

THE NEED FOR A CLOSER COLLABORATION BETWEEN EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES TO PREVENT RADICALISATION

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The terrorist attacks that shook Europe in the last five years have been committed by young people raised and educated in Western societies, and most of whom had been already known by the law enforcement community in the countries where they lived. While violent radicalisation is not a new phenomenon, its most recent manifestations, its scale and the use of new communication tools pose new challenges that must be addressed through a joint effort of all relevant actors across society. This reflection paper proposes the development of a strengthened partnership between the education sector (schools and universities) and the Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) to develop a comprehensive communication strategy for counter-radicalisation at national and European level, by mentioning the American model as a possible model to follow.

According to the [Autumn 2017 Eurobarometer](#), after immigration (39%, +1), terrorism was rated as the second top challenge that the European union (EU) is facing (38%, -6 points). In addition, 80% of the respondents considered that the EU should intervene more than at present in the fight against terrorism. Last year, EU reports were also showing that the risk of a terrorist attack is appreciated as being high by 40% of respondents in the EU, 47% consider there to be a medium risk, and 11% think about it as a low-rated concern. At national level, an absolute majority of French, British and Belgian respondents thought that the risk of attack is high in their country. Thus, the two measures which Europeans thought to be most urgent for combating terrorism are

- the fight against the financing of terrorist groups,
- the fight against the roots of terrorism and radicalisation.

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With specific regard to the fight against radicalisation and recruitment of EU citizens by terrorist organisations, 32% of the respondents identified communication campaigns as necessary to raise awareness amongst the youngest and the most vulnerable about the risks of radicalisation. 22% of the respondents considered that specialised training for teachers and local stakeholders is also required to prevent and fight against radicalisation, together with talks in schools by former foreign fighters who managed to de-radicalise (20%). 19% also highlighted that Member States should share more best practices for de-radicalisation.

The phenomenon of “home-grown” Islamist radicalisation has seen a significant increase in recent years. Young people, including many minors, sensitive to ideological discourse and the apparent “sense of social purpose” offered to them by radical Islamist organisations, are drawn into extremist movements, are involved in violent conflict, for example in Syria and Iraq, and carry out terrorist acts, as we’ve seen in Europe in recent years. Nowadays, in Europe, the increasing number of women and children becoming radicalised and recruited by terrorist groups represent one of the main challenges in terms of understanding and addressing the underlying root causes and processes of radicalisation.

There has been little written so far about the relation and potential partnership between LEAs and the education system to address radicalisation among teenagers and young people. Thus, this paper asserts that present-day context requires a security-led strategy aimed at creating not only a resilient society, but a proactive one that is able to recognize and fight falsified information and knowledge. In other words, countering these prevailing dynamics requires a fresh approach that focuses on education and enhancing public safety—protecting our citizens from becoming radicalised by identifying the catalysts driving extremism and building preventive social resilience.

Actions countering radicalisation take place mainly on the ground, at local or national levels, falling primarily within the competences of state authorities, yet most of the times, given the social perception of these entities’ role in punishing rather than helping, the results are weak. For this reason, local actors such as teachers, youth and social workers, community leaders, psychologists, NGOs, think-tanks, community police, prison and probation officers as well as representatives of local authorities are usually best placed to prevent and detect radicalisation both in the short term and the long term. At the same time, it is essential that individuals and groups have trusted information sources that they can turn to in times of surprise. Trusted information is critical for rational risk assessment and the evaluation of options and should come from people and institutions who have reliable scanning capabilities (what’s really happening here?), such as the law enforcement community.

In the last 15 years, The United States Government had created various online platforms aimed at raising awareness about Internet safety, such as [OnGuard Online](#), managed by the Federal Trade Commission and involving 16 departments and agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Education. According to the feedback provided by the Administration, [one important reason for the success of Federal Government Internet safety awareness efforts is that they work](#)


[closely with local organizations — such as school districts, Parent Teacher Associations, local government, and law enforcement — to communicate.](#)

At the same time, in the area of preventing and combating radicalization, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has a long history of engagement in outreach and education initiatives, continuing to improve its efforts by identifying and adapting to new trends and challenges. In collaboration with state and local partners, the FBI has designed and implemented programs aimed to reach certain communities who are at greater risk for radicalization. [According to Kerry Sleeper](#) (Assistant Director, Office of Partner Engagement, FBI), the FBI Minneapolis served as a pilot program for the Bureau immediately after September 11, 2001, when their executive management regularly hosted focus group meetings with specific audiences, such as the Somali elders, in order to address their concerns and needs. The FBI also focuses on education for different catalysts for radicalization designed to help the public increase awareness of radicalization. These products are widely disseminated to the law enforcement and community partners for further engagement with the public, and demand continues to increase for additional products. The FBI's website [Don't Be a Puppet: Pull Back the Curtain on Violent Extremism](#) is specifically designed for the public and for use by educators and community leaders and organizations for school-age children.

This shows that local communities are more successful at perceiving risks to their environment. For this reason, it is important to shape policies and programmes that build upon a dialogue with closest stakeholders and actors, and to receive their inputs. The consultation activities will help identify existing sources of knowledge on the subject as well as areas of operational follow-up that could be reflected in the communication and implementation process of preventing and countering radicalization

As one of the actions to achieve this goal, the European Commission (EC) has tried to promote an inclusive, open and resilient society by reaching out to young people. For example, the Commission engaged in joint activities with the European Parliament and the European Council towards the adoption of the [anti-discrimination directive](#). It will also enhance its support to youth workers and youth organisations, particularly by developing a toolkit helping them to detect and tackle violent radicalisation. How is this important in the counter-radicalization process?

