Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism

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Introduction

1. Trends and developments

In recent years, the processes of radicalisation leading to violent extremism have greatly evolved. The variety of ideologies that provide inspiration for extremist groups is growing and include religious inspired extremism, left wing, anarchist and right wing ideologies as well as nationalist and separatist ideologies. Extremists are also no longer acting only as part of organised, hierarchical organisations but also within smaller cells and sometimes as lone wolves. All forms of extremism have become more globalised taking full advantage of the opportunities of the interconnected world. Consequently, terrorist or violent extremist actions are becoming harder to detect and predict by the authorities, making traditional law enforcement techniques alone insufficient to deal with these evolving trends, particularly in relation to tackling the root causes of the problem. A broader approach is needed, aimed at earlier intervention and prevention, and engaging a wide spectrum of actors from across society.

Within the EU, Member States are facing a variety of challenges. European societies are increasingly confronted with home-grown terrorism - radicalised individuals, born and raised in the West were involved in or responsible for the Madrid bombings in March 2004, the assassination of filmmaker Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam in November 2004, the London 7/7 attack, the massacre committed by Anders Breivik, the Jewish Museum attack in Brussels, the assassination of satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo editors and other staff in Paris and the atrocities committed in the same city on 13 November 2015. On- and offline support for terrorist organisations such as Daesh shows an increase in radicalisation among young people on EU territory.

It is clear that all available counter terrorism tools need to be enhanced. Prevent efforts are also needed more than ever before. Following such attacks, there is always a risk of copycat style attacks, and attacks against those communities wrongly perceived as being responsible. Preventing radicalisation is key - fighting terrorism can only be successful if we remove the soil out of which it grows.

Radicalisation of EU citizens is connected with global issues. The form and intensity with which radicalisation manifests in the streets and neighbourhoods of Europe often follows on from armed conflict in third countries. The rise of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) is among the clearest examples. The armed conflicts in Syria and Iraq have motivated thousands of EU citizens to join those battle fields, often due to recruitment activities by terrorist groups such as Daesh. There are now believed to be thousands of Europeans within the region. Apart from their potentially violent acts abroad, the threat posed by radicalised returnees, who may be traumatised, skilled in combat and/or brainwashed to hate European values and commit acts of violence in Member States, has been revealed all too painfully in terrorist atrocities within the EU.

In addition to the risk of uncoordinated attacks by lone actor returnees, Daesh and al-Qaeda recently called upon their followers to bring the terror to the West. So terrorist groups are not only recruiting EU citizens to join their battles abroad, but are also motivating young people vulnerable to radicalisation to commit acts of terrorism at home. Daesh and al-Qaeda are competitors in the recruitment of EU fighters, and successful attacks against European values and societies seem to be among their recruitment tools.
In Eastern parts of Europe, right-wing and nationalist extremism is growing and more people are leaving for Ukraine to engage in the conflict there. Southern European countries often serve as transit-countries, and may as a consequence experience home-grown extremism in the long run. In reaction to the foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon, a rise in Islamist extremism and domestic extremism are creating a breeding ground for increased polarisation and intolerance throughout Europe.

2. RAN and the EU Communication “Supporting the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism”

The Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) was set up by the European Commission in 2011. RAN is an EU-wide umbrella network connecting first-line practitioners and local actors around Europe working daily with those vulnerable to radicalisation, as well as those who have already been radicalised. As teachers, social workers, community police officers, etc. they are engaged in preventing and countering radicalisation and violent extremism in all its forms, or in reintegrating violent extremists. Within RAN, different working groups have been created, where participants exchange their experiences, knowledge and practices in different fields and areas relevant for tackling radicalisation. Participants include NGOs, representatives of different communities, think-tanks, academia, law enforcement agencies, government representatives and consultancies. In 2015, the RAN Centre of Excellence (CoE) was established. The RAN CoE acts as a hub for connecting, developing and disseminating expertise. It supports and coordinates RAN, and fosters an inclusive dialogue between practitioners, policy-makers and academics.

In June 2016 the European Commission presented a new Communication, entitled ‘Supporting the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism’ focusing on seven specific areas:
1. supporting research, evidence building, monitoring and networking;
2. countering terrorist propaganda and hate speech online;
3. addressing radicalisation in prisons;
4. promoting inclusive education and EU common values;
5. promoting an inclusive, open and resilient society and reaching out to young people;
6. the security dimension of addressing radicalisation;
7. the international dimension.

The paper focuses on prevention, as well as establishing exchange at the local level. The work undertaken by RAN is taken into consideration in many of these areas, as well as in its key actions..

