of citizenship, while a headmaster suggested cultural exchanges with colleagues from other countries.

Italian and Austrian participants mentioned the need for teachers to have more time to implement activities for the development of skills and competences and to be freed from the pressure of finishing the educational programme.

German participants pointed out that traditional forms of teaching must be reformed and reused, while new techniques and methods are also needed. Support is needed but varies from school to school in terms of material, courses, methods and techniques. Teachers also stressed the need

of well-functioning methods and techniques, that have been tested and evaluated.

Teachers from the UK suggested various speakers to attend meetings and trainings, designated trainings for specific topics, a portal for information exchange, guidelines for handling sensitive matters, interactive support and resources, as well as meetings with parents and school leaders. Danish participants highlighted that they need sufficient working hours to build a relationship of trust with students, especially those with a vulnerable background. This kind of relationship can lead to the development of a sense of belonging and confidence in the society. The Danish expert on digital media and children suggested that teachers should have more material that will help them teach students about the ways emotions are used in the arguments, as well as on how algorithms are used in social media. Further material is needed to encourage students to read, understand and critically approach sources of information. As a teacher stated "many teachers have not grown up with the internet. We have only met it as adults. We don't have personal

experiences with having to relate to, and navigate at the internet as a child. We've never tried being a child in this context".

An Austrian educator teaching students with migrant background stressed that they needed more information about students' origin country and their specific needs, in order to have discussions about sensitive topics. According to some stakeholders, teachers should also be informed about the phenomenon of radicalisation and its aspects. Teachers and stakeholders mentioned that they

need more interconnectedness with policy makers, organisations and families. Teachers need a central contact point, opportunities to exchange experiences and supervision.

Similarly, the constant presence of experts in schools is considered needed in Greece, as well as the provision of motives to teachers to attend relevant trainings. Educational material, support from the school management and external factors, as well as didactic hours addressing controversial matters were also suggested.



# CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Although teachers from the participant countries reported to try to create a climate of acceptance and free expression, not all students are willing to express themselves. In fact, students were reported to seem reluctant to share their opinion in the classroom and not to be open to other points of view, even though there were cases of students engaging themselves in dialogue and exchanging ideas. For example, students from Germany need to be motivated by the teacher, whilst only a few Greek students participate in discussions. In cases of conflict, teachers try to moderate the discussion, encourage freedom of speech and questioning of one's own viewpoints, as well as to provide structured arguments and examples.

Students did not seem to be familiar with the term diversity.

Even though Italian schools are inclusive, students appear to find it difficult to understand and talk about diversity in general terms, while students with a diverse background tend to exclude themselves from the group. However, they tend to accept classmates with a diverse background. Students from the UK were reported to be less tolerant, mostly because of the lack of contact with diversity; whereas, this is not the case with people who have a diverse background.

As reported by the teachers, some students demonstrate extreme beliefs. In Italy, some align with the idea of the integration of the death penalty in the legislation, whilst male students were reported to have more extreme views on gender and homosexuality. Some German and Italian participants reported that, sometimes, students tend to adopt the far-

right way of thinking, regarding matters such as migration. Children from the UK sometimes exclude classmates with different cultural or religious background. Although most Greek participants stated that students are open to diversity, a few mentioned that children experience it as something far from them, expressing extreme opinions about migrants. Cases of students embracing Nazism were reported in Denmark.

This phenomenon seems to be enhanced by the information students get from the internet. Teachers, school leaders and stakeholders expressed their concerns about students' life on the internet and the ways they use it, as it does not stimulate reflection or facilitate the development of critical thinking. Family, friends, peer groups and, somewhat, school seem to be some other means of information students use. Some Greek participants underlined the difficulty to critically approach the information one receives from the family. Children were reported to passively receive information, being unable to separate fake and real news and to critically approach the available information. The lack of non-verbal and para-verbal

communication was highlighted by Italian participants.

According to participants from Italy, Germany, Greece and the UK critical thinking is the ability to think rationally, construct and evaluate arguments and exchange ideas, critically approach information and evaluate different sources of information. The school plays a major role in the development of such skills. However, in Germany it seems to be difficult to integrate it in the educational guidelines, while the Greek educational system was reported not to foresee the development of such skills. Italian teachers try to help students acquire the aforementioned skills by supporting their soft skills, encouraging them to read and take part in research and theatre projects. In Germany, educators try to do so, by promoting matters of human rights, acceptance by others, environmental protection and fight against poverty and misery. UK teachers try to create a safe environment, where everyone can express themselves and encourage students to gather information from different sources and exchange opinions. Greek teachers try to promote the exchange of ideas, introduce

different topics for discussion, provide stimuli, as well as different opinions and arguments.

In Denmark, professionals endeavour to challenge prejudices and generalisations and stimulate questioning about sources of information. Independent thinking and a climate of acceptance and free expression was considered important in Austria.

As participants mentioned, students need to acquire several skills, in order to develop their critical thinking. Namely, the ability to exchange views and opinions, active listening, personal readings and exploration and verification of different sources of information, the ability to reflect on other people's opinions and handle news that promote hate, self-confidence and independence.

Regarding radicalisation, most participants seem to be unfamiliar with term, while almost all could not segregate violent and non-violent radicalisation, or where unsure. Some Italian participants underlined that, as school is a controlled environment, signs of violent radicalisation can be detected. All participants see a connection between critical

thinking and prevention of radicalisation, as such skills facilitate the deconstruction of stereotypes, understanding different viewpoints and may contribute to the elimination of violent behaviour. Characteristically, a German teacher mentioned that critical thinking "can also be seen as an antidote to radicalisation".

Italian, German and Austrian participants mentioned some existing Continuing Professional Development programmes, while Greek teachers were not aware of any relevant programmes; participants from the UK and Denmark mainly focused on the current needs. Existing CPD programmes were considered insufficient in terms of content, trainers and provided material. No such initiatives on the prevention of violent radicalisation, or more specifically on the prevention of the phenomenon through critical thinking skills were reported by the participants.

A more student-centred approach, with the involvement of the family was considered necessary, as well as the use of the maieutic method and experiential learning, in order to connect theory and



everyday practice. Promotion of dialogue and teachers' training on questioning their own stereotypes and handling controversial issues was also considered vital.

Greek participants stressed the need of consistent training regarding radicalisation prevention through critical thinking, while Italian teachers and stakeholders welcomed the idea of such programmes. Greek stakeholders mentioned that they could contribute to the provision of such trainings.

Teachers reported that they need support from the school

management, external factors, organisations and experts, the constant presence of whom in schools was considered important and useful. Trainings on students' needs and mind-set was also considered necessary, for the teachers to understand them and approach them appropriately. Other teachers proposed the need of sufficient working hours to build a trustful relationship with students, so that they can develop a sense of belonging. German participants also stressed the needs of trainings adapted to teachers' needs to be further developed.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

It remains evident that the existing Continuing Professional Development programmes in the participant countries could improve, especially regarding the prevention of phenomena like violent radicalisation. Taking the above conclusions into account, the following recommendations to increase the provision of support to teachers are suggested:

- Support from the school management, external organisations and NGOs;
- Continual teachers' training on new methods of the promotion of the development of critical thinking skills;
- Ways to promote the critical approach of news and information;
- Seminars on the phenomenon of violent radicalisation, its forms and aspects;
- Trainings on new approaches for the prevention of radicalisation, in general and through critical thinking;
- Trainings for teachers, in order to combat their own stereotypical ideas and normativity;
- More trainings based on teachers' needs;
- Motives for teachers to participate in trainings;
- More practical tools, resources and tested methods for the promotion of critical thinking and the prevention of violent radicalism; connection of theory and everyday practice;
- Programmes on ways to handle heterogeneous groups of students;
- Seminars on students' psychology, perception and needs;
- Development of skills, such as problem solving, non-aggressive conflict resolution, tackling root causes of personal problems, emotional well-being, tolerance towards people with different points of view;
- More educational material and methods for the promotion of critical thinking, such as the use of texts, images and videos;
- Non-formal education and experiential learning to be integrated in the official education curricula;

- The establishment of dedicated didactic hours on discussions and exploration of different matters;
- The constant presence of sociologists, psychologists, social workers and other experts in schools;
- Teachers' constant personal development, through seminars, trainings and Continuing Professional Development programmes on handling cases of conflict;
- Teachers' training on how to moderate debates on sensitive issues, by being neutral and not influencing students with their political opinions;
- Ways to encourage students to exchange views and opinions, reflect on other people's ideas and investigate the credibility of sources of information;
- Engagement of families and stakeholders for the development of strategies addressing students;
- Creation of a safe space and promotion of dialogue and exchange of views;
- Creation of an online space with available resources and material on sensitive topics;
- Creation of network for the communication of teachers on methods they use to handle conflicts, violent behaviour and extreme opinions and to promote critical thinking;
- Dissemination of available training programmes;
- Trainings/seminars for educators to be able to discuss controversial topics in the class, such as gender, homosexuality, migration, etc.

As depicted in research results, education professionals need to develop several skills and competences, in order to respond to the current situation; namely:

- Critical thinking skills, as well as skills on the promotion of critical thinking;
- Skills on addressing and handling controversial issues;
- Skills on ways to create a safe space for all students to be able to express themselves freely, while respecting others'



opinions;

- Skills on how to handle conflicts in the classroom;
- Skills on the promotion of dialogue and the exchange of views;
- Skills on how to approach social media and the online world;
- Skills on ways to handle heterogeneous groups of students;
- Problem-solving skills.

These skills are considered vital in order to support students in the development of their critical thinking skills, as a way to prevent radicalisation processes, namely in the following areas:

- Fact checking;
- Analysis of facts and data and argumentation
- Open dialogue and debate (express own opinion and compare different opinions);
- Research and comparison between different sources of information;
- Deconstruct stereotypes;
- Media analytical competences.

Teachers need to be equipped with better tools and methods to discuss controversial issues with students in the class, some of which are the following:

- Gender issues;
- Religious practices and customs;
- Topical global issues (war, terrorism, religious extremism, nationalism)
- Violent and non-violent radicalisation;
- Justice and offenders' rights;
- Migration;
- Cultural differences and respect of diversity;
- Far-right and far-left extremism;
- Disability.

# ANNEXES

## ANNEX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS

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### *INTRODUCTION/GENERAL SITUATION OF THE CLASSROOM*

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1. How do your students interpret/ perceive diversity in society? Do they demonstrate to have strong/extreme opinions regarding sensitive issues (such as migration/ gender/disability and in general diversity in society)? Could you give examples?

### *CRITICAL THINKING*

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1. How do you understand critical thinking?
2. In your opinion, what is the main source of information your students use? What are the means that mostly influence them to form their own opinions (TV, social media, other friends, family)? Do you think they are able to critically approach these means, and to create their own way of thinking?
3. What is the situation in the classroom in relation to critical thinking? Mention: listen to each other, express themselves freely, read, reflect on other students' opinions, be able to/ have the climate to feel free to exchange opinions, handle/ interpret news that promote hate, search for different sources of information, question the information received...
4. Do you think there is one or more than one aspect between the ones above mentioned/a set of competences that students should develop/acquire?

### *NEEDS OF THE TEACHERS IN TERMS OF CRITICAL THINKING TEACHING AND PROVIDING STUDENTS WITH RELEVANT SKILLS*

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1. How do you deal with conflicts of opinions in your classroom? Please give examples
2. What are you doing to support your classroom to develop critical thinking? Please give examples
3. What do you need to help children develop critical thinking skills? Mention: listen each other, express themselves freely, read, reflect on other students' opinions, be able to/ have the climate to feel free to exchange opinions, dealing with news that promote hate, look for different sources of information, question the information received, etc.
4. What do you need to feel more competent to handle sensitive/ controversial issues? (in case the interviewees find it difficult to understand, mention migration/ gender/disability/religion etc.)

## *RADICALISATION*

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1. In your opinion, is there any connection between critical thinking and prevention of radicalisation? How do you think they are connected? What do you think is your role in this context?
2. What kind of support do you need as teachers to prevent radicalization? (e.g. support from the school management, support from the school environment, teaching material, trainings/ tools/ strategies, good practices, CPD, NGOs, Other)

## *CPD*

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1. Do you have any further suggestions for CPD? What do you need that is usually missed?
2. CPD for critical thinking & radicalisation prevention: what are your needs?

## **ANNEX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT STAFF, POLICY MAKERS AND STAKEHOLDERS**

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### *CRITICAL THINKING*

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1. How could the school system be adapted to a more critical thinking approach? How to promote critical thinking in a better way?
2. Do you think there is a set of competences that students/teachers should develop/acquire? How could you contribute to that?

### *NEEDS OF THE TEACHERS IN TERMS OF CRITICAL THINKING TEACHING AND PROVIDING STUDENTS WITH RELEVANT SKILLS*

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1. What do you think children and teachers need to develop critical thinking skills? Mention: listen each other, express themselves freely, read, reflect on other students' opinions, be able to/ have the climate to change opinions, dealing with news that promote hate
2. How could you contribute to helping teachers promoting critical thinking?

## *RADICALISATION*

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1. Is there any connection between critical thinking and prevention of radicalisation?
2. What kind of support do you provide teachers to prevent radicalization? (e.g. support from the school management, support from the school environment, teaching material, trainings/ tools/ strategies, good practices, CPD, NGOs, Other)

## CPD

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1. Do you have any further suggestions for CPD? What do you think you could provide that is usually missed?
2. CPD for critical thinking & radicalisation prevention: what are teachers' needs? How could you contribute to that?



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