The first step is understanding radicalisation of the young generation, and not only its general causes, but also the way in which radicalisation is propagated from early ages and the factors that deepen radicalisation. At first sight, a series of factors that enable the radicalisation process are obvious: weak emotional state, predisposition towards violence, family tensions. It can be stated that all these factors come from the individual. But although radicalisation seems an easy path to an individual, this path should be analysed in its social context (inside family, at the workplace) that could have religious, social or cultural connotations. Personal factors refer to the psychological and social context the individual identifies himself at the moment of his involvement. Social/political/organisational context refer to the environment of the individual, taking into consideration that the political and organisational features have an



effect on the individual's experiences inside the social context. Many victims of radicalisation come from poor families that did not manage to adapt to the traditions and norms of the country they are currently living in, who feel marginalised, don't have a higher education level, nor jobs that make them feel safe and consider that their failure in life was because the society refused them for being different ([Abrahams, 2017](#)).


But besides the traditional notion that people from economically deprived backgrounds and of low education are more prone to radicalisation, recent trends show that educated youth from affluent families are also engaging in such activities. This trend has given rise to a new phenomenon: a new generation of youth who are technologically literate and well-versed in social media application skills. They garner more support from like-minded individuals and groups in carrying out radical activities ranging from selection, indoctrination and recruitment, to training, financing, planning and execution of their programmes.

“The rise in home-grown terrorists has two important components: the process of radicalisation and the causes for it are both linked to one common denominator: the society in which these young men live. On the one hand it rejects these people from its circle, and on the other hand it pushes them to look for other social networks. (...)

Europeans were not keen on allowing outsiders in their social circles, and even though the governments have created extensive policies to integrate and assimilate immigrants, who incidentally helped rebuild post-war Europe for meager wages and, unfortunately, even their children who were born in Europe are not fully accepted in the social ranking of white Europeans. The parallel societies where young educated European-born Muslims are confined to their communities and do not experience being truly European citizens breed dissent, as the young men strive to find their identity, and thus fall prey to Islamist fundamentalism especially if it is preached by a charismatic person “([Bizina and Gray, 2014](#)).

High school students are ideal targets for recruitment by violent extremists seeking support for their radical ideologies, foreign fighter networks, or conducting acts of targeted violence within our borders. Therefore, high schools must remain vigilant in educating their students about catalysts that drive violent extremism and the potential consequences of embracing extremist beliefs. Among the various actors that can play a crucial role in countering radicalisation, we believe that the role of education will be of critical importance. In recent years, the role of education in countering radicalisation has gained prominence among policymakers and practitioners. As a matter of fact, education can act as an early intervention of any violent extremist tendencies, hence permitting an early and effective counter-strategy. Therefore, by bringing schools and educators to the table, law enforcement communities should actively engage them as the first line of defence against radicalisation.

In 2016, the EU has funded projects addressing the prevention of radicalisation dedicated to help teachers and social workers engage with young people to enable identify and prevent radicalisation. One of these projects is aimed at creating radicalisation screening tools to help teachers recognise signs of radicalisation at an early stage, a training course for all staff on how to detect and appropriately work with potential vulnerable individuals at risk of radicalisation as well as an e-learning training course. Another one gathers students, teachers



and pupils, the goal being to help them work together to develop a module for participatory learning approaches that can be integrated into teacher training and school curricula.

Within the same context, the European Commission has launched the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) which connects first-line practitioners and law-enforcement agencies with civil society organisations, schools and academics to empower them to counter radicalisation.

“RAN connects key groups of people involved in countering violent radicalisation across the EU. Thus, researchers, social workers, religious leaders, youth leaders, policemen and others working on the ground in vulnerable communities are able to exchange ideas and best practices, in particular on how to challenge terrorist narratives and recruitment. They are able to pool experiences and knowledge to enhance awareness on radicalisation and to encourage credible opinion leaders to voice positive messages that offer alternatives to terrorist narratives”. ([See website](#))

For schools talking to law-enforcement agencies can be challenging. Especially when the country has a high terror risk level, schools might be concerned about the consequences of referring someone to the authorities. When it is mandatory the partnership feels less equal, because schools might feel they are being forced to operate for the strong arm of security. In this matter schools and partners should be creative. When schools and others build partnerships, it is worth spending time in understanding each other’s culture, missions and ways of working. For instance the word radical, and even radicalisation, might be perceived different by an activist teacher who deal with engaged youngsters, than security officials who equal radical with radicalisation to recruitment, being two steps away from terrorist violence.

As a result, the law enforcement community must engage both defensively and offensively in partnership with the education environment, switching *“from a counterterrorism or security approach toward measures that tackle the radicalization process have renewed interest in the role of education in addressing some of the underlying causes of radicalization”* ([Macaluso, 2016](#)). Strategic communication at national level, adapted through local policies & security-led training for actors in the education system. So basically a partnership between the LEAs and the education community would be an important instrument to enhance a Risk Communication & Resilience strategy led by governments to help individuals and communities best prepare for, respond to, and recover from dealing with terrorism and radicalisation.