

***Preventing and fighting radicalization leading to violent
extremism in Europe – the importance of local security
analyses and evaluations***

**European Forum for Urban Security (Efus) –
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Abstract

Local authorities play a key role in preventing radicalization through strategies and actions that target the population and specific local environments. However, any strategic approach must be based on evidence and before designing a strategy and initiating actions it is paramount to carry out an assessment of the local setting. The objectives of such a local audit are (1) to identify the relevant stakeholders who already work in this field or should be involved; and (2) to determine the strengths and potential of the local environment. As a unique network of 250 European local and regional authorities dedicated to urban security, the European Forum for Urban Security (Efus) has been working towards the prevention of radicalization for a number of years in conjunction with dozens of European local authorities as well as academics and practitioners. Having recently published two guidebooks on how best to establish and implement local prevention strategies, we provide a summary of their recommendations on evaluation, from identifying a local radicalization phenomenon to assessing the impact of prevention measures. The questions addressed are: What data should be collected? Who should take part in the assessment? How to evaluate the relevance of a prevention project's objectives in a given context? How to evaluate its impact and implementation?

The European Forum for Urban Security's approach to violent radicalization and actions for its prevention

The central role of local authorities

Radicalization and violent extremism are phenomena that innately call for a preventive response as no amount of repression, as necessary as it is, will ever root out the ideology and beliefs that inspire this type of crime. However, countering radicalism can only be effective when considering both the hearts and minds of the persons concerned. But how can this be achieved? As of now, most prevention policies aim at building up the resilience of individuals and groups identified as vulnerable.

Similarly, prevention must be strongly adapted to each local context/circumstances because, apart from war zones beyond Europe, it is in our cities, our neighborhoods where (predominantly) young people, often with European citizenship, are groomed by radical recruiters.

Due to their proximity to the citizens, local authorities can (some would say must) play a key role in efforts of preventing radicalization because they are strategically positioned, and they can mobilize all the relevant local stakeholders. In this respect, the European Forum for Urban Security (Efus) advocates prevention policies that, in addition to policing and justice policies, mobilize local crime prevention partnerships.

Integrating the fight against radicalization into a global prevention strategy

Since the risk factors of radicalization are similar to those leading to crime, the prevention of violent radicalization must be part of a global prevention strategy. Consequently, local authorities must be able to respond to the specific problems of violent, radicalized individuals while at the same time incorporating their prevention strategy into the local security policy.

Guaranteeing individual liberties and avoiding division of communities

Violent extremism regularly fuels calls for increased, widespread surveillance which in turn threatens fundamental liberties and the right to privacy. Efus believes that security and freedom are not opposites but interdependent, and that the indivisibility of these fundamental rights

must be preserved in the fight against all types of violent extremism. Both are the pillars of our democracies and the question is not which of them to select but how to preserve and strengthen both.

Another pitfall to avoid is bringing up certain communities against others. Strengthening social cohesion and inclusion is the only way to avoid outcasting certain groups of the population, which can in turn create a breeding ground for radicalism. Political reaction to terrorist acts must not be guided by emotion but based on rational analysis and evidence. This entails the need to communicate in a balanced and responsible manner, in particular by stressing the importance of cohesion and avoiding the stigmatization of any group of the population.

A response that is simultaneously local, national and European

Given that the propaganda tools, enrolment processes and pathways to violent radicalization are global and transnational, it is necessary that European cities adopt joint and coordinated preventive responses.

Supporting local authorities

Due to its unique position as a network of 250 European local and regional authorities dedicated to urban security, Efus plays a major role in helping its members to build up their capacity for action, thus contributing to formulating a response that is both local and European. Efus:

- enables local authorities to exchange their practices, help each other by pooling their experiences, and receive the support of experts;
- contributes to tackling the challenges faced by authorities in the fight against radicalization;
- assists in obtaining recognition for the authorities' role in the creation and implementation of national and European policies to provide tools for action;
- helps cities draft their local strategy as a complement to the strategy of other stakeholders including those at national level;
- supports the position of locally elected officials and their role among their community. In this context, training is particularly important to help locally elected officials understand and act upon a problem that is extremely complex and rapidly evolving.

Helping local authorities to set up local counter-radicalization measures: the LIAISE project (2014-2018)

Since September 2014 Efus has been leading the exchange project LIAISE (Local Institutions Against Extremism) with financial support from the European Commission. The project is aimed at helping local authorities to establish local audits of the prevention of violent radicalization.

In the first phase of the project, ten cities from six countries, the UK-based think tank “Institute for Strategic Dialogue” which is specialized in the phenomenon of extremism, and several NGOs participated.¹ Through LIAISE a training program for local stakeholders was created, encompassing both the prevention of radicalization and the processes of disengagement or de-radicalization. It included four two-day sessions on the following topics: raising awareness among actors in this field; drafting a local strategy involving different stakeholders; local approaches to disengagement and de-radicalization; local communication strategies and counter-narratives; support of families; resilience and prevention in schools.

The training modules and expert recommendations resulting from the project were described in a publication released in October 2016, titled “*Preventing and Fighting Radicalization at the Local Level*”, which was accompanied by a series of videos available online. These resources constitute a set of tools for local French and other European authorities.²

Due to the strong interest among the members of the LIAISE project, Efus set up a follow-up project which obtained EU financing as well. The project was titled LIAISE 2 with a duration of two years (2016-2017). 34 institutions from 10 European countries participated in LIAISE 2³, representing 22 cities, five regions, four national forums, and three thematic NGOs.⁴

¹ Augsburg (Germany), Brussels (Belgium), Düsseldorf (Germany), L’Hospitalet (Spain), Liege (Belgium), Malmö (Sweden), Montreuil (France), Reggio Emilia (Italy), Sarcelles (France), and Vilvoorde (Belgium). The German NGOs Ufuq e.V. and Cultures Interactive e.V. as well as the Belgian Forum for Prevention and Urban Security also contributed to the project.

² The book is available free of charge for Efus members and for a modest price for non-members. To obtain a copy please contact Efus: contact@efus.eu.

³ Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden.

⁴ Alexandroupolis, Augsburg, Bagneux, Barcelona, Bologna, Bordeaux, Brno, Brussels, Charleroi, Düsseldorf, Essen, L’Hospitalet de Llobregat, Liège, Leuven, Malmö, Montreuil, Paris, Reggio Emilia, Rotterdam, Sarcelles, Setubal, The Hague, Toulouse; the Bremen State Office for the Protection of the Constitution, the State of Bavaria, the Generalitat of Catalonia, the Departmental Council of Val d’Oise, the Belgian, French, German, and Italian Forums for Urban Security, Ufuq e.V., Cultures Interactive e.V. and the Confederation of European Probation (CEP).

The objectives of LIAISE 2⁵ were to:

- create and strengthen a European network of local authorities for the prevention of violent radicalization;
- offer training sessions to local authorities and their partners (200 local stakeholders);
- support the implementation of local strategies for the prevention of radicalization that are integrated in the overall crime prevention strategies;
- support the implementation of pilot initiatives in the partner cities;
- issue political recommendations for local, national and European decision makers.

During the duration of LIAISE 2, five European seminars were organized with regard to different aspects of radicalization. In addition, the local authorities that were involved in the project received technical and financial support to implement training and local pilot actions tailored to their needs.

Toward an evidence base: shared local audits

Adopting a strategic approach means following a plan to achieve medium and long-term goals rather than making ad hoc decisions for short-term goals. Such an approach requires up-to-date knowledge of local realities. In order to identify problems at an early stage it is therefore paramount to:

- examine the area with the aim to obtain a general representation of the demographics, economy, and other characteristics of the city (rate of poverty, school dropout, unemployment etc.). This can be achieved with the assistance of experts specialized in security issues or social needs;
- analyze the characteristics of the problem under study as well as any related concerns (magnitude, trends, distribution, and impacts);
- establish a profile of at-risk individuals or groups based on gender, age, and socio-economic characteristics;

⁵ The LIAISE 2 project recently produced a handbook that includes practical recommendations for local and regional authorities. The title of the handbook is «*Prevention of Radicalization*»; it can be purchased through Efus.

- identify the local stakeholders who work on this problem, the actions that are carried out, and, if possible, assess their impact;
- assess the political and institutional environment in order to identify opportunities for developing preventive actions;
- identify the city's strength and potential including social capital, civil society, and existing projects on which the future strategy can build.

Recruitment of relevant stakeholders

A multi-institutional partnership

Given the complexity of the problem of radicalization, the diversity of factors contributing to it, and the various domains of public policy it encompasses, it is highly recommended to involve partners from different agencies in the audit.

Involving the local population

It is also important to involve the local population and take into account their perceptions and expectations. Similarly, local residents and civil society organizations should be invited to contribute to the development of the prevention strategy and the implementation of actions. Special care must be taken to involve a representative sample of the population, including minorities.

In order to assure confidentiality, local residents who are involved in the audit should not have access to the profiles of radicalized persons. Furthermore, in order to avoid inducing fears and prejudices, it may be relevant not to focus on the term "radicalization" but rather refer to more general topics such as discrimination, relationship with institutions, sense of solidarity, etc.

Academics

Involvement of researchers and experts in the field of radicalization should be considered because:

- the academic literature on this phenomenon is very dense and constantly growing;
- the phenomenon itself is rapidly evolving (recruitment methods, propaganda, methods of attack, etc.) and requires close follow-up;

- public policies on the topic are also rapidly developing; many actions have been put in place in Europe; therefore, a description of the state of the art and a systematic review of practices can be useful;
- researchers can be involved in the audit. For example, sociological studies or ethnographic surveys may help to better understand local issues.

Gaining the trust of partners

Violent radicalization is a complex issue and stakeholders in the field often feel helpless or even insecure in their response to it. It can therefore be difficult for them to share information that may place them in an unfavorable light with their peers because this might reveal shortcomings or the need to adapt their actions. Furthermore, the information could be confidential. Gaining the trust of partners is therefore a prerequisite for carrying out an audit. It is thus required to:

- clearly state who is in charge of the process and that professionals have to be authorized by their line-managers to take part;
- explain the political expectations and objectives of the audit so that professionals know what the information will be used for;
- clearly define the level of seniority of the persons involved at the different steps of the audit as well as the required information. For example, a local stakeholder could hold information about the situation in a specific neighborhood whereas they may be less informed about the partnership between their department and other professionals. Their supervisor, on the other hand, might not have relevant information about the specific neighborhood but may be knowledgeable of their relationship with other professionals. It is important to be aware of the distribution of knowledge among persons of varying levels of seniority in order to avoid putting someone in a difficult position which could jeopardize the audit procedure;
- have a clear plan from the start so that partners can estimate the investment expected from them. Carrying out an audit of violent radicalization requires time, especially in the trust-building phase. It is therefore essential not to lose partners along the way because they feel it requires too much time and effort.

Have a common definition and common goals

Essential prerequisites for an accurate audit include agreeing on common definitions and sharing knowledge because:

- local stakeholders need to fully understand the processes of and factors contributing to radicalization to be able to provide the relevant data by assessing the scale and shape of the local problem. For example, it may be useful to explain why discrimination or a person's inability to take part in public life may constitute relevant factors.
- stakeholders must take ownership of the public policy objectives that have been set. It must be transparent whether these concern violent extremism, cognitive extremism or behaviors classified as anti-social. This must be clearly specified to allow identification of relevant indicators.
- A poor understanding of the concept of radicalization can lead to stigmatization. If professionals report behaviors or even name specific persons on the basis of poor indicators this could stigmatize people, neighborhoods, or whole communities.
- by organizing awareness-raising discussions before starting the audit, a positive group-dynamic can be established where partners are able to trust each other.

What data should be collected?

Data reflecting the presence and extent of radicalization factors in order to determine how vulnerable or resilient a city may be

These data will be particularly valuable for designing primary prevention strategies. To obtain these data a list of the main factors that can contribute to a person's radicalization is required. This could be achieved by analyzing the profiles of local individuals identified as radicalized. Furthermore, metrics which measure the local extent and shape of the phenomenon have to be developed.

Indicators of radicalization can include:

- discrimination as measured by victimization surveys, complaint rates, studies of local access to employment, demonstrations against this phenomenon, etc.;
- feedback from stakeholders about tensions / conflicts (or their increase) in schools, youth structures, sports clubs, etc.;

- existence of sites which are historically or symbolically important for extremist groups (i.e. statues of personalities, cemeteries);
- presence – actual or suspected – of violent extremism in the city (i.e. official or unofficial places of worship, groups or communities whose activities serve other purposes than those for which they were established, rumors of clandestine groups);
- analysis of extremist views, conspiracy theories, speeches advocating radical change which are held in public and / or online;
- feedback from social workers in contact with families who can share information or perceptions about other persons and their neighborhood without further permission.

Data regarding people who are radicalized or are reported as such as well as families who have asked for help with radicalization issues

These data will be particularly useful for determining secondary and tertiary prevention actions. Examples are:

- estimates of the extent of the phenomenon in the city (i.e. number of people reported, areas affected) which are particularly important to avoid either exaggeration or minimization of the problem;
- data regarding the profiles of radicalized persons or persons in the process of radicalizing, such as age, gender, area of residence, family situation, school situation etc. It is unnecessary to reveal the identities of these persons but by collecting this information (which population is the most affected, what grievances are expressed in local radicalization discourses, etc.) the prevention actions can be better targeted. It may sometimes be difficult to obtain this information which is usually held by state agencies. However, it should be possible to share these data if anonymity / confidentiality of the information is guaranteed. One example to illustrate the importance of these data is that in some areas the number of girls is higher than in other areas and also higher than the number of boys. This information shall encourage local stakeholders to set up specific actions targeting girls.

Inventory of existing actions on which the strategy can be based

Some of the prevention actions already meet the strategic objectives and should to be maintained or even strengthened; others will have to be adapted or created. It is important to retain an up-to-date inventory of existing actions not only to avoid costly duplications but also to appreciate the value of the work already carried out.

What methods should be applied?

Systematic reviews of the literature, individual interviews, working groups, and empirical studies are all methods that are commonly used for an audit.

It may be relevant to prioritize individual interviews with:

- stakeholders who are very concerned about radicalization and who are in possession of a substantial amount of information;
- stakeholders who suspect of radicalization processes and with whom it is important to discuss the issue individually.

For working groups the number of participants should be limited to approximately 20 in order to ensure that everybody can participate. Examples of questions that can be used to open the discussion are:

- Are you confronted with violent radicalization as part of your job (within your department, among the public with whom you work ...)? If so, what problems do you encounter?
- What indicators do you apply to describe the problem and measure the phenomenon?
- What are your training needs with regards to violent radicalization?
- Are you already implementing preventive actions that could be integrated in our overall anti-radicalization strategy? Or do you know of such actions?
- In your opinion, what are the priorities of a partnership strategy for the prevention of radicalization in the community?

Participative evaluation of local prevention strategies

The evaluation of prevention strategies and actions is important to guarantee their quality and effectiveness, build trust in the effectiveness of local policies, and ensure accountability. It is also an essential part of any prevention scheme to allow re-assessment of underlying premises on the basis of scientific data and a continuous development of strategic and methodological options. In addition, it facilitates the transfer of knowledge and experiences to other sectors of communal services.⁶

⁶ Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Peter Romaniuk, Rafia Barakat, Evaluating Counter Extremism Programming. Practice and Progress. Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation, Goshen, 2013, 3-8.

It is possible to carry out internal or external evaluations; both approaches have their advantages and disadvantages. While external evaluations allow a more objective assessment of premises, strategic coherence and impact, internal evaluations facilitate the adoption of a variety of strategic and methodological options. However, even if an external evaluation is planned it is essential to involve relevant internal stakeholders. Most evaluations, though, combine both approaches.

The evaluation of projects with the aim to prevent radicalization is very similar to any field of crime prevention.⁷ In primary prevention, for instance, effectiveness is demonstrated by the non-occurrence of an event. Evaluation, thus, often builds on assessments of the plausibility of the project's strategies and methodologies, and the consistency of their implementation rather than on quantitative indicators of success. Even in cases of intervention and exit projects that are focused on radicalized individuals the definition of measurable indicators is problematic. This relates, among other issues, to the definition of "cases" as such: Who is defined as a "case" and on what basis? For instance, someone who has shown interest in (violent) extremist websites? Someone who is involved in extremist activities but does not support the use of violence? Or someone who is promoting violence? Similar problems exist in defining "success": Does "success" constitute a rejection of violence, a denunciation of underlying ideologies, or explicit support of democratic values and principles?

However, evaluation is not meant to provide answers to these questions; it aims at assessing the consistency and clarity of the project's definition of goals and objectives. It should therefore focus on the following dimensions:

Pertinence: Are the objectives of the project in line with the actual problems and the overall policy goals?

While many projects aim at preventing radicalization before it takes place, local prevention projects often respond to a local authority's urgent needs. In some cases strategies are developed and implemented in reaction to observed tensions and conflicts. The aim of evaluations is to assess the link of the project to overall strategies pursued at the local level, and to estimate possible contradictions and mid-term side effects. For example: in the case of a project targeted at vulnerable

⁷ Impact Europe, Synthesis report on the state-of-the-art in evaluating the effectiveness of counter-violent extremism interventions; Rand Europe, Cambridge 2014.

young women it is important to assess its linkages to the municipality's broader strategy on gender equality (if it exists).

Evidence-based assessment and premises: Do the project's assessment strategies, premises and methods reflect recent academic research and recommendations?

Academic research about the causes of radicalization remains contested; the same holds true for recommendations regarding prevention strategies and methods. Evaluation is a tool to assess a project's reflection of recent academic debates and contributes to confirming or refuting the often-polarized assessments about appropriate responses to radicalization. Consideration of research in the development and evaluation of a project facilitates the development of evidence-based strategies and their implementation, and allows the use of the obtained data to further academic research and debate. For example: A project intended to produce online content to respond to violent extremist propaganda in social media should reflect ongoing controversies about the concepts of counter and alternative narratives.

Qualification and training: Is the project staff qualified and trained to implement the project?

The prevention of radicalization is a relatively new task for most actors working in the field. Qualified staff is often difficult to find, and the development of methodological standards is still in its early stages. External evaluation is a tool that can make staff well aware of the implicit challenges. It also allows assessing the responsiveness of project managers when addressing emerging topics and changing contexts, and to select and train staff accordingly.

Internal coherence: Are the different objectives of the project coherent?

It is important to clearly define the limits of the project and the actions as stakeholders often tend to overstretch their scope and assumed impact. The aim of evaluation is to assess the feasibility of the project goals in the light of existing resources, qualifications, and partners involved.

External coherence: Are the objectives of the project coherent with other actions / projects implemented by the municipality?

The prevention of radicalization is a multi-disciplinary effort that requires actions on various levels and in different fields. Evaluation is a tool to assess the adequacy of the project / action and how the partners integrate the project's activities into other types of activities carried out in the field. For example: A prevention project targeted exclusively at young Muslims might have stigmatizing effects on this group and would therefore undermine other activities carried out to prevent discrimination and strengthen social cohesion.

Involvement of target groups

Preventing radicalization requires knowledge about the groups targeted by the respective actions and an awareness of their concerns and perspectives. They will be more likely to respond to and accept preventive measures if they are involved in the process of development and implementation. Their degree of involvement can also be evaluated in order to identify problems that could significantly hinder the successful implementation of any activity.

Effectiveness: Does / did the project achieve the intended results?

SMART criteria (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound goals) have become a standard feature of project management. They are particularly helpful in the field of primary prevention where measurable indicators of success (i.e. successful interventions with x individuals) do not exist. SMART criteria allow, for example, to pre-define the expected number of trainings or the number of participants reached through workshops and seminars, and thus provide important information about the implementation process. On the other hand, external evaluation places these goals in a larger context and weighs them against other projects and actions implemented in other fields and cities.

Impact: What are the direct and indirect impacts of the project?

Prevention projects aim at changing attitudes and behavior or at building the resilience of target groups. These impacts are difficult to measure and it is difficult to prove causal relations between a project and observed changes. In addition, primary prevention often builds on mid- or long-term impacts that are not immediately observable.

Evaluation should therefore aim at documenting the subjective experience of participants and partners in order to identify non-quantifiable results – such as raising awareness of practitioners or building self-confidence among young people – that are crucial for any sustainable prevention strategy.

Implementation: Is / was the project implemented as planned? How do / did the involved actors respond to possible challenges?

Prevention projects and actions implemented at the local level are limited in scope and time; yet, policy makers, citizens, and the media often expect immediate results. This risks increasing the pressure on stakeholders to prove efficiency and impact and reduces readiness to acknowledge challenges and failures in the implementation process. Evaluation can assess the preparedness of stakeholders to respond to unexpected challenges and the transparency of implemented changes. Readjustments and failures are part of most pilot projects and evaluation is a tool to appraise responsiveness to such challenges.

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