

RELIGIOUS RADICALISATION WITHIN THE FOOTBALL ENVIRONMENT

AIM

Reduce the salience of negative group norms pertaining to the most radicalised groups and possibly create positive norms against radicalised and violent behaviours

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If religious radicalisation is found within the football environment, there are specifically two main steps which may be followed (see Figure 4):

- **Step 1. Identification of the most at risk of radicalisation groups.** First of all, groups of fans majorly prone to express radicalised beliefs within the stadium should be identified. These groups are likely to be easily spotted and recognised among the crowd. Nevertheless, effort should be made to establish a figure who could monitor group and fan dynamics during matches, as well as identify the most at risk individuals. These groups usually have an identity as well as norms they follow which are hard to change if radicalised groups are kept together. This means that allowing these groups to be “contaminated” by others, outside of their (radicalised) group (but still within the bigger group of football fans of the same team), should help shift the focus from specific (mainly negative) norms to more positive norms, thus weakening the impact of such negative norms on the group. This is a delicate phase since individuating the most radicalised portion of fans will likely secure that the most problematic groups will be included in the activities.



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- **Step 2. Break the unity within the radicalised groups and creation of a new collective identity.** Secondly, and once the most radicalised groups have been identified, the next step would be to break the unity within these groups. This should be made possible by dividing the fans within the group (the number will vary according to the number of individuals chosen to be part of such intervention), that is make different subgroups of fans who support the same team (more and less at risk of radicalisation who preferably do not know each other), work together in activities which enhance cooperation and mutual communication, with the aim of creating a new and more positive identity as well as reducing the salience of specific negative norms associated with the groups most at risk. For example, these activities may result in organised events which may include football festivals and seminars regarding the risks of radicalisation. During these events, the strength of the negative norms used by the most at risk groups of fans should be reduced and a new identity should emerge (see figure 5).

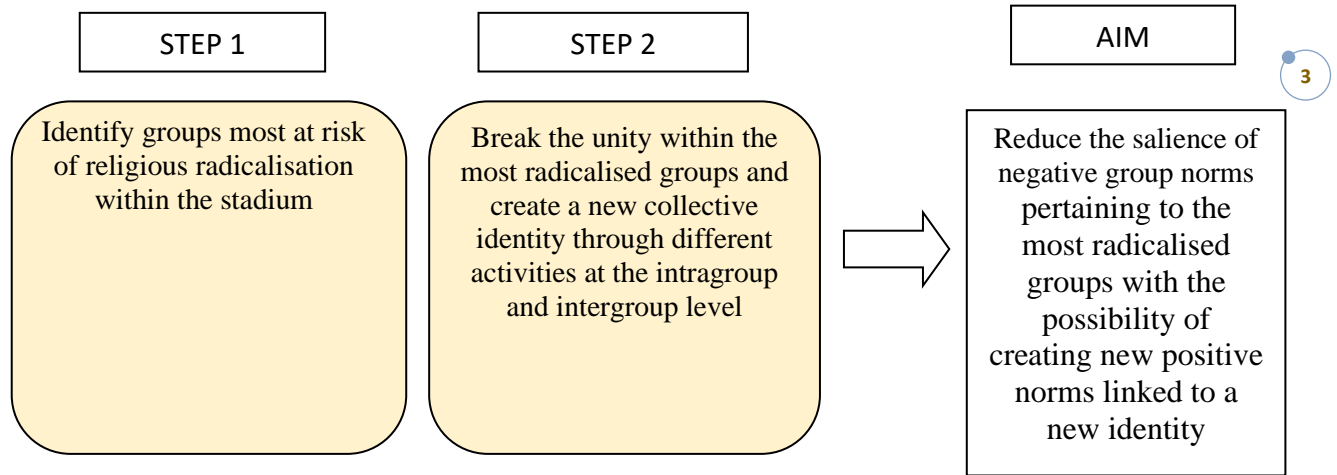
Importantly, activities which may be carried out within the football environment should first focus on the *intragroup level*, this is carry out the activities among individuals pertaining to the same group (individuals more or less at risk of radicalisation pertaining to the same religious group) and only then extend the activities to include also individuals pertaining to different groups (mainly individuals at risk of radicalisation pertaining to different groups, in this case religious groups). As mentioned earlier, the intergroup level should be carefully considered since bringing different groups together may pose a risk for the people attending the different activities, if not monitored carefully.



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Figure 4. Hypothesised steps and aim of the Action Phase relative to religious radicalisation
“within the football environment”



A list of activities which may be included in this phase are summarised in Figure 5.



