# Online radicalisation of minors in France exposes growing extremist threat



A recent case in France has highlighted the escalating concern over the online radicalization of minors, revealing how young children can be exposed to and influenced by violent extremist content through digital platforms. The case centres on a 12-year-old boy whose mother was shocked to discover the extent of his engagement with graphic jihadi videos and terror-related material.

According to details revealed by French prosecutors and the boy’s legal counsel, the child began his descent into extremist content after an innocent start: curiosity about Islam prompted by receiving a Quran from an aunt. This initial interest led to online searches that, aided by automated algorithms on apps, video games, and social media, increasingly exposed him to ultraviolent and extremist propaganda, particularly from Islamic State militants and similar groups. The boy’s mother told criminal investigators she was unaware of the nature of his online activities, believing he was merely playing video games or doing homework.

French prosecutor Paul-Edouard Lallois, who oversaw the boy’s conviction on two terror-related charges in August of the previous year, outlined the grave impact that exposure to thousands of extremist images had on the child's cognition and morality. "It will take years and years of work to enable this kid to recover normal bearings," Lallois said. The prosecutor expressed serious concern about the trajectory the 12-year-old was on, suggesting he might have become a "completely dehumanized soldier" capable of carrying out violent acts. The extremist content amassed by the boy included nearly 1,739 jihadi videos, some depicting brutal acts such as a man being methodically dismembered. Lallois emphasised the potential for young children to be mentally unmoored by continuous exposure to such material, warning that even before adulthood, they could be capable of committing attacks with rudimentary weapons.

This case is part of a broader and growing trend. Counterterrorism agencies worldwide report an uptick in the number of minors being radicalised and involved in terrorism-related activities. Olivier Christen, France’s national anti-terrorism prosecutor, reported a dramatic increase in the number of terror-related charges against minors in his country—from just two in 2022 to 19 in 2024. Christen noted, “Some are really very, very young, around 15 years old, which was something that was almost unheard of no more than two years ago.” He attributed this rise to the efficacy of terrorist propaganda which targets adolescents.

The concern about radicalised minors has prompted odd actions from international security networks like the Five Eyes alliance, which comprises agencies from the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. In December, the group publicly urged collective action, stating: "Radicalized minors can pose the same credible terrorist threat as adults." Similarly, France’s DGSI domestic security agency revealed that 70% of suspects detained for alleged terror-related plots are under 21. Other European nations, including Germany, Austria, and Belgium, have reported similar issues with teens involved in extremist plots or support. In Belgium, intelligence agencies disclosed that nearly a third of suspects detained for terror plotting between 2022 and 2024 were minors, with the youngest being just 13 years old.

Authorities describe how children and teenagers, adept at using digital technologies to conceal their identities, can become radicalised in a matter of months, often utilising encrypted chats and social media platforms to engage with extremist networks. A senior official from a European intelligence agency detailed how these youths "live on their phones, their tablets, their computers, in contact with people they don't know," sometimes conducting reconnaissance or learning to create explosives from online tutorials. The radicalisation process can commence innocuously, sometimes with a fascination for violent pornography or gory images, which escalates into exposure to increasingly violent content including jihadi propaganda and gruesome execution footage.

Kamel Aissaoui, the lawyer representing the 12-year-old boy, described the psychological toll of the trial on the child, who was reportedly so distressed that hearings had to be paused twice. Aissaoui emphasised that the boy was not violent by nature but rather a victim of the digital environment that enabled access to such harmful material. The boy is currently in residential care, removed from social networks, and receiving specialised educational support, with his parents maintaining visitation rights.

Officials note that those vulnerable to digital radicalization come from diverse backgrounds; some show behavioural problems or social isolation, while others may have previously exhibited no warning signs. This case and related investigations underscore the increasing challenge counterterrorism agencies face as extremist ideologies infiltrate the online spaces inhabited by younger and younger individuals.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/RAN-online-radicalisation_en.pdf> - This official EU report discusses the process and impact of online radicalization, including how minors can be exposed to violent extremist propaganda through apps, video games, and social media algorithms, corroborating the description of the 12-year-old boy’s progression into jihadist content in France.
* <https://english.aivd.nl/latest/news/2025/04/18/aivd-sees-increase-in-threat-of-online-radicalisation-minors> - The Dutch intelligence agency AIVD reports an increase in the threat of online radicalization of minors, supporting the article’s claim of a growing trend of youthful exposure to extremist content and subsequent radicalization.
* <https://www.cep-probation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Reports-on-the-EG-on-Violent-Extremism_final.pdf> - This report from an expert group meeting highlights France’s ongoing terrorism threat, including the challenge posed by minors in jihadist contexts and the country’s specific legislative and social responses to youth radicalization, reinforcing the case details and national trends presented.
* <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10454252/> - This academic article presents an in-depth interdisciplinary study of a young individual's online engagement with ISIS material, echoing the psychological and cognitive impacts on minors exposed to violent extremist content described by the French prosecutor in the article.
* <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/radicalisation-of-minors-european-union-focuses-on-prevention-and-de-radicalisation> - Europol’s coverage on the radicalization of minors across Europe supports claims about the increasing involvement of children and teenagers in extremist plots and the use of encrypted chats and social media by youths to connect with extremist networks.