3. RAN Collection: objectives and key insights

The RAN Collection of Approaches and Practices is one of the main outcomes of the network, providing an overview of the different insights, lessons learned and practices that have come out of the network so far. It illustrates the kinds of measures that can be taken in different areas to, for example, enhance the awareness and competence of first-line practitioners, involve and engage more closely with communities, families, victims of terrorism or former terrorists, address new forms and advents of radicalisation (e.g. through an increased use of the internet and social media) and more generally establish the appropriate framework for comprehensive prevent work.

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The Collection serves as a practical, evolving and growing tool, in which practitioners, first-liners and policy-makers may:

- draw inspiration;
- find replicable examples to adapt to their local/specific context;
- look for counterparts to exchange prevention experiences.

Practices in the Collection are aimed at a broad range of different target groups. Since the primary focus of RAN is on prevention, many practices are aimed at citizens and youth in general and specific individuals and communities at risk. Prevention can also be directed towards individuals who have been (violent) extremists but who want to leave an extremist group and/or mind-set. Therefore some practices will be aimed towards de-radicalising – for example convicted terrorists.

In this broad spectrum it is important to underline that the work of RAN fits under the Prevent strand of the EU's Counter Terrorism Strategy, which is focused only on identifying and tackling the factors which contribute to radicalisation. This is not about Pursue, which focuses on hindering terrorists’ capacity to plan and organise terrorist atrocities. Nevertheless, practitioners of Pursue (e.g. law enforcement, or security agencies) should be encouraged to engage with Prevent practitioners, as they may be able to help advise on the individual's background, motivations and grievances. This is particularly the case with regards to those who have been convicted.

i. RAN DNA

Across RAN meetings and the RAN Collection, a number of key, overarching insights apply. These are also referred to as the RAN DNA. The RAN DNA has been developed within the network since its start, and is set out in the revised Charter of Principles Governing the RAN and its CoE:

- **Prevention is key**: it is crucial to invest in interventions that aim to remove the breeding ground for radicalisation, to prevent these processes or stop them as early as possible.
- **Involving and training first-line practitioners is key**: these practitioners will be the first professional point of contact for individuals at risk. To be able to take a preventative approach, they need to be aware of signals of radicalisation, and know how to seek support to address these signals whilst maintaining a positive relationship with the individual.
- **Multi-agency approach is key**: to be able to prevent radicalisation and to safeguard individuals at risk, multi-agency cooperation is necessary to provide a consistent and reliable network. In this network, expertise and information can be shared, cases can be discussed and there can be agreement and shared ownership on the best course of action. These networks should be combinations between law enforcement, professional care organisations as well as NGOs and community representatives.
- **Tailor made interventions, adapted to local circumstances, are key**: each individual at risk is different, calling for a case-by-case approach. It is important to understand an individual’s background, grievances, motivations, fears, frustrations etc. to be able to develop a suitable intervention. Besides internal factors, external factors such as the individual’s social environment and other local circumstances need to be taken into account to provide effective support.

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4. Methodology

i. The approaches and lessons learned

The RAN Centre of Excellence (CoE) has selected a variety of practices and has gathered them under seven different themes or “approaches”. Each of the seven approaches are described, notably their aim(s) and underlying methodologies. This is then complemented by lessons learned and by a set of relevant examples of practices used throughout Europe.

The approaches presented in this Collection are the following:

- Training for first line practitioners: raising awareness of first line practitioners working with vulnerable individuals or groups at risk of radicalisation.
- Exit strategies: de-radicalisation programmes to re-integrate violent extremists and disengagement programmes to at least dissuade them from violence.
- Community engagement and empowerment: engagement and empowerment of communities at risk, establishing a trust based relation with authorities.
- Educating young people: education of young people on citizenship, political, religious and ethnic tolerance, non-prejudiced thinking, extremism, democratic values, cultural diversity, and the historical consequences of ethnically and politically motivated violence.
- Family support: for those vulnerable to radicalisation and those who have become radicalised.
- Delivering alternative narratives: offering alternatives to extremist propaganda and worldviews either online or offline.
- Multi-agency structures: institutional infrastructures to ensure that people at risk are given multi-agency support at an early stage.

The work on the RAN Collection was undertaken in a spirit similar to that which guides over RAN’s work in general: it is not intended as a scientific exercise (even if the underlying methodologies may also find support in scientific literature) but more as an empirical, very concrete, practitioner-oriented exercise.

The seven approaches were selected through different means:

- The policy recommendations proposed by the RAN Working Groups and discussed at the 2013 High-level Conference served as a first input. For example, one of the recommendations was to ‘develop frameworks for multi-actor cooperation and information sharing’. This contributed to the development of an approach called ‘Multi-agency structures’.
- Some of the approaches derived directly or indirectly from the work of the RAN Working Groups.
- Some of these approaches have been described in scientific research as common practices. For example, in the EU-funded project “Containing Radicalisation In Modern Europe (CRIME)”, a survey established which practices first-liners use. The result of this study provided valuable insight into possible approaches.