Figure 5. Example of activities which may be carried out within the football environment to fight religious radicalisation

ACTIVITIES WHICH MAY BE CARRIED OUT WITHIN THE FOOTBALL ENVIRONMENT TO TACKLE RELIGIOUS RADICALISATION

1. **Football festivals** in which different fans (more or less prone to religious radicalisation) play in mixed teams
2. **Family activities** where fans may also spend quality and positive time with their children organising football festivals
3. **Discussion** among football fans on possible problems and suggestions for improving well-being and positive engaging of football fans
4. **Seminars** relative to the topic of violence and radicalisation linked to religious radicalisation and its risks. These should be held by football clubs and fan associations (if feasible)
5. **Games:** participation at this event should allow participants to possible win free tickets for a football match.

Some activities may contribute to the creation of a new common identity (i.e., as teams supporters) between the most radicalised football fans and others which may ultimately reduce the salience of the negative norms pertaining to the most radicalised groups (see below for a more extensive discussion)

Importantly, these activities should first be carried out at the intragroup level and only then at the intergroup level (if perceived as necessary and feasible!)



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As can be seen in Figure 5, there are several activities which may be carried out within the football environment.

- **Football festivals:** they provide football fans the possibility of playing in mixed teams made up of different fans (less and more prone to radicalisation) pertaining to the same team and religious group (intragroup level) or different religious groups (intergroup level, only if perceived safe!) with the aim of breaking the unity (and thus negative norms) within the most radicalised groups of fans. At the intragroup level, having the possibility of sharing a passion (being fan of a same team) with other fans (not part of the radicalised group) may offer a tool to get to know different groups of fans with the possibility of witnessing other and more positive examples of positive norms which should be used within the football environment. This aim may also be reached at the intergroup level which may include mixed teams made up of individuals pertaining to different groups (e.g., Protestants and Catholics). Recategorisation of individuals pertaining to different religious groups as being part of one team should help create a new and more positive image of groups which are usually considered different and may reduce the salience of (negative) norms which are typically used within the group. In addition, at the intergroup level, organising mixed teams where individuals pertaining to originally different groups play together may help overcome differences among individuals as they now engage in a common activity and aim for a common goal.
- **Family activities:** these activities may focus on providing occasions for families to use sport as a vector of family bonding. Through sport it is possible to strengthen family relationship by spending quality time within the football environment. Family



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events should aim at showing the positive side of football and teaching children how to relate with other football fans. Again, football festivals and additional activities may be organised to engage with this specific target.

- **Discussion:** this activity includes discussion among football fans and football associations on possible problems and suggestions for improving well-being and positive engaging of football fans. Again, giving football fans an active role in this sense, by organising events where to discuss on several topics concerning possible issues which fan clubs may face during football initiatives and improvements they may suggest in order to counter radicalised behaviours within the football environment should be aimed for. One example may be represented by the creation of an App which football fans may download and use to report all negative issues as well as violent situations witnessed within the stadium. The same App could be also used to report suggestions for improvements. Final aim of these discussions will not only be that of actively including fans' opinions and suggestions within football clubs' potential activities but also make fans feel part of a wider group, thus possibly creating a more inclusive positive identity.
- **Seminars:** they allow football fans and clubs to take an active role in the fight against religious radicalisation by presenting clear and focused messages against radicalisation. These seminars could include the presentation of the phenomenon with a specific focus on the football environment and its risks. Ideally, the seminars could also involve some football players as testimonials of the fight against violence and religious radicalisation.



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- **Games:** to include as more individuals as possible and incentivate their participation in the event, games (e.g., choosing from a list of possible candidate winners in a football tournament; quizzes etc.) should be included. This would allow individuals to have the possibility of winning free tickets for football matches, t-shirts and autographed footballs by football players. Incentives for making the most at risk fans participate should be discussed in advance in order to reach more individuals as possible.

In sum, some of the above-mentioned activities may contribute to the creation of a common identity (i.e., as teams supporters) between the most radicalised football fans and others, both at the intragroup level and at the intergroup level. Of course, generating a common and positive identity in the former case should be easier since, although different in their level of risk regarding radical behaviour, fans still share the same group (e.g., Protestants). Collaborating and engaging in activities at the intragroup level may also contribute, as mentioned earlier, to decrease the salience of negative group norms associated with the most radicalised groups. At the intergroup level (i.e., when different radicalised groups are present), the creation of a superordinate identity (“we are all team supporters”) may require more time and more activities since groups in this case do not share an initial same group (e.g., Protestants or Catholics). Importantly, in the case of more radicalised groups, the intergroup level should be carefully considered and specific conditions (e.g., safety) should be explored prior the decision of implementing this second step.



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The proposed activities should include football fans independent of whether radicalisation is present within the football environment or not. If the football environment is not familiar with radicalisation issues, football fans should still be included in the activities carried out outside of the football environment since sports, and especially football, may represent an important link with the community and a way to reach a wider audience.



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