

105 - Policy Paper



HEADS-UP

IO5 - Policy Paper – Heads Up

Introduction

HEADS UP is a project funded by the EU's Erasmus+ fund running from September 2017 to August 2019. It has developed educational tools and resources to inform and enlighten teachers and front-line workers dealing with young adults at risk of online threats and radicalisation.

The eight project partners are:

- Creative Exchange (UK)
- AKLUB (Czech Republic)
- Cardet (Cyprus)
- Dante (Croatia)
- Future in Perspective (Ireland)
- Innoventum (Finland)
- Jaitek (Spain)
- StoryTellMe (Portugal)

Partners contributed to the content of this paper through their responses to a short questionnaire that explored the benefits to individuals and organisations participating in the project as well as the impact on the stakeholders and end users. In addition, delegates at the Heads Up Final Conference, held in June 2019, were asked for feedback on the event and resources.

Further information and access to free resources developed by the partners can be found through the [Heads Up Website](#).



What are the issues?

The internet is now the leading entertainment and research platform having taken over from conventional media forms such as TV, newspapers, books and magazines. Most people carry a smart phone and have access to tablets or laptops and, therefore, have constant online access. Social media platforms are easy to use, free and fast, enabling individuals and organisations to reach into every home and to target their messages to millions.

This virtual cosmos provides unlimited opportunities for sexual predators, political and quasi-religious fanatics, and Internet trolls intent on grooming young people who are most often the primary target audience. Extremist organisations have developed calculated and sophisticated strategies to radicalise, recruit and even train people through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube and online gaming – there is a radicalised version of Grand Theft Auto.

There is a perception that those at risk of radicalisation are vulnerable, poorly educated and disadvantaged young people but research has found that the demographics in relation to religion, age, sex, education and financial backgrounds vary. However, what has been found is that many become radicalized in response to emotive messages and visuals and through frustration or outrage at perceived injustice or inequality. Potential candidates for recruitment and radicalisation often make themselves known by ‘liking’ a particular post, donating to a cause, downloading information or even searching a particular topic.

Terrorist organisations are experts in engaging with these sympathisers by developing a relationship, often ‘love bombing’ the individual with positive and encouraging messages and fostering a sense of belonging and community. Like marketing companies, these organisations will research profiles, identifying age, background and interests then use the information to befriend and manipulate the targeted person.

Who will benefit?

These are all issues that front line educators and youth workers are expected to address with their target groups. Young adults need support in any type of education but the vast and ever developing online world poses many challenges and potential dangers.

How will we help?

HEADS UP aims to build the skills of front-line workers through in-service training and a series of simulated videos that explicitly demonstrate those online threats. This practical, user friendly set of resources will enable educators to support their target groups more effectively by teaching them how to identify and address potential radicalisation and grooming tactics.

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The Impact Achieved by Heads Up

The Heads Up Project has raised awareness of what radicalisation is and highlighted the factors that can lead an individual or a group of people to radicalisation. Their approach was supported by partners creating and disseminating resources to relevant stakeholders including schools, parents, front line educators and youth workers.

Creating and evaluating resources has drawn more attention to the topic within the youth sector. For example, through evaluation at each stage of the resource development, partners found that *“youth workers, teachers and also parents have a better understanding of online surfing and online engagement and the dangers that comes with it,”* now knowing how to put preventative measures in place.

Another effective way Heads Up achieved impact was its involvement with key figures relating to youth. Teachers, youth workers, community leaders and members provide a pathway to reaching young people in a safe way to engage them in discussions about radicalisation. A key example provided by one of our partners in Ireland was that they engaged young actors in filming the simulation resources. They stated that:

“By involving local community members in developing the idea for these simulation resources and then in the production of the videos and activities that accompany them, we achieved a real impact among local community members. The impact achieved meant that their awareness of radicalisation and of how young people are vulnerable to online threats was raised. We have since had discussions with youth workers and front-line educators who are interested in using the Heads Up simulation resources and training package in their work with young people, communities and parents to raise awareness of radicalisation, and to prevent radical behaviours and attitudes being cultivated, especially where we are situated in the border region of Ireland. With the threat of violence which looms in this region with the Brexit crisis, it's important that front-line workers are empowered and supported to tackle radical tendencies developing in young people in this region.”

This demonstrated that producing resources that reflect the target demographic in a realistic way was an effective way of engaging with young people. This strategy opened up opportunities to discuss with youth workers and front-line educators who were interested in using Heads Up simulation resources and training packages with young people, parents and communities.

In addition, Heads Up provided the opportunity to further maximise long-lasting impact through use of these relationships by providing opportunities for personal and professional development. Partners have stated that front line educators, teachers and youth workers had an increased positive mental health, and positive attitude towards others. This coincided with their increased knowledge of modern 'recruitment' as part of radicalisation.



Furthermore, parents gained a deeper understanding of online surfing and online engagement. These included *“the threats posed by radicalisation ... Safety and security, social cohesion and the promotion of family values in online environments.”*

Measuring the impact

Partners measured the impact in different ways in order to gain an accurate picture of the effectiveness of both the resources developed and their practical use. Evaluation questionnaires were provided for participants after workshops to seek improve future delivery and to help build a better relationship with parents and educators.

Digital media was used to measure awareness and attention on the Heads Up project. There was an increase in number of views and reach on social media. For an example, one partner found their simulation videos had nearly 700 views on YouTube (by April 2019). They said:

“We measured the impact quantitatively through the number of views our simulation resources have received in YouTube - almost 700 views now between both videos, and also in the number of enquiries we have received from front-line educators and youth workers in our region about using these training materials.”

Impact was also measured through word of mouth and the conversations partners have had with young people and parents. Parents in particular, mentioned how they are more aware of the threat of radicalisation through their involvement in this project. This kind of response was possible through the safe spaces provided by partners in the way workshops and seminars were delivered.

There were also hands-on measurements based on the reach of, and responses from small group discussions with different stakeholders in the field of youth work. In addition there were significant of enquiries received regarding the use of resources.

One partner said that the *“impact was measured by carrying out evaluations with parents and educators. In Cyprus both of these were positively received and were found to be useful since there are no similar resources available.”*

A Final Conference held in Brighton in the UK in June 2019 was attended by over 75 delegates whose feedback reflected on both the challenges raised and the potential of using the Heads Up resources.

I have learnt...

“That grooming and radicalisation is far more wide reaching than people consider”

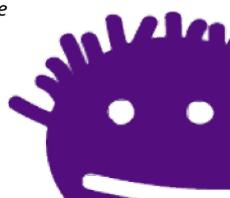
“To look at the bigger picture when it comes to vulnerability and how to better approach the topics of radicalisation and grooming.”

“lots about types of radicalisation in different countries”

there are “Innovative materials to help with radicalisation”

“there is a huge need for this kind of information to be made available”

“I can get materials to my groups and talk about it”



“...about the reach and scale of radicalisation and how it impacts on different communities.”

“Diverse range of issues in different countries”

“Raise my awareness of online grooming and radicalisation issues”

“Ways to have the conversations and raise awareness. Looking forward to seeing the resources developed in more detail online.”

“This was a proof of how this topic is important all over Europe”

In addition, delegates were asked about the actions they would consider taking following the information received at the Heads Up Conference:

“It will no doubt inform my clinical practice. I also made some valuable contacts who have already helped me in developing the impact and inclusion of both services I work for.”

“Consider our overall strategy for supporting parents/carers around internet safety within our team, use some of the resources and ideas to inform our practice”

“Discuss with manager and wider teams the need to have a clear strategy to support families and protect children and young people.”

“feedback ... to my team and hopefully they will give more consideration to grooming when working with adults and their families, and know how to report it.”

“Look at the online materials and send them out within my own organisation”

“I will look online at the resources and see if I can use them in my youth and community work. I am about to embark on a project with 7 year-olds and young people to prepare them for secondary school”

The potential for further development of Heads Up

Through our survey conducted in April where we asked our partners a number of questions to help evaluate the Heads Up project, partners have suggested that one way to improve the project is to develop it with a broader view of the problem. One response suggested to emphasise less that radicalisation is mainly connected to Islam and include more focus on other leading factors including the far-right threat. This was supported by more than one partner where they advised that one way of continuing the project is to approach it with *“the broader view of the problem, namely factors of discrimination that often leads to isolation and interaction with radical movements.”*

This mention of isolation has been discussed by other partners with one leading to the suggestion that the project could be adapted to reach vulnerable adults *“who are equally as susceptible to self-radicalisation online”*. These suggestions indicate investing in the Heads Up project even further so users will have an all-rounded and insightful experience of improving their awareness on radicalisation.



Another recommendation includes to make it more dynamic such as to

“offer an interactive online platform for community participation and ... offer an interactive roadmap that educators and parents can use to better understand the causes of radicalisation as well as methods of addressing these”.

The success from the simulation videos has paved the way to the idea of creating digital mediums to help engage with target demographics as well as supporting front-line educators through opportunities to gain skills and experience. This will provide a long-lasting impact as they will be more empowered to take initiative to support their peers, helping to build a safe environment (such as schools, youth and community centres) for vulnerable people. One of our partners stated the following:

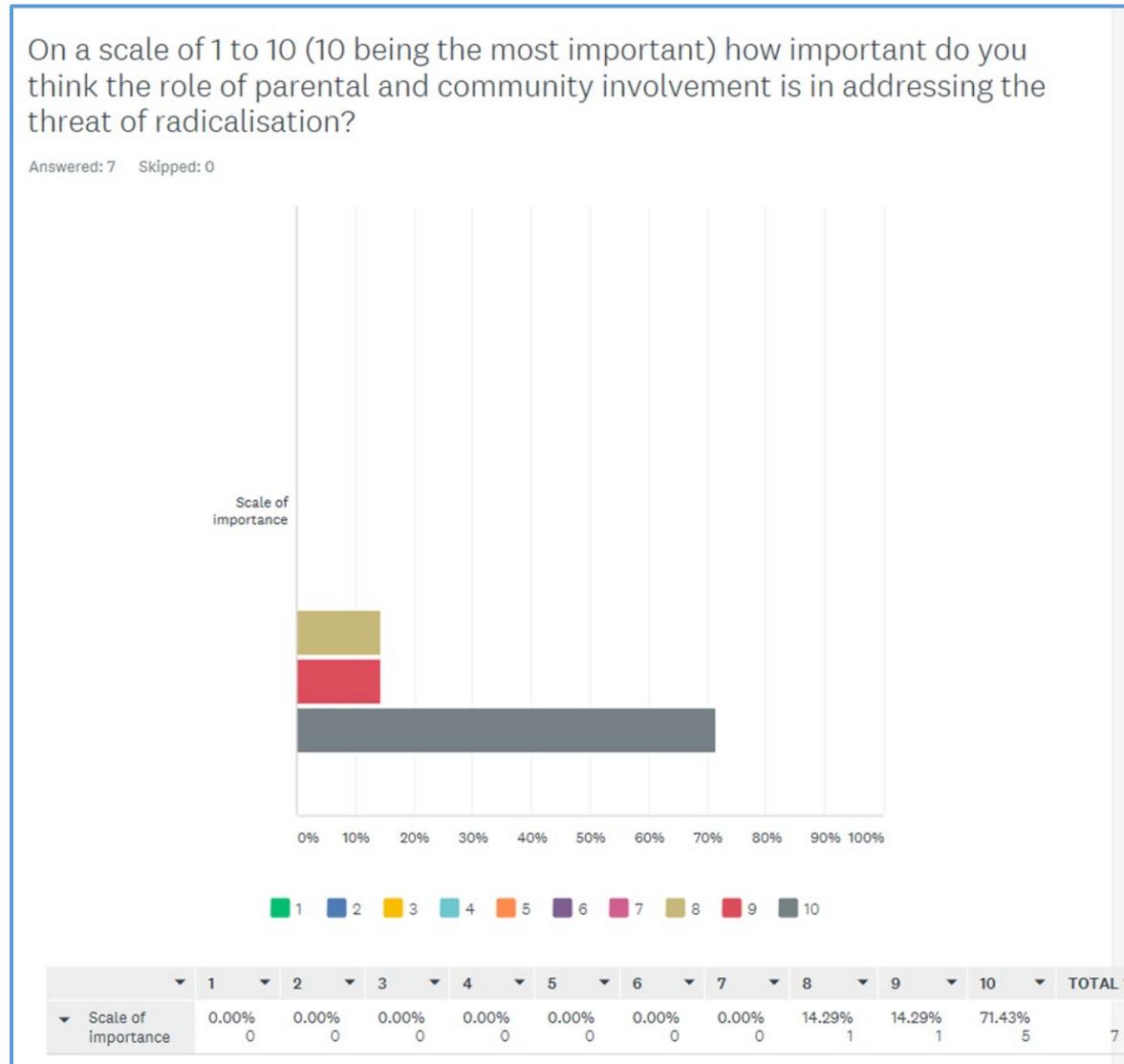
“I think training the youth workers and front-line educators to create their own simulation resources would be a significant development for the Heads Up model. At the moment, they are interested in learning about radicalisation and raising awareness among young people; but if we could provide up-skilling opportunities for them to be able to work with their young people to produce their own simulation resources, this would be a huge added value and benefit for the youth workers. It would also mean that they could use digital media as a medium to raise awareness about radicalisation among young people through embedded-learning techniques. It would also be a creative and immersive way for young people to conduct their own research into radicalisation, to brainstorm their own scenarios, and to engage in authentic learning where they can create their own messages to prevent the spread of radicalisation online.”

These views were taken on board in the preparations for the Heads Up Final Conference. The Keynote Speaker, Lorin LaFaye from the Breck Foundation spoke movingly of her personal experiences and mission to change the perceptions and reactions of front line agencies. The input from each of the eight project partners then provided information relevant to each situation that covered the broad scope of different threats. The perceived focus on the Islamic issue did not take centre stage, showing that the partners had reflected on initial feedback and broadened their perspective.



The role of parental and community involvement

In the April survey presented to our partners, we asked the following question: How important do you think the role of parental and community involvement is in addressing the threat of radicalisation?



The results showed that the role of parents and the community were rated highly. Our partners provided the following reasons for this. See below for their comments.

“Parents and community together form the support and safety net that should take the responsibility of preventing people from “falling out” of society and on the paths of radicalisation. In practice, friends are often an important part of this network, but this should not be their role and responsibility, hence 9 out of 10. Also, community and parents guided by the community, should set the role models to follow.”



“Only through the interaction of family and community can we include the younger generations who feel displaced and subject to external and radical influences.”

“It's very important for parents to be informed about what is going on in the online environment, how it works and to know how to secure children in the online environment, and to understand different types of radicalisation. Secondly, their contribution in raising a child's confidence, feeling of warmth, understanding, and stability is the main foundation for building a strong individual who will be hard to influence by radicalisation.”

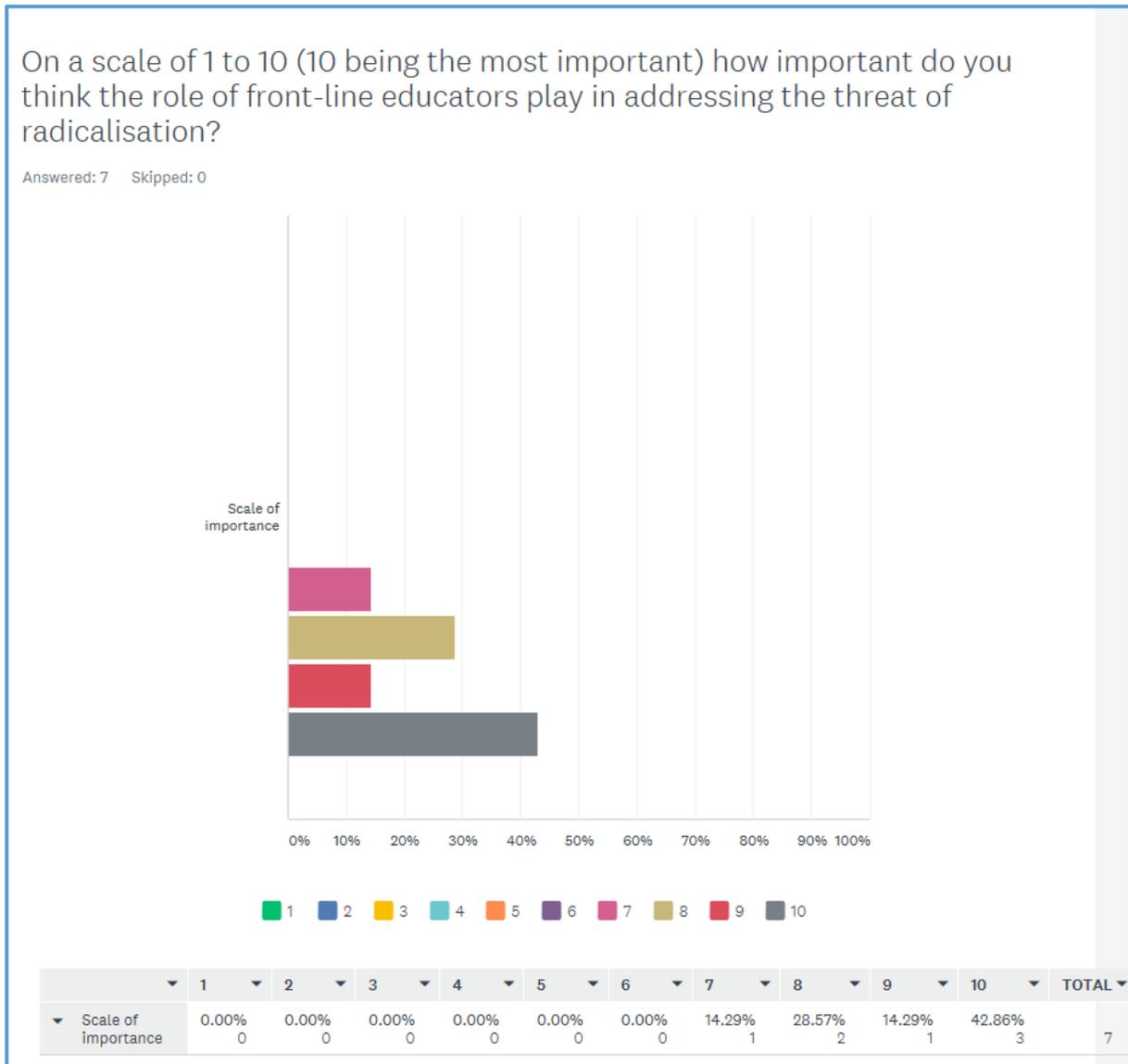
“It is incredibly important for parents and the whole community to be involved in addressing radicalisation because preventing radicalisation online will take considerable effort and it needs the buy-in from all community members. As our research identified, spreading radicalisation most often happens in social, familial, religious and political circles - as such, in order to stamp out instances of radicalisation, it requires that the awareness of radicalisation is raised among whole communities and that all involved are aware of the threats of radical thoughts, behaviours and actions.”

The comments show a wide range of views and reasons from our partners but a key reason why parents and community were rated so highly was from the understanding that parents and community are rooted in responsibility and power. They are responsible and have the power to influence and put preventative measures in place for a young person. Thus, it is largely necessary to focus on working parents and local communities to help build their knowledge about radicalisation and create resources for them that they can use as part of their network and support system.



The role of front-line educators' involvement

We asked a similar question with this time asking our partners about front-line educators.



This showed that front-line educators, while rated highly were not as key as parents and community members. However, we can safely accept that their role is still highly important to the Heads Up project.

“The front-line educators form the professional body of people who are in contact with the people in the risk of racing radicalisation and have an understanding of the world these people live in. Their work should be supported by providing more resources, and their voices heard in the policy-making processes.”

“Schools are key institutions to strengthen resilience and prevent youngsters from being attracted to radical ideologies and organizations. What is more, front line educators are often among the first to note possible signs of radicalisation and are important interlocutors



for those affected, so they must be heard in the construction of measures adjusted to their realities.”

“After the family, they are the first ones in line to be in touch with children. That is why their role is very important to raise awareness of dangers of the online environment, to teach critical thinking, and to notice if radicalisation already happened so they have prepared steps for how to react.”

“Radicalisation is a complex, multi-faceted, current societal phenomenon which requires a multi-agency approach for its effective prevention. This includes the equal contribution of parents, the community, school leaders, members of civil society, educators, peers and governmental agencies.”

“The answer is similar to question 6. However, front line educators are different to parents as most young people think their parents are “uncool”. This is where a FLE (front line educators) could have an advantage. They could be someone that is mature but could also have the respect of the young people. This could prove useful.”

The comments show that front-line educators are a part of key institutions in society and that it is important to include them in the Heads Up model in order to work with young people. They are in contact with young people on a day to day basis and are seen as people that young people may feel more comfortable to speak to about their issues.

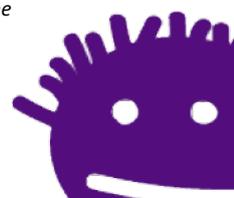
The experience of the project partners

In our April survey, we asked our partners about what they liked best and least about the Heads Up project. Overall, the main positive feedback from them was that the project helped them gain a deeper understanding of what radicalisation actually is and how different the situations, and the forms of radicalisation can be even within the EU. Another includes the output of the project such as the positive effect it has had so far with local communities.

However, partners have stated that *“there is still more to be addressed and a multi-agency approach involving more members from society would ensure an all-rounded prevention.”* This informs us that with the right adjustments to the Heads Up model, the project will have a wider impact in society.

“I liked the scope of the different targets, it is a project very well built and executed, with immense resources adapted to the targets. The partnership has always worked as a whole, respecting all expected deadlines and objectives. It is a successful project and extremely useful these days.”

“We firmly believe that young people make up the basis of any successful society and that they are our society's future. To become stable individuals that our community rests on, they need to have developed critical thinking skills, they need to constantly question the information and messages they receive, and they need to feel like they belong to that



community as well. If they have developed questioning and critical skills, they will not be as easily swayed or manipulated with. We believe that this project is one of the best means of actually achieving that goal and that is why we see it having a valuable and positive impact in our context. We hope that the results of the project will be visible even after the end of the project once we have reached the target groups who have recognized the importance of carrying out this type of education among young people.”

“A strength of the Heads Up project is the development of training programmes which have been guided by experts in the field and in the context of an EU-wide effort. A weakness of the EU project is that it marks the beginning of what is required to effectively address the social and complex phenomenon of radicalisation. There is still more to be addressed and a multi-agency approach involving more members from society would ensure an all-rounded prevention.”

“The engagement with the local community really helped to create a sense of ownership of the project on a local level and also helped us to raise awareness among the community about radicalisation.”

Recommendations

The Heads Up project has been successful in its impact within communities as well as supporting key figures in its fight against radicalisation (such as parents, youth workers and teachers) through a wide-range of communications. From the survey conducted in April, there are a number of recommendations proposed to help Heads Up create further impact.

- **Focus on parents and family groups to achieve the biggest impact:**
The survey results indicate that the role of parents is most important to prevent radicalisation, thus the next step for Heads Up is to focus more on how to engage with parents further.
- **Adapt resources further to meet local needs.**
Including local participation in creating resources such as videos led to greater ownership leading to a higher chance of longer lasting impact.
- **Focus on a variety of factors that contribute to radicalisation**
The project developed to find less focus on contextualisation of radicalism within Islam and allowed for a wider understanding of other factors worth considering such as the threat of the far right threat heightened by nationalism.





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