



Strategic orientations on a coordinated EU approach to prevention of radicalisation for 2021

Priorities and key actions

1. Introduction and threat picture: current and emerging challenges

2021 marks the third exercise of the EU Strategic Orientations for prevent work at EU level. This guiding document has been created in line with the recommendations of the High Level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation¹.

The 2021 Strategic orientations will be implemented in line with the overall objectives and guiding principles of the Security Union Strategy presented by the Commission in July 2020² setting out a whole-of-society approach to security that can effectively respond to a rapidly changing threat landscape in a coordinated manner to protect EU citizens. On 9 December, the Commission will present a EU counter-terrorism agenda for the period of 2020-2025 including concrete actions to counter and prevent radicalisation, which are building on these Strategic Orientations.

In order to define the strategic orientations, Member States stressed the need to consolidate, deepen and explore to be able to respond better to present and evolving challenges through concrete deliverables and results. Therefore, the present document puts forward the priority areas of work for 2021 based on an overview of the current threat picture, new challenges and emerging trends. It also sets out key learnings, insights and possible gaps based on work carried out so far (including in particular work by the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) and under the various project-based collaborations (PBC) with a view to identifying key actions for 2021.

These actions take stock of the Strategic Orientations for 2020 where Member States already identified ideologies, radicalisation in prison, support to local actors, strategic communications, research, evaluation as well as priority third countries as key topics. Member States decided to explore each of these priorities through specific actions in particular through project-based collaborations. 2021 Strategic Orientations is the continuation of this logic.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-security/20180613_final-report-radicalisation.pdf

² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1596452256370&uri=CELEX:52020DC0605>

These actions for 2021 are based on the inputs from Member States as expressed in their written contributions, oral comments during the Network of Prevent Policy Makers (NPPM) and conclusions of the project-based collaborations agreed in 2019.

They also take into account the priorities identified by practitioners within the Radicalisation Awareness Network (via a dedicated survey and the yearly Plenary meeting) and are meaningfully complemented by the specific feedback provided by the cities taking part in the Commission-led initiative “EU Cities against Radicalisation”. “It also takes into account areas where practitioners see a need for further actions.

Even if actions are developed under some specific priority, many of them are interlinked and could be included under various areas. Therefore, these strategic orientations should be read as a whole building made of different floors and bricks.

2. Priority areas and key actions for 2021

The terrorist threat within the European Union has become the usual environment for EU citizens since the dramatic attacks of 2015 and 2016. The shift from a whole-Islamist extremist threat to a split threat landscape (with violent right-wing and left-wing extremism gaining support) has been widely documented and analysed for the last three years. If attacks do not raise high figures anymore, EU Member States are still exposed to terrorism (9 major attacks reported in 2020, including the beheading of a French teacher on 16 October 2020).

This picture could look repetitive and lead to a kind of defeatism and fatigue. It would be a mistake though to lower our ambition and common vigilance and disinvest in prevent work.

Threats are still vivid and present: the potential return of foreign terrorist fighters is still ahead (half of EU citizens who left to join Isis are still abroad, and they will return some day); the increased online presence during the COVID-19 crisis and lockdowns has created a fertile ground for radicalisation, including by spreading conspiracy theories; old extremist movements are exploiting new mantra (like technophobia) to recruit and seduce new adepts. These are probably not a paradigm shift but it still require full attention and mobilisation.

Therefore, while in some areas, time has come to consolidate and better disseminate existing knowledge and expertise, there are other areas which remained so far under-explored or where work so far showed the need to go deeper. Across all priorities, there is a need for more result-oriented approaches. All actions proposed in these Strategic orientations will also address the need to evaluate interventions and policies.

Supporting victims of terrorism through prevent work is a cross-cutting priority. We will make sure that all priority areas take duly into account the necessary involvement and role of victims in prevent (e. g. prisons, rehabilitation, education). This can be done via restorative justice approaches in exit work, by further supporting victims in sharing their narratives and by addressing the status of first responders and secondary victims (such as relatives, friends, etc.).

The online dimension is another common element across our priorities. The EU policy response to this challenge include strengthening strategic communication responses and removal of terrorist content online. The first response includes supporting policy makers and practitioners in developing their strategic communication capabilities through exchange of expertise and empowering civil society, grass roots organizations and credible

voices. The second is taken forward within the voluntary framework of the EU Internet Forum and legislative work at the EU level.

