



YARPSE CONFERENCE REPORT 7 November – 8 November, Rome, Italy Organised and led by Fare network

1.0 Introduction

Niels van Muijden (Fare network and YARSPE Project Coordinator) introduced the **YARSPE (Youth Anti Radicalisation through Sport in Europe)** project. The project, funded by the European Union, aims to prevent radicalisation among youth at risk by organizing sport activities with a focus on young people aged 15 – 30 years in communities at risk.

YARSPE has a multidimensional, proactive and positive approach to radicalisation that focuses on collaborations between different actors, combating isolation and helping young people from identified communities at risk to take part in sport and leisure activities.

YARSPE seeks to create tools for coaches, teachers and sport associations to prevent radicalisation among youth by cooperating with local organisations (partners), institutions and public authorities, and, prevent discrimination of all forms by organising sport activities for youth at risk of radicalisation.

YARSPE has 5 main phases including, comparative research of the national contexts, Increasing the resilience of key actors working with youth, increasing the resilience of youth from communities at risk and valorisation and dissemination.

The main results/ outputs include a comparative research and stakeholders mapping, a handbook of good monitoring and coaching sport tools of young people at risk of radicalisation, ten digital animated stories of people that were part of extremists groups and were at risk of radicalisation but managed to break the cycle of violence and extremism, a training course template, an analytical report of the risk of radicalisation merging theory, policy and practice on the topic.

The long term expected results:

1. Coaches, teachers and youth workers will be better equipped with knowledge, skills and tools to identify and support youth at the risk of being radicalised,



2. The level of marginalised youth feeling excluded and isolated decreases as a result of being active in team sports
3. Youth are less vulnerable to the far-right group narratives and have developed critical thinking and counter narratives to radicalisation
4. New collaborations and networks are formed between the key actors that lead to an improvement of the prevention policies of youth at risk of radicalisation.

YARSPE is coordinated by Fare network Stichting (Netherlands) together with the following partners, GEA Societa' Cooperativa Sociale (Italy), Inex SDA (Czech Republic), Szubjektív Értékek Alapítvány (Hungary) and Fundacja dla Wolności (Poland).

The YARPSE consortium shared the main results of the project at the final conference and held discussions, through panel sessions, and presentations, which saw speakers highlight the issue of youth radicalisation and prevention, as well as how sports can be useful in countering radicalisation. A copy of the YARSPE Handbook of Good Practices was handed out to all participants.

2.0 Panel discussion 1: Preventing radicalisation

Loris Vezzali from the Romania Football Federation highlighted that the notion of radicalisation is quite broad and too complex to be stated in simple terms during the panel discussion. There are different types of radicalisation and approaches based on geographical location, creating an ambiguity without a simple solution. It is important to tackle radicalisation not only in sport, but also beyond. Specific situations require specific approaches, and the solutions should be based on an institutional level.

Donatelli Minelli from CONI/Sport e Salute School of Sport discussed how rejection from their own groups can make young people more susceptible to joining radical organisations. She believes that the key to tackling radicalisation centres around having well-informed coaches who can form positive relationships with young people to influence them.

She highlighted that sport, and the society have the responsibility to tackle radicalisation mainly through education and financing, supporting initiatives that involve young people in football activities, teaching them about preventing radicalisation and the need for justice, and helping them integrate into society, can help prevent radicalisation.

The funding from the European Union played a big part in engagement, with 700 million designated to refurbishing and redesigning infrastructure, whilst 300 million is designated towards extra support for school facilities.

The redevelopment of the disadvantaged areas supports the improvement and quality of the community at large.

Houssin Bezzai, a former professional football player and current programme manager racism en discrimination at the KNVB (Dutch FA) emphasised the



importance of the "Legends" concept, which involved using athletes acting as role models to engage with young people in disadvantaged areas. This approach makes a personal connection with young people and increased the likelihood that of their engagement in sports and sharing their sense of relatability to their peers. He pointed out that the "Legends" concept helped to fill the void from football players, who often hesitated to discuss contentious issues like radicalisation out of concern for their careers or for the possibility of racist or violent attacks on their personas.

He also highlighted the rising phenomenon of violence online on most of the common social media channels, which unfortunately is difficult to police. Both sporting and educational initiatives have created many tools, good practice guidelines and measures that enable athletes to learn and share their experiences.

Reyes Bellver from Bellver Sports stressed the importance of creating safe spaces for athletes within society and to report discrimination and educate those causing issues to prevent radical behaviours. This guidance also helps to prepare athletes to speak up and spread awareness on issues related to discrimination.

The EU defines radicalisation leading to violent extremism as the process whereby a person accepts the use of violence to achieve political, ideological, or religious goals, including violent extremism and terrorism. Unfortunately, this presented a legal challenge, on one hand, data protection aimed to safeguard personal information, and on the other hand evidence collecting seeks to gather data to support legal, regulatory and investigatory activities.

She emphasised the importance of designing the legal framework and strategies in collaboration with respective stakeholder.

Rafal Pankowski, from Poland, presented the keynote speech summarised below.

Rafal emphasised the importance of the recognising the content of radicalisation and discussed several topics, including the new governing coalition in Italy and the internationalisation of far-right radicalisation.

The new governing coalition in Italy, which included the far-right party Lega, had been criticised for its anti-immigrant stance, with experts believing it could contribute to the radicalisation of far-right groups and promote collaboration with other far-right groups in Europe, which could further exacerbate the problem. In addition, the coalition ignores the importance of addressing discrimination and exclusionary policies.

He focused on the Ukrainian war that impacted many of its neighbouring countries, such as Poland, where several refugees settled, in need of integration into their new societies. The Legia Warsaw Stadium was transformed into a centre for helping migrants, offering them a sense of community, where the Polish gave them hope and a temporary solution out of their challenging situation.

He believed that global cooperation is needed to fight against the globalization of extremism and called for critical reflection and action against events and organizers



that promote extremism. He cited Polish Ekstraklasa's (Polish top flight football league) lack of action regarding Janusz Walus (a convicted criminal for racially motivated murder) and the positive impact of EURO 2012 on Poland and Ukraine. He emphasised the need for sustainability and continued action on the institutional level after such big events and tournaments, with missed opportunities at the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia and the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar.

He concluded his keynote speech by highlighting the importance of employing global collaboration to tackle the globalisation of extremism.

3.0 Panel discussion 2: Stories from the field

Jannes deCock from Aktos highlighted that the idea that sport serves a greater purpose in society has a benefit for everyone.

He reported that his organisation started a boxing club to get young people interested, build relationships among them, and provide them with a secure place to express themselves and feel successful in a community where they might otherwise feel excluded. However, due to the perception of boxing as a violent sport, they had to persuade people of its value. Boxing, like other sports, attracted individuals who formed a network that extended beyond the sport itself.

The objective of the program was to provide individuals with a sense of belonging in society where they can thrive to the best of their abilities.

Paola Cosma from Meticcio Football Club reported that youth in underprivileged communities were highly susceptible to influence, and it was important to establish a shared sense of identity among them to prevent radicalisation stemming from a sense of belonging.

Sport fosters a sense of community as it serves as a universal language for young people as they demonstrate teamwork. She added that this in turn plants a seed for a new type of citizenship.

Dolores Galindo Fontán from Dragones de Lavapiés highlighted the importance of establishing a sense of identity because many young people face similar challenges. It is very encouraging to create a space where the young people can come together, leaving behind issues such as violence, poverty, and prejudice, to join a constructive community, for instance presenting the opportunity to be a part of a sports club.

In highly multinational programmes, citing an example of a programme with 370 children but with over 50 different nationalities, she highlighted that sports especially provided a tool for inclusion and integration.

She stressed that it was more effective to educate the young people on radicalisation, and encourage inclusion and integration, to prevent future occurrences.

Krzysztof Jarymowicz from Fundacja dla Wolności addressed the challenges faced when attempting to integrate refugees within sports.



He pointed out that the influx of refugees created challenges around reintegration and establishing a society with common ideals.

Cultural and language barriers created feelings of isolation and exclusion for refugees making it difficult to adapt and feel comfortable within the sports team in host countries.

Financial and legal constraints, which vary in different countries, present challenges for refugees to afford access to sports as well as sports equipment which impacts on their participation in sports.

Many refugees face psychological trauma before and during their journey to the host country making impacting on their confidence and motivation and making it challenging for them to enjoy and fully engage in sports.

Sport, however, is an effective tool that welcomes newcomers to naturally adopt its principles, promoting their interaction with others and sense of belonging. He highlighted that sport did not change the system but filled the gaps.

4.0 YARSPE Project Results

Vendula Divišová (YARSPE project researcher) reported that the project collaborates with different organisations, institutions, and public authorities to develop tools that coaches, teachers, and sport associations can use to prevent youth from being radicalised. The project is aimed at combating discrimination and various forms of extremism by organizing activities for at-risk young people.

She reported that the project adapted the working definition of radicalisation provided by the Centre for the Prevention of Radicalisation Leading to Violence, which defines radicalisation as the process by which individuals who hold extremist beliefs or who are associated with this belief system intend to use, encourage, or otherwise facilitate violence in order to advance their ideologies.

