



IcARUS

IcARUS Policy Brief

Acknowledging the Key Role of Local and Regional Authorities in Crafting Inclusive Community-Based Initiatives To Prevent Radicalisation Leading to Violent Extremism





Welcome to the IcARUS Policy Briefs, where the project's partners present their key findings

These policy briefs are designed to provide political decision-makers at local, regional, national, and European levels with insights and recommendations from the EU-funded and Efus-led IcARUS project. They cover the five areas that were explored through the project and are of primary concern for crime prevention policy-makers and stakeholders, i.e., social innovation, juvenile delinquency, organised crime, public spaces, and radicalisation leading to violent extremism.

Acknowledging the Key Role of Local and Regional Authorities in Crafting Inclusive Community-Based Initiatives To Prevent Radicalisation Leading to Violent Extremism

Introduction

European cities and regions are faced with the phenomenon of extremism that can lead to violence, which can take various forms. Besides actions taken at the international, European and national levels by public authorities and law enforcement, local authorities can play a key role in addressing this phenomenon. Indeed, they are close to communities on the ground and can lead preventive actions to build the resilience of individuals and communities together with local stakeholders.

Problem context

Radicalisation leading to violent extremism is an increasingly pervasive societal concern. Like other regions of the world, European cities and regions are faced with a phenomenon that can take various forms, such as hate speech, recruitment networks, radical cells and, more seriously, terrorist attacks.

Besides actions taken at the international, European and national levels by public authorities and law enforcement, local authorities can play a key role in addressing this phenomenon, in particular through granular prevention on the ground. Experience shows that such a preventive approach must be based on local prevention partnerships and seek to strengthen the resilience of individuals and communities against the risk of radicalisation.





Because they are the level of governance closest to citizens, local and regional authorities are indeed strategically positioned to lead such efforts and bring together all the relevant local stakeholders.

What is radicalisation? Although its definition remains ambiguous and controversial, there is a general agreement that radicalisation refers to the process through which an individual or a group becomes extremist. In this policy brief, Efus defines radicalisation as a hardening of opinions and behaviour that leads to the legitimisation of violence and, sometimes, to violent extremism. However, it is important to stress that the qualification of acts, discourses or groups and individuals as dangerous must be conducted carefully and cautiously in order to avoid stigmatisation, misleading accusations or false suspicions that can cause harm.¹

What do we mean by “prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism”? Policies and programmes that seek to reduce or prevent individuals from the risk of involvement in terrorism or violent extremism. These interventions aim to divert those people susceptible to violent extremism from embarking on a path to radicalisation. These measures avoid the use of coercive and repressive means, while being directed at addressing some of the conditions that may drive individuals to extremist violence²

In its 2017 *Security, Democracy and Cities Manifesto*³, Efus notes that “*local authorities are strategically well placed to implement actions and mobilise all relevant local stakeholders*” and calls for a “*strong preventive approach*” in the face of radicalisation, which “*threatens security and social cohesion*”. Indeed, local and regional authorities possess invaluable knowledge of local context and needs, as well as the legitimacy to mobilise and coordinate partnerships. They serve as vital bridges between local communities, civil society and national governments, playing a pivotal role in fostering cooperation and collaboration. The involvement of local authorities ensures the sustainability of prevention actions. By formulating concrete prevention plans integrated into the city or region's future vision, there is ongoing engagement to achieve the outlined objectives and actions.

By implementing effective and inclusive local community-based prevention initiatives, they can have a real influence at a granular level against a phenomenon that is by nature transnational, fuelled in part through social media. Such local initiatives can foster trust, collaboration, and resilience within communities.

¹ (Efus, 2016). [Preventing and fighting radicalisation at the local level](#)

² [IcARUS \(2021\). The Changing Face of Urban Security Research: A Review of Accumulated Learning. University of Leeds.](#)

³ Efus (2017). *Manifesto: Security, Democracy and Cities – Co-producing Urban Security Policies.*





This leads to another key question, which is how, with what means, local authorities can enact such preventive approaches. It is indeed crucial to address their specific needs to enable them to appropriately play their central role in preventing violent extremism by engaging and empowering community members.

However, despite their efforts, they often lack recognition, resources, and support and leadership from their national governments, which hampers the implementation of effective responses to extremism.

By having access to more resources, training, and support, local authorities can effectively engage with community stakeholders, coordinate multi-agency responses and implement evidence-based strategies to prevent radicalisation and build community resilience. Empowering local authorities and responding to their specific needs enables them to strengthen the capacity of communities to resist extremist ideologies, to promote social cohesion and safeguard against the threat of violent extremism.

