

REACH OUT 3 FINAL REPORT



**Organisations, Authorities
and Religious Communities
Cooperate in Support of
Families**



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Violent extremism and radicalisation require society to engage in broadly-based cooperation to prevent these phenomena and to support people and families directly affected by them. The purpose of Reach out 3 project (2020-2021) was to strengthen the cooperation between the authorities and the third sector and, furthermore, to enhance their know-how in ways that develop the support services available and strengthen the case management of families and young people directly affected by violent radicalisation and extremism.

Finn Church Aid and the Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers established by it have engaged in broadly-based work to prevent violent extremism and radicalisation since 2014. The idea behind this activity is to build a safer world by increasing confidence and building action models for cooperation with the authorities, organisations, religious communities, and families who have experienced the radicalisation of loved ones.

The measures to develop family support in Finland have mostly been implemented via Reach Out, launched in 2016, and this work has continued through the support of the Internal Security Fund (ISF-P) of the European Union. In 2020-2021, Reach Out 3 aimed to increase knowledge and understanding about the practices whereby families and communities hurt by the radicalisation process can be supported. This started from the premise that the prevention of radicalisation and the re-integration of a radicalised person into society cannot be achieved without the support of a wider range of people. Family members, relatives and local community representatives in particular often have a crucial role to play in enabling people to leave violent activity behind, to separate from radical ideas and actions and build everyday lives as members of the local community and society at large. Although violent radicalisation and violent extremism in all their forms are still marginal phenomena in Finland, their impact on communities and society is more extensive than assumed in public debates. The frequently cited estimate of the number of people who are susceptible to radicalisation or associated with extremist organisations in Finland fails to take account of the much wider range of people (families and close relatives), who are directly impacted by radicalisation and extremism and whose cooperation is sought.

The activities of Reach Out support local cooperation and develop policies to support families.

Support to the network-based cooperation and case management of local experts

The project developed **Community counsellor training** for those agencies, organisations and communities, as well as those engaged in family work, who act as support providers and case managers, meeting families in challenging life situations. The training was piloted in cooperation with the local cooperation networks in Oulu, Turku, Tampere and Helsinki in the spring of 2021. These networks coordinate local cooperation and develop action models to prevent radicalisation and extremism at the local level.

Strategic communication is a key element in preventing radicalisation and extremism. In the practical context of Reach Out, this means that the work brings new knowledge and points of view to support the development of action models and cooperation. Timely communication and knowledge can increase the inclusion of a diversity of cooperation partners and networks in the work and grow our understanding of the role of these various agencies in the area of prevention.

It is particularly important to highlight knowledge and points of view that further the dismantling of the prejudices, polarisation and stigma associated with these phenomena

Using strategic communication, we have furthered the process of bringing new knowledge to support family work in Finland through the research and international cooperation carried out in the project. Moreover, the people involved in the project have actively participated in the public debate about this theme and specialists acted to support the work of the authorities and the work with families, building a bridge between these.

As a significant new area of cooperation with the University of Tampere, we created a course entitled “Violent extremism revisited: What is it about and what can be done to prevent it?” The course was conducted as part of the project and the process of putting the project study results into practice. Closer university cooperation enables and supports dialogue between the research, the academia and the practical agencies. The course was conduct-

ed as part of the Spring 2021 educational provision and it consisted of 24 hours of classes held from 13 January 2021 – 28 February 2021. People have expressed hopes that this cooperation will continue and discussions are underway on how to expand it to other universities as well. Building a work connection between the scientific community and practical work is important so that in the future, we can gain scientific knowledge that recognises the premises of practical work and boost effectiveness.

At the family and community levels, the project has developed and disseminated action models that help vulnerable people to find assistance and be met in a safe space. The project has built these prerequisites together with the Timeout Foundation, which is the project partner working in the steering group. Timeout provided training on the Timeout dialogue method to those involved in Reach Out cooperation and supported the organisation of local Timeout discussions on selected themes. **The dialogue activity strengthens competence and various skills in organising safe discussions on difficult subjects. This activity supports the dismantling of the stigma and false information surrounding the theme.** This furthers readiness to act in cooperation as part of the process of prevention and to meet with those who need support.

Steering group

The work of Reach Out builds on broad, network-based cooperation and the key cooperation partners are involved in the project steering group and activities. The active involvement of these cooperative parties in planning and carrying out the project activities has boosted the effectiveness of this work, as competence and cooperation build around local competence and networks.