Finally, the way ideologies will be addressed in EU prevent actions deserves a special reference in this introduction. In the past few years, the focus of our activities was in large part on the main threat of Islamist extremists, including actions to address radicalisation in prisons and the challenges of integrating returning foreign terrorist fighters and their families back into society. This threat is still present as we have seen with the attack in France on 16th October 2020, when a teacher was killed for teaching children about freedom of expression. It shows that radicalisation can become the vector of a segregated vision of society.

Islamist terrorism is still one of the biggest threats to our societies. This is why several actions under different sections of this document tackle this specific challenge. It is nevertheless important to develop also a better understanding of the activities of violent right-wing and left-wing extremists, anarchists and incels across the EU. Even if working on ideologies is not a new strand of work, we see that this evolving thematic requires constant updates and more in-depth discussion

Actions under each priority area translate Member States' wish to reach concrete outcomes at the end of 2021. Therefore, it is foreseen to get some comprehensive outcomes that will take the form of written guidance, overviews, recommendations, checklists and collections. These final outcomes will build on various activities with all kind of stakeholders.

Prisons

Based on Member States contributions and on insights and conclusions from the PBCs, the following areas for further work have been identified:

1. Prison-exit continuum

Strategic Objective: *To reach consistency and continuity between the work conducted in prison and the work conducted after release is clearly an area where EU Member States face a challenge. Information sharing, continuity in risk assessment before and after release, links between prison and local dimension are key challenges for EU Member States.*

Action: **Collection of best practices and recommendations to reach continuity between detention and reintegration after release**

2. Enhanced risk assessments

Strategic Objective: *According to the first outcomes of the PBC 2020, one element missing is e.g. an in-depth analyses of tools built and implemented to radicalised people since most of the well-known tools are general ones. Furthermore, the religious angles some recent tools have could be further explored to provide some transferable lessons. Moreover, lessons could be taken from adjacent fields (e.g. interventions for offenders convicted for other serious crimes) in order to adapt risk assessment tools used so far in the EU.*

Action: EU overview on recent developments regarding risk assessment tools in prison and early exit work

3. Well trained prison staff and collaboration among professionals

Strategic Objective: To build a common understanding on the key skills of prison staff and on how multi agency collaboration should work in prison. This should be done not only for prison and probation staff, but for all the other professional profiles who work in prison (chaplains, psychologists, social workers, NGO, etc...).

Action: EU Overview of trainings on preventing and countering violent extremism for prison and probation staff, and other professional profiles who work in prison, as well as multi-agency collaboration models

4. Better understanding on how to handle extremist literature in prisons

Strategic Objective: Member States are still reporting cases of extremist literature present in prison. Bringing together researchers, experts, practitioners and policy makers to explore the Member States' practices and procedures to control/ban/validate literature in prison could help to identify useful solutions.

Action: Overview of Member States approaches to prevent extremist literature in prison

Exit

Based on Member States contributions and on insights and conclusions from the PBCs, the following areas for further work have been identified:

1. Roles and responsibilities in exit work

Strategic Objective: There is a need to support Member States in developing guidelines, clarification of roles and responsibilities between national agencies (police, prison and probation, social services, health care etc.) and municipalities on exit work (both convicted for terrorism or involved in violent extremist environments). More specifically, cities have developed innovative initiatives and good exit practices. The key features, success factors and processes should be identified with a view to help other cities in implementing similar initiatives. This should address also the work with and involvement of communities and the support of informal actors.

Action: EU guidance on roles and responsibilities in exit work between national and local level and collection of best practices on local efforts in reintegration

2. Mental health and exit programmes

Strategic Objective: The mental health of individuals participating in exit programmes (as well as other kinds of vulnerabilities e.g. drug abuse) needs to be explored more in-depth, as it can have strong impacts on the exit path of a person.