Recommendations

□ Recommendations to local and regional authorities:

- Tailor evidence-based prevention interventions to address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of local communities, considering factors and data such as demographics, cultural backgrounds, and socio-economic status (based on the safety audit), and relying on academic research and knowledge, including understanding processes, profiles, and the impacts of prevention actions.
- Ensure programmes and policies do not disproportionately target, stigmatise or discriminate against any particular communities by adopting inclusive practices, completing comprehensive impact assessments and using evidence-based research from academic partners
- Invest in training and capacity-building for local authorities and frontline practitioners to enhance their understanding of radicalisation dynamics and equip them with the skills to effectively implement prevention strategies.
- Foster multi-stakeholder collaboration and coordination based on trust and common understanding of shared values and objectives, with different actors including law enforcement, social services, education, and healthcare, to ensure a comprehensive and holistic approach to preventing radicalisation leading to violent extremism.
- Implement early intervention and community engagement programmes by providing support services, mentorship, and alternative pathways such as using arts to address grievances and prevent escalation towards extremism.
- Establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of local interventions, collecting data on key indicators to assess impact and inform future strategies





- Establish or strengthen existing links with universities and research institutes and between them and local practitioners.
- **Recommendations for governments and national, European and international institutions:**
- Acknowledge and recognise the critical role of local authorities in preventing radicalisation leading to violent extremism within national, European, and international policy frameworks.
 - Allocate adequate resources and funding to support local authorities in implementing effective prevention initiatives, including grants, training programmes and technical assistance.
 - Ensure consistency and alignment between national, European, and international policies on preventing radicalisation leading to violent extremism, facilitating coordination and collaboration between different levels of government and stakeholders.
 - Provide support for capacity-building initiatives at the local level, including knowledge-sharing platforms, best practice exchanges, and peer-to-peer learning networks.
 - Include the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism across a whole range of local policies, in particular those that concern social cohesion, integration, youth empowerment and community development.
 - Invest in research and innovation to better understand the dynamics of radicalisation, to identify emerging trends, and to develop evidence-based strategies for preventing violent extremism at the local level.

How the recommendations can be implemented in practice

Implementation of these recommendations requires a **multi-stakeholder approach** involving local authorities, local organisations, law enforcement agencies, and different stakeholders such as social and youth workers. All these actors must collaborate to develop comprehensive evidence-based prevention plans, ensuring trust and representation from diverse sectors and communities. **Challenges** may include resource constraints, coordination gaps and resistance to change. **Strategies** for overcoming these challenges include securing dedicated funding for prevention initiatives, establishing inter-agency task forces to facilitate collaboration, and conducting regular evaluations to measure effectiveness and impacts. Additionally, capacity-building efforts can empower local actors to implement evidence-based interventions, while awareness campaigns can mobilise public support for prevention efforts. By fostering strong partnerships based on trust and addressing implementation challenges proactively, stakeholders can effectively





translate recommendations into tangible actions to prevent radicalisation leading to violent extremism at the local level.

In practice: Trick17, City of Stuttgart (Germany)

In Germany, these last years, terrorist attacks and plots linked both to radical Islamism and radical right have shown over the past 15 years the danger posed by radicalisation processes. Factors that facilitate radicalisation processes among young people include among others a lack of perspective, feelings of powerlessness, social isolation and the desire for social inclusion. Extremists use these feelings of frustration to recruit young people and give them a sense of belonging by joining their extremist, anti-democratic group. Trick17 is an elaborate interactive and mobile tool base through which the Stuttgart City Council alerts users on the fake promises and tricks used by extremists to recruit young followers. Trick17 is not a targeted programme - it is aimed at all young people (not any one particular community of young people), in order to build resilience and critical thinking to enable them to identify and reject these tricks played by extremists.

> More information on [<https://www.icarus-innovation.eu/>]

In practice: Mapping online hate speech & violent extremism, city of Malmö (Sweden)

In order to better understand the extent of online hate speech, extremist views and threats, the city of Malmö developed an online tool which allows the creation of a digital map of their local digital sphere. The municipality's objective is to be aware of what is happening in Malmö's digital "streets and squares" in order to prevent citizens from being exposed to online harassment, threats and extremist propaganda. Based on the first analyses that were conducted, the city's steering committee developed an action plan that includes training programmes for civil society organisations and others to help them reduce hate online on their own platforms and create a group with several moderate digital voices that oppose extremism online and gain the competence to intervene preventively and actively to strengthen digital security.

By working together with police and civil society, the municipality aims to make Malmö's digital streets and squares safer.

> More information on:

[https://nordicsafecities.org/wp-content/uploads/NSC.SafeDigi.publ_.ENG_.01a.pdf]





Conclusion

This policy brief highlights the indispensable role of local authorities in preventing radicalisation leading to violent extremism. By prioritising tailored evidence-based interventions, fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration and investing in capacity-building, resilience and social cohesion can be promoted among local communities. However, to translate these recommendations into tangible outcomes, policymakers must heed the call for action. It is imperative that they recognise the important role played by local authorities in preventing radicalisation leading to violence, and thus allocate resources accordingly and include prevention efforts into broader policy agendas. Only through unified action can we create safer, more inclusive societies resilient to violent extremist ideologies.





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IcARUS

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Consortium



European Forum for Urban Security (Efus)



FH Salzburg

Fachhochschule Salzburg (FHS) Salzburg University of Applied Sciences



Plus Ethics



Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR)



Laboratory of Urban Criminology - Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences (Panteion)



University of Salford



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LOBA



University of York

The IcARUS project (Innovative Approaches to Urban Security) aims to rethink, redesign and adapt existing tools and methods to help local security actors anticipate and better respond to urban security challenges. This factsheet is based on the IcARUS Review of Accumulated Learning and cross-analysis of urban security.



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Website

www.icarus-innovation.eu

Contact us

info@icarus-innovation.eu

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