The partner organisations from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Italy had complete control over how they recruited their participants and defined this group of people who were at risk of radicalisation. It was not possible to assess the effectiveness of countering radicalisation using, say, proxy variables. The youth at risk of radicalisation, their in-depth knowledge of their local neighbourhood, and all the various push and pull factors that are at play in their respective cities presented the main focus of the project.

Sport can help prevent radicalisation in five different contexts: social spaces, social safety, education, resilience, and empowerment. However, YARPSE places a strong emphasis on education, safety, and social spaces. The creation of safe places and social safety involves much more than just securing a secure physical location, though that is certainly crucial. It also entails making sure that those areas are free from prejudice and exclusion and that individuals may confide in one another without fear of repercussions. Social inclusion involves relationships between people of



various backgrounds, therefore once more; it involves fostering friendships, teamwork, and respect among those from various backgrounds.

Education presents a resource for teaching youth about various push-pull elements that lead to radicalisation as well as various methods empowering them with the resilience to protect themselves from being drawn to violent extremism and from being enlisted by various violent extremist organisations. This also helps them develop life and social skills that will improve their social and economic mobility in the long run.

Observational results

The results measured differed slightly from original expectations. For the outcome in the safe space field, the trainers reported that the interviews they conducted revealed that the young people had some tension between them, minor conflicts, but gradually built trust with each other and felt comfortable speaking up and expressing their feelings. The project partners concluded that it was crucial to create a space free from exclusion and discrimination because this directly affected their social inclusion and risk to radicalisation.

The trainers observed that the ability of the young people to create new friends and collaborate with one another to achieve common goals showed an improvement in confidence and integration. She highlighted the importance of taking note of the time and space dimensions of these activities were strongly tied to these changes.

As partner organisations transferred skills like communication, conflict resolution, and improvement in emotional intelligence, it became harder to measure positive development in empowerment or resilience.

However, the partners were unable to really tell whether empowerment or resilience had increased because this is something that can only be observed over a longer period of time. YARSPE and similar projects presented a great opportunity to exchange good practices and share experiences, but it was also important to consider what could come afterwards, as resilience and empowerment took much longer to build.

5.0 Workshop sessions

As part of the conference, three workshops were presented in one-hour sessions which allowed participants to attend two workshop sessions.

Workshop 1. Online hate speech by Loukas Anastasiadis from Fare network and Federico Laface, Izadora Silva Pimenta and Daniel Kilvington, Fare network experts

The objectives of the workshop included, raising awareness about the prevalence of hate speech and discrimination in various contexts, including in the online and offline environments, particularly as it relates to football and gender-based discrimination; Exploring the motivations behind hate speech and discrimination, including emotions, invisibility, anonymity, and the influence of role models; Discussing the effective



strategies for tackling hate speech and discrimination, including education and proactive measures by social media platforms and other relevant stakeholders; Encouraging participants to share their experiences and perspectives on the issue, particularly in relation to their country or region; Exploring how the Fare tool can be used to address hate speech and discrimination and how it can be applied in different contexts; Facilitating dialogue on the impact of hate speech and discrimination on various groups, including visible minorities and women; Highlighting the importance of diverse representation in football and other sports and to address the challenges faced by women in this environment, and finally encouraging participants to develop and propose solutions that can be implemented in their local context to reduce hate speech and discrimination.

Workshop 2. Grassroots sport realities working on inclusion and reduction of violence and radicalisation processes by Ansley Hofmann, Project Coordinator at INEX

The key message of the workshop was for the participants to experience the key principles needed when designing a course with the intention to have a preventive effect to radicalisation namely 'safety', 'solidarity' and 'significance'. These three components were identified in the YARSPE project as some of the key principles to design anti-radicalisation sports programmes. In the workshop the host and participants engaged in a set of activities that had the participants experience and reflect on the three core principles.

3. Workshop on the basics of social psychology in relation to discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping by Wies Dinsbach, Project Manager at Anne Frank House

A workshop on the basics of social psychology in relation to discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes. The objective of the workshop was to look into prejudice and stereotypes. The workshop included stereotypes participants have about each other's countries. Participants looked at the rationale behind prejudice and stereotypes as the workshop specifically touched upon social categorisation and how people like to put others in boxes. These boxes and categorisations can be based on images we have in our mind and can be funny and harmless. However social categories can also have negative consequences in real life and impact people negatively, it can lead to discrimination and/or negative behaviour and ideas.

People also do self categorise, we put ourselves in a group versus putting other people in a group, which is often followed by positive attributes to your own group and negative to other groups. The workshop showed how important it is to acknowledge prejudices and stereotypes and make sure this does not lead to forms of discrimination and exclusion.

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