Action: EU analysis on implications of mental health disorders and substance abuse on exit work

3. Quality and impact of exit programmes

Strategic Objective: *The rising number of released ex-offenders poses new challenges to the setup of exit programmes. There is still need to identify successful features of exit programmes, building also on the insights of the dedicated PBC in 2019, and research findings in Member States and EU funded projects.*

Action: EU collection of practices on exit work

4. Collaboration with Civil Society Organisations

Strategic Objective: *In many Member States, exit work relies on the collaboration with Civil Society Organisations. It will be important to consolidate learnings on what is needed for a fruitful and safe collaboration. This work should take practitioners from state-run exit programmes into account since the interactions between CSO's and civil servants are often decisive*

Action: EU checklist on a successful collaboration with civil society organisations (CSOs) in the exit field

Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters and their family members

Based on Member States contributions and on insights and conclusions from the PBCs, the following areas for further work have been identified:

1. A comprehensive approach on child returnees

Strategic Objective: *A proper management of child returnees is crucial to avoid negative consequences of their traumas and past experiences. EU Member States have progressed in adopting short term measures just after return, but on the long term perspective there is still uncertainty on what should be done. Lessons could also be taken from adjacent fields (e.g. general crime prevention, child soldiers, sexual abuse, children of other offenders).*

Action: EU Guidance on how managing returning children in short/medium/long term perspective covering also the specific challenges of orphans and isolated mothers

2. Preparedness of professionals involved in the reintegration of child returnees

Strategic Objective: *Member States agree that the training of the professional profiles dealing with child returnees is crucial, but not all Member States target the same professional profiles. An overview of existing trainings, will help identify core competences and skills and could help to clarify key aspects as e.g. who could be best placed to provide such trainings when a national CVE Center is not in place.*

Action: EU overview of existing trainings for practitioners working with child returnees

3. Better management of the return process

Strategic Objective: *Member States have identified inter-European dialogue on prosecuting, reintegrating*

and/or repatriating foreign terrorist fighters and their families as a key area where further work is needed. An EU overview of the ongoing experiences will allow to identify the best practices in dealing with the different phases of a return (repatriation, prosecution and reintegration), as well the coordination mechanisms of the different professional profiles involved that have proved to be effective.

Action: EU overview of the best practices in member states on the management of returning foreign terrorist fighters and their family members

4. Gender dimension of returning FTF

Strategic Objective: Returning women can present specific challenges and needs, and the lack of a proper consideration of the gender dimension can be an obstacle to reintegration. Rehabilitation programs are often shaped on men, with the risk to miss the opportunity to increase the probability to reach a successful reintegration of returned women and mothers into society, starting already in prisons where necessary.

Action: EU analysis of the specificities concerning returning women

5. Effective communication strategies on returning FTF

Strategic Objective: Strategic communications can play a key role to facilitate the reintegration of returning foreign terrorist fighters and their family members. We need to develop targeted communication strategies, with a proper support from the national level to the local level, and clearly identify responsibilities and risks of narratives stigmatising returnees that could hamper their reintegration process.

Action: EU Recommendations on strategic communications regarding returnees

Local

Based on Member States contributions and on insights and conclusions from the PBCs, as well as of the cities participating in the EU Cities Against Radicalisation Initiative, the following areas for further work have been identified:

1. Hotbeds of radicalisation

Strategic Objective: In 2019 and 2020 we have started analysing possible ways to identify radicalisation hotbeds at national and local level. Mapping the hotbeds and their specific features, without prejudice to the competences of national intelligence services, is crucial. There is a need for a more in-depth overview of different approaches with a view to better target prevent actions and interventions. We should also know more about how these communities are impacted by terrorist propaganda.

Action: EU Overview on how to identify radicalisation hotbeds at national and local level, how terrorist propaganda is addressing and affecting them, how to exchange the outcome between national and local level and how to create targeted prevent actions

2. Features and creation of national hubs supporting the local level

Strategic Objective: The positive experience with national hubs supporting local actors (including for instance

advise centres and helplines) has been discussed in the PBC on the local dimension. There is an interest, at EU level, in identifying the key features, advantages and challenges of these centres and other possible coordination, cooperation or support structures and mechanisms. This could result in a guidance on how to establish such centres or similar structures and mechanisms, while carefully taking into account the variety of administrative structures within the EU Member States.