The seven approaches, empirically selected, have then been discussed and approved within the RAN Steering Committee (comprising the RAN Working Group chairs, the RAN CoE, and the European Commission - DG Home). There is consensus among practitioners from several Member States as to the practices’ effectiveness.

Lessons learned derive from discussions in the RAN meetings as well as from the experiences of various practitioners/practices and have also been reviewed by the RAN Steering Committee.

ii. The practice samples

The description of each practice comprises the following:

Name of the practice and the organisation responsible for/carrying out the initiative.
Description: a short description of the aim and nature of the practice, methods and products and, if made available by the owner organisation, results and effects.

Approach: the main approach under which the practice can be categorised. Some practices are categorised under multiple approaches. However to make this a user-friendly document, practices have been categorised under the approach considered the most relevant.

Target audience: the target audience designates the group the practice is focused on or wants to create an impact for. The following subdivision of target audiences has been used:
- Authorities
- Local community organisations/NGOs
- Educators/academics
- Families
- First responders or practitioners
- General public
- Online
- Health practitioners
- Law enforcement officers
- Prison/probation/judicial practitioners
- Violent extremists
- Formers
- Victims of terrorism
- Youth/pupils/students

Deliverables: concrete outputs of the practice e.g. publications, products, trainings etc.

Evidence and evaluation: explanation of if and how the effectiveness of the practice has been measured and evaluated.

Sustainability and transferability: indication of how the practice can be sustained in the future (e.g. funding structures) and how it could be made applicable to other (local) contexts.

Geographical scope: reference to the areas (countries, cities, regions) in which the practice was implemented.

Start of the practice: reference to the year and month the practice was developed and implemented to indicate the maturity of the practice. If the practice is no longer active, this is also mentioned.

Presented and discussed in RAN meeting: reference to the RAN meeting(s) the practice has been presented and peer-reviewed.

Relation to other EC initiatives: reference to other EC or EU initiatives that the practice is connected to besides RAN.

Organisation: reference to the organisation(s) that have developed and are executing the practice.

Country of origin: reference to where the practice has been developed.

Contact details: names, email addresses and telephone numbers of people who may be reached for more information, inspiration and cooperation. If personal contact details are not made available, links to websites and informative documents have been added.

If one of the elements is not applicable for a practice, e.g. there have been no concrete deliverables, this element will not be part of the practice outline.

To select the practices for the RAN Collection, the following criteria and procedure were formally adopted by the RAN Steering Committee:

RAN Collection criteria:
The practice has an explicit connection to the subject of radicalisation/violent extremism. This means that in the aims and/or activities/methods of the practice, there is a link to preventing and countering radicalisation and/or violent extremism.\(^4\)

The practice is an activity/method that has been used/is in use by professionals and/or community members.

Basic elements of the practice are transferrable to other (local) contexts (This implies research projects will not be included in the Collection).

The practice is based in the European Union (EU)/European Economic Area (EEA);

All practice descriptions have been checked with the organisations in question and if necessary have been adjusted following feedback.

The practice has been presented in a RAN meeting, allowing peer review.

The practice has been reviewed and approved for adoption by the Steering Committee.

**RAN Collection procedure:**
Practices must be discussed in a RAN (working group) meeting, enabling peer review. Only in exceptional cases will practices that have not been discussed at such a meeting be nominated to be included in the Collection.

All practices need to be formally approved by the Steering Committee (SC) to become part of the RAN Collection. All nominations will be sent to the SC. The RAN CoE will highlight any nominations that do not meet all necessary criteria (except reviewing by the SC). For these nominations, the SC discusses (requirements for) adoption for the RAN Collection.

The practices in the RAN Collection do not have an ‘approved by European Commission/RAN’ label but have the aim to be informative and inspiring.

**5. An evolving tool**

The RAN Collection does not aim to provide comprehensive information about existing practices, nor does it aim to give a comprehensive picture of all existing practices in the EU Member States. As the RAN Collection is the result of experiences within RAN, the approaches and practices are not exhaustive and other/additional valuable categories of practices or approaches may be added in the future.

Moreover, the RAN Collection is also available as a digital tool for practitioners and policy-makers on the RAN website, where additional features, such as cross-referencing of practices are included. As a work-in-progress, the RAN Collection will continuously be adjusted and enhanced with new practices from EU Member States.

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\(^4\) It should be noted that there are practices in the area of early prevention, hate speech and hate crime that do not have an explicit link to radicalisation. However, in RAN meetings they were found to be inspirational and useful in terms of method. Therefore these kinds of practices have sometimes been included in the RAN Collection. This is indicated in the practice description.