Steering group representatives

The project steering group comprised specialists in preventive work and representatives of stakeholders, and the following key cooperative parties of the project:

- Ministry of the Interior (Chair)
- Finn Church Aid (Secretary)
- Helsinki Safe City Network
- Turku local cooperation network
- Tampere local cooperation network
- Oulu local cooperation network
- Timeout Foundation
- University of Helsinki
- Save the Children Finland
- Helsinki Deaconess Foundation

The project involved cooperation with local networks in Helsinki, Tampere, Turku and Oulu, established for the prevention of violent extremism, and strengthened the capacity of religious communities and organisations to develop action models to prevent violent extremism and support vulnerable families and young people. The Ministry of the Interior, being responsible for the national coordination of the work of preventing violent extremism, was closely involved in this work as well. Reach Out 3 was part of the “National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism”. The implementation of the project has been made possible by the funding provided by the Internal Security Fund (ISF-P) of the European Union.

International experience shows that the family and the immediate circle have a major role to play, also when young people seek to dissociate themselves from extremist movements. From the Member States, The Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) of the European Commission draws together specialists and those engaged in the practical work of preventing radicalisation and brings together the best practices and approaches. The role of families

and the development of support as part of prevention are among the main themes of the network and this work is carried out in the Member States in a targeted way. Read more about this work and the family support models via the European Commission [portal](#).

Supporting the building of confidence and action models together with families

Since 2016, Finn Church Aid and the Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers have built activities and cooperation networks in Finland to ensure that families and young people get timely support that is appropriate to their needs when radicalisation and violent extremism affect them or raise concern. This work has been made possible by the support of the Internal Security Fund (ISF-P) of the European Union and the extensive cooperation networks in Finland and around the world, whereby it has been possible to develop activities together with leading specialists and to establish those activities through the key cooperation forums. The work of Reach Out is persevering in nature and the activities and results of Reach Out 3 built on the partnerships and experiences of the previous project periods, which boosted effectiveness.

Persevering specialist support to key cooperation partners and networks

The process of building specialist work and network-based cooperation and confidence has been at the heart of Reach Out from the very beginning. Finn Church Aid and the Peace Network have been able to flexibly bring together some of the best international practices and lessons from cooperation around the world, as well as extensive cooperation networks between local agencies, religious communities and families in Finland, so that solutions to the new phenomena can be built in cooperation, based on knowledge and local competence.

In 2020–2021, a particularly topical issue in Finland involved families returning from the Iraq-Syria conflict zone: women and children whose return from the Al-Hawl camp attracted a great deal of public attention, but also the need to map out in practice the kinds of necessary support and coop-

eration to provide such. Finland has developed the premises for this work since 2017 when a proposal for organising cooperation was put forward, led by the Ministry of the Interior. Finn Church Aid and the Peace Network, supported by the Internal Security Fund (ISF-P) of the European Union, have also contributed for long to the building of cooperation networks and confidence between the support providers, authorities, organisations, religious communities and families. This work continued through Reach Out 3.

International experience shows that families and the immediate circle have an important role to play in how those separating from extremist movements can be supported in establishing ties with society. Experience also shows that families need support in this work. One of the key objectives of the project has been to provide those responsible for support measures with knowledge about family support needs together with good international practices. This work was carried out through a **project study** that brought out some of the family support models and best practices observed by 6 EU/EEA countries. The study aimed to provide specialists with a compilation of information that they can use when the process of planning support measures continues in Finland.

In addition to this, the project supported either the development of the forms of support or the local strengthening of the practices whereby people are referred to such. This was supported by both developing the **dialogue skills** of local agencies in cooperation with the Timeout Foundation and organising **community counsellor courses** together with local cooperation networks for local networks so that local agencies know about the case management procedure when a concern arises.

Experiences of families and their support needs at the heart of this work

To be able to support a loved one in establishing ties with society and everyday life, the family and the immediate circle need support. They also need information on the phenomenon and its impacts, a support network that provides them with psychosocial support and a safe place to discuss their experience, knowledge about the forms of support and services available, as well as the family-related actions taken by the authorities. In other words, comprehensive support to the family is an essential part of preventive work.

Usually, support to the immediate circle is provided on a family basis so that the main attention is on the family members who have engaged in the activity of an extremist movement or when it is desirable to prevent their joining such. This leaves the wider impact threatening the well-being of the family and community untouched and the people impacted by the phenomenon without support. Support to the family and the immediate circle demands that the needs and experiences of families are made visible and that we have more dialogue between the families and the authorities who are responsible for planning the support measures. This will allow the support measures to be planned based on the needs of the families, thereby increasing their effectiveness and the families' confidence in them so that they can gain appropriate support. One of the main results of Reach Out 3 was the creation and strengthening of dialogue so that families who are affected by this phenomenon have the opportunity to participate in the discussion and bring out their points of view when support measures are planned and implemented in practice.

Supporting specialist work and building confidence

The work of Reach Out 3 is part of the Finnish "National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism 2019-2023" and the project participates in the National Cooperation Network, which brings together various parties, coordinating the cooperation between them. The National Cooperation Network and the enforcement of the action plan are coordinated by the Ministry of the Interior.

Reach Out 3 was participated actively in the work of specialists, which developed a long-term support model to organise long-term support to children returning from combat zones, as well as their loved ones. The specialists of Finn Church Aid and the Peace Network support the responsible authorities in developing cooperation through which vulnerable families can gain the support they need promptly.

Reach Out on display in Europe

Lessons and cooperation through international networks in Finland and around the world

International experience shows that the family and the immediate circle have a major role to play, also when young people seek to dissociate themselves from extremist movements. From the EU Member States, the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) of the European Commission draws together specialists and those engaged in the practical work of preventing radicalisation and brings together the best practices and approaches. The role of families and the development of support as part of prevention are among the main themes of the network and this work is carried out in the Member States in a targeted way. Reach Out supports peer learning and works in close cooperation with the specialists of RAN Youth, Families & Social Work, the RAN workgroup. Furthermore, the FCA and the Peace Network are co-chairs of this working group.



The work of Reach Out was presented in Spotlight, a RAN publication that highlights some of the best European practices.

The work of Reach Out and project Reach Out 3 are part of the Finnish national cooperation to support families when radicalisation affects them. This information box provides further information for specialists and families on family support and its organisation.

The work of Reach Out has supported the development of the following action models and networks:

Valtakunnallinen mallinnus taistelualueilta palaavien lasten ja heidän läheistensä pitkäaikaisten tukitoimien järjestämiseksi, (2020) Specialist report of Socca - The Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. (Eds.) Laura Yliruka and Noora Kivioja.

This publication presents a three-stage process of long-term support over five years for children returning to Finland from the combat zone, as well as their loved ones. The objective of the support is for both the child and the family to have a safe and effective everyday life as part of Finnish society. View this specialist report [here](#).

National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism 2019–2023. Ministry of the Interior publications 2020:1.

This action plan guides preventive work at the national and local levels. It was prepared through extensive cooperation between the authorities, organisations and community representatives. It is also enforced together with various authorities and organisations. View this action plan [here](#).

Ehdotus viranomaisten yhteistyön järjestämiseksi toiminnassa taistelualueilta palaajien kanssa sekä ehdotuksen siitä, miten järjestöjen palvelut voitaisiin liittää viranomaisten toimintaan. Ministry of the Interior publications 2017:11. View this publication [here](#).

Links to cooperation networks:

[RAN Radicalization Awareness Network](#)

[National Cooperation Network](#)

[Helsinki Safe City Network](#)

Community counsellor training for communities and organisations brings services and support networks to support families

In Finland, radicalisation and violent extremism affect hundreds of people and their families and immediate circles. Often, knowing about the radicalisation of a loved one or their ties to the activity of violent extremist movements is a crisis for the whole family and the immediate circle. The roles of the family and the immediate circle are essential when considering what support people need to separate from extremist movements.

The project carried out community counsellor training to increase local competence and cooperation so that the authorities, organisations and communities that meet with the families can work together smoothly to refer them to appropriate support. In the various localities, case management and support services are organised in conjunction with local networks and services, so there are differences between them depending on the location. During the training, the local cooperation networks of Tampere, Turku, Oulu and Helsinki, which were involved in Reach Out 3, presented case management models and key agencies that are specific to their localities.

Community counsellor training was conducted digitally

Through community counsellor training, we wished to reach the local agencies that meet with a diversity of families as widely as possible and to raise their awareness and skill in supporting and referring families to the appropriate services together with the cooperation networks involved in the project. During the project period, we organised a course in each of the following four cities: Turku, Tampere, Oulu and Helsinki. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all the courses were held online via Teams.

The courses focused in particular on strengthening existing case management action models at the local level. The days of training were divided into different sections. First, we went through the cities' process charts for "When concerns arise about radicalisation". By looking at them, we identified the existing service descriptions of each city so that the community

counsellors would have a better chance of implementing preventive action more effectively.

The course participants included social workers, representatives of religious communities, youth work representatives, authorities, such as police officers and city employees who are responsible for the measures to prevent radicalisation and extremism and the family support services. The third sector (i.e., the local organisations and communities) of each city had their say during the training as well. Their contributions brought out their views about the forms of service and the need for such.

Each training also included working in small groups, going through the process of “When a Concern Arises” through a video that had been produced for use as training material. While testing how to identify the concern, the small groups wished to stress that no one is left alone with their concern.

A related video, entitled “When a Concern Arises”, provided information on how to proceed when the suspicion arises that some loved one is becoming radicalised and that support is needed. The video is available in four languages: Finnish, English, Somali and Arabic. View the video [here](#).



To end the day of training, we had some free-form discussion and unpacked the programme together.

Experiences from the field

The participants noted that cases are referred only to quarters they believe can be trusted and for this reason, increasing cooperation and interaction is important for raising confidence.

They had found it challenging that this work tends to depend on the person, so ensuring the continuity of the confidential cooperative relationships demands work and meticulous planning as people move on to assume new roles. Many local agencies, as well as the authorities and the representatives of organisations and communities, noted that resources for people to engage in cooperation must be increased.

Dialogue makes building confidence visible and highlights the shared values behind cooperation

Dialogue activity strengthens the skills and competence of the various stakeholders in facilitating safe discussions about difficult topics. The activity supports both the dismantling of the stigma and false information surrounding this theme and the process of meeting vulnerable people. Raising competence at the community level furthers the capacity to engage in cooperation as part of prevention and to meet with those in need.

During the project, we organised four online dialogue sessions and a training session on the Timeout method together with the local communities and members of networks for the prevention of extremism. These members included the authorities and responsible employees of the Cities of Helsinki, Turku, Tampere and Oulu.

The training session provided participants with new tools for raising and addressing issues related to violent extremism and radicalisation.

The discussions were led by Laura Arikka, a member of the steering group and Chief Executive Officer at the Timeout Foundation.

What we discussed

Together with the participants in the dialogue sessions, we discussed topical acts of violence linked with polarisation and their impact on the sense of security, also in Finland. We sought solutions to the question of how cooperation between representatives of various religions can dismantle polarisation and thus contribute to overall social stability.

By sharing experiences of their own, the participants discussed how social cohesion and the sense of security can be enhanced. As examples, they mentioned the need to respond to polarisation and hate speech through cooperation between representatives of various religions. Much of the feedback emphasised the importance of anti-polarisation activity for a safe future. We also observed that despite the different professional fields of the participants, many of them recognised that they were working on very similar issues.

The polarisation of population groups is a complex development process in all contexts. Religion and religious symbols are not the cause of conflict or polarisation but are some of the implements which political actors use in seeking to justify their actions and gain support.

The participants also brought out ideas related to identity, confrontation and safe spaces. In their professional activity, many participants had observed that issues linked to identity and religion are matters of concern for young people but that these issues are increasingly difficult to address in a social climate that is tinged with prejudice and even open racism. Young people find themselves wanting safe spaces to engage in constructive discussion. When they go public, for example, Muslim youth find themselves obliged to speak within a predetermined framework. The participants also stated that the atmosphere in our society is more polarised than before and at the same time, the dialogue about religion seems increasingly tied to being a Muslim and other minority-related aspects.

When speaking about the themes of interfaith cooperation and the sense of security, the participants emphasised the need to listen to one another, sharing ideas across group boundaries, and the need to involve people with different religious attitudes in every religion. No one, whether religious or non-religious, should be held responsible for the activities or opinions of an entire collective.

Better support for families in the future

Further information about our project study for specialist and policy programme use

During the project, we conducted a study, entitled “When a Family Member Becomes Radicalised: Violent Extremism Prevention and Family Support Activities in Six Western European Countries”.

This project study highlights the experience of families, presents some of the needs for support measures and discusses the questions of how the prevention of violent extremism has been organised and implemented in various European countries and what lessons and experiences can be useful in Finland. The study also discusses the importance of the roles of communities and families when we think about the factors that are protective against radicalisation or consider the best ways to support separation from extremist movements and thinking. The project study supports the building of a factual basis to support the follow-up work of the authorities, organisations and communities and offers experiences and best practices to strengthen these measures. The study highlights some new points of view on how in the area of prevention and support measures, we should consider the wider communal and social context.

Read the study [here](#).



The final seminar brings experts together to discuss the results and recommendations for the future

In June, we organised a seminar for specialists and cooperative parties, presenting a study conducted during the project in 2020-2021, entitled “When a Family Member Becomes Radicalised: Violent Extremism Prevention and Family Support Activities in Six Western European Countries”.

On this occasion, we also presented the main results of the activities of Reach Out 3. In addition to this, the programme included specialist contributions by Dr Leena Malkki, University Lecturer at the University of Helsinki. She highlighted the need to develop practical work in ways that take into account both the scientific debate and the effective practices, but also the social debate and the operational environment. Dr Malkki emphasised that international research raises the importance of the social network to the very heart of the radicalisation process, but that more attention and resources should be devoted to making the positive influence of families and close relationships on the process of separating from extremist movements and returning to the community and society more effective. Among other things, the work of Reach Out supported the national modelling for organising long-term support for children returning from combat zones, as well as their loved ones. This model was presented at the seminar by Dr Laura Yliruka, Development Manager at the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL).

Conclusions and key results

The impact of COVID-19 on project work and results: Experiences and lessons learned

The activities of Reach Out 3 were planned in cooperation with the stakeholders and cooperation partners in 2019 when the prospects of a COVID-19 pandemic and how it would change the world and the everyday lives of billions of people in 2020 were nowhere on the horizon.

The project was launched in February 2020, when the first signs of the new virus reached people’s awareness and gained space in the news. It soon became clear that carrying out the work and activities would have to be re-considered, so with the support of the steering group, we decided to digitise

all project activity. In practice, this meant that the planned working methods and timetables for everything from the research material collection methods to the courses and dialogue activities to be conducted, as well as the materials and tools used to support them, changed significantly. The changes were implemented in a planned and structured way in good cooperation with our partners and funder.

Good cooperation and communication contributed significantly to the full achievement of the project goal—in part, substantially exceeding it. As a significant addition to the project, we planned and produced the content for 24 teaching sessions and launched a full university course. The added value of increased cooperation between the Academy and practical agencies is great, so we can further such knowledge-based collaboration that takes the premises of practical work into account.

The success of the overall result reflects the influence of the cooperation networks that were built in previous project periods and the confidence that enabled us to plan and carry out the collaboration with flexibility. Although the COVID-19 pandemic brought many challenges, it also allowed us to reconsider the work practices of Reach Out and develop new kinds of instruments and partnerships. One example of this is the case management-supporting animated video “When a Concern Arises”, which was developed to support digital work and for use as training material. The video allows multilingual communication and, compared with conventional printed material, better dissemination of information through the communications media. Furthermore, from the peace work point of view, we gained valuable experience in collaboration and the organisation of safe dialogue spaces through digital tools. These will also be used in the future.

During the project period, the funder carried out a financial and operational project audit which concluded that both the work and the objectives of the activities of Reach Out were fulfilled despite the significant challenge brought by the COVID-19.

Reach Out recommendations

- Build a factual basis and learn together from the experiences and best practices of international work.
- Taking families and their experience and need for support to the heart of planning support measures is important so that families can receive timely support that meets their needs.
- Cooperation mobilises everyone's competence and point of view to the work process, increasing effectiveness.
- Support family and peer support activities because they know the issues and can be involved in building solutions.
- Raising awareness among both professionals and the general public will increase confidence and reduce the phenomenon-related stigma that prevents people from finding their way to the appropriate services.
- Build local cooperation and networks. Seek and find help. Meet people in their communities.
- Develop ways of evaluating the effectiveness of the work together.

The project organised the following activities

- 4 community counsellor training sessions together with local cooperation networks in Oulu, Turku, Helsinki and Tampere. These networks coordinate work for the prevention of radicalisation and extremism in extensive cooperation with the responsible authorities and civil society, such as organisations and religious communities. The total number of participants: 51
- 1 training in Timeout dialogue; the number of participating cooperative parties: 19
- 2 Timeout discussions on violent extremism and its impacts on people's daily lives; the number of participants: 16
- 1 dialogue between young people and the authorities in cooperation with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Ministry of the Interior. The number of participants: 40
- 1 dialogue between young people and the media
- 4 steering group meetings
- 1 university course consisting of 24 teaching sessions for 17 students
- 1 project study covering 6 countries, involving 19 interviews and going through hundreds of pages of material and dozens of interviews and documents
- 1 final seminar with 56 participants and cooperative parties