Action: EU Guidance on how to establish knowledge hubs or coordination, cooperation and support structures and mechanisms at national level to support the local level

3. Synergies with other crime prevention efforts at the local level

***Strategic Objective:** Especially at the local level, experience shows that a wide and integrated approach to radicalisation is key. Exploring approaches to link the prevention of radicalisation to other crime prevention initiatives for urban security could provide useful insights and learnings.*

Action: EU Guidance on how local crime prevention approaches can be used for addressing different types of extremism

4. Access to guidance and training material at the local level

***Strategic Objective:** The engagement with cities so far has also shown how important it is for local actors (including elected officials) to have an online access to targeted, concise and practical guidance and trainings on specific topics of their interest.*

Action: EU online training/manual for practitioners and front-line actors at local level on selected topics (e.g. on direct participation of young people in prevent work)

5. Digital prevent work at the local level

***Strategic Objective:** In particular due to the COVID crisis, prevent work at the local level has to shift to the digital space to reach the target groups. The links between online and offline radicalisation at the local level are still under-explored and deserve further attention. Cities need to know more about how to take into account the role of social media, algorithms, conspiracy theories and fake news in local prevent work.*

Action: EU overview of learnings, practices and tools for cities on digital prevent work

Ideologies

Based on Member States contributions and on insights and conclusions from the PBCs, the following areas for further work have been identified:

1. Inter-linkages between all kinds of violent extremist ideologies

***Strategic Objective:** We have explored quite intensively ideologies but COVID-19 and the spread of conspiracy theories have once more shown how inter-linked different violent extremist ideologies (e.g. left-wing extremism,*

right-wing extremism, incels, anarchists) can be. These links could be further explored to identify adapted prevent actions, including similarities and differences between online and offline discourse, and root causes that fuel extremist ideologies. It is also important to address the linkages between the latter and social unrest (riots and violent demonstrations) and polarisation.

Action: EU Overview and interlinkages of different types of violent extremist ideologies and motivations including online dimensions

2. Radicalisation leading to self-segregation

Strategic Objective: Radical ideologies can lead to self-segregation of certain communities. This impact of radicalisation requires specific measures to prevent isolation, in line with the conclusion of the project-based collaboration 2020 on home-schooling.

Action: EU overview of practices on how to prevent self-segregation of radicalised groups

3. Community policing and engagement and prevention of radical ideologies

Strategic Objective: Community policing and engagement plays a decisive role in the dialogue with (religious) communities and contribute to address the risk of stigmatisation. Guidelines developing measures from community policing and engagement (possibly including with diaspora communities) at the local level and across ideologies would benefit to all EU Member States.

Action: EU guidelines on community policing to support (religious) communities

4. Common understanding of right-wing extremism

Strategic Objective: We started working on how to define a clearer understanding of scope and scale of violent right-wing extremism to ensure a more coordinated response at European level in 2020. This on-going work should be continued, exploring definitions, measuring and reporting of violent right-wing extremist activities in the EU, including through victim surveys.

Action: Support to Member States on developing a common understanding of violent right wing extremism and on strengthening approaches to tackle this challenge

Communication and online propaganda

Based on Member States contributions and on insights and conclusions from the PBCs, as well as the work under the EUIF, the following areas for further work have been identified:

1. Prevent work and new technologies

Strategic Objective: A deeper and more focused understanding is needed, of the role of technological developments and platforms (virtual reality, artificial intelligence, encryption, gaming, etc.) and why certain narratives resonate with certain audiences, as well as on assessing which online communication efforts

(counter-, alternative-, positive- narratives, re-directions) bring results at local and national levels

Action: EU overview of emerging technologies and how they are used by extremists, in view of better tailoring the countering of extremist communications

Action: Evaluation of counter- and alternative-narrative efforts (stemming from the CSEP programme) with indication of examples of success stories;

2. Learning from adjacent fields in governmental communications

***Strategic Objective:** Lessons learnt from governmental communications on (past) health and economic crises should be explored as they could support current and future strategic communications related to P/CVE (in the Covid-19 context).*

Action: EU guidelines on lessons learnt from governmental communications on (past) health and economic crises

3. Disinformation and radicalisation

***Strategic Objective:** Online propaganda makes a strong use of disinformation. Conflans-Sainte-Honorine attack has shown once again how ideology and disinformation can exploit vulnerabilities. The impact of disinformation on radicalisation needs to be examined more in depth.*

Action: EU analysis about the relationship between disinformation and radicalisation in view, in particular, of primary prevention

4. Online exit work

***Strategic Objective:** COVID-19 crises with lockdowns has made face-to-face interventions even more difficult than in the past. Therefore, there is a need to further explore approaches to exit work / deradicalisation online i.e. how to approach possibly radicalised individuals and build trust without direct contacts.*

Action: Recommendations for practitioners on the effective use of selected exit work approaches in online deradicalisation work

Priority third countries

Based on Member States contributions and on insights and conclusions from the PBCs, and in line with the Joint Actions Plan on Counter-Terrorism for the Western Balkans, the following areas for further work have been identified:

1. Cooperation with Civil society organisations, religious communities and non-governmental organisations in priority third countries

Strategic Objective: *To improve the capacity to cooperate with civil society organisations and religious communities on P-CVE activities, including on the reintegration of returning foreign terrorist fighters and their family members to the Western Balkans and to the MENA region; to share EU experiences in establishing safe cooperation processes and trust with non-governmental organisations working on P-CVE.*

Action: **EU recommendations for the Western Balkans and some countries from the MENA region on how to collaborate with non-governmental organisations and religious communities on P-CVE**

2. Processes of radicalisation of Western-Balkans diaspora living in a EU Member State

Strategic Objective: *An EU analysis of the specificities of the radicalisation process of Western Balkan diaspora living in EU Member States could help to understand how the environment, and the social and family networks in the country of origin, interacted with the environment of the hosting country.*

Action: **EU analysis of the radicalisation process of Western Balkans diaspora living in EU Member States**

3. EU - Western Balkans understanding on P-CVE at policy and practitioners level, and enhancement of practitioners' skills in the region.

Strategic Objective: *To reach an EU-WBs common understanding on P-CVE, as well as to have professional profiles well equipped to deal with the main challenges in this area is a common need for the EU Member States and for the region. An increased involvement - on an ad hoc base - of WBs practitioners and policy makers in the activities conducted on P-CVE at EU level could benefit the security both of the region and the EU Member States.*

Action: **On an ad hoc base, further involvement of WBs practitioners and policy makers in the activities conducted on P-CVE at EU level, with the aim to reach a common understanding and to enhance the capacities of the first line practitioners, including those dealing with returnees in the WBs**

Vulnerable groups

Based on Member States contributions and on insights and conclusions from the PBCs, the following areas for further work have been identified:

1. Children in- and outside schools

Strategic Objective: *The Conflans-Sainte-Honorine attack has shown how vulnerable pupils can be. We need to put in place actions with young people at school and in (digital) youth work to deconstruct propaganda and counter polarisation. In order to reach these objectives, it will be important to support Member States in reinforcing cross-collaboration between schools, youth work and social work. Exploring the potential of digital youth work and identifying practices to support and involve families of young people will help also to prevent the intergenerational transmission of extremist beliefs.*

Action: EU overview of approaches and practices dedicated to young people in and outside schools

2. Asylum seekers and refugee communities

Strategic Objective: Member States need to take into account also the risk of terrorists exploiting vulnerabilities among certain individuals migrating to the EU territory (e.g. adult and child refugees, persons seeking international protection, and unaccompanied children) and the related polarising effect in our communities, . We need to collect good practices, experiences and to provide further insights and guidance on the matter.

Action: EU overview on approaches and practices on prevention of radicalisation in asylum seekers and refugees communities

Lone Actors

Based on Member States contributions and on insights and conclusions from the PBCs, the following areas for further work have been identified:

Strategic Objective: Lone actors have been analysed through different angles (ideologies, online dimension, mental health) but we would need a comprehensive overview on learnings and possible prevent actions

Action: EU overview on lone actors and related prevent measures

3. Working formats and stakeholders – who contributes how and with what?

The Commission will implement the strategic priorities and the related actions through a result oriented approach to respond more effectively and with innovative approaches to radicalisation. This approach will also allow us to better measure the progress made so far.

In order to reach these goals, the Commission will bring together all available tools both in the offline and online spaces (such as NPPM, PBC, EUIF, CSEP, EU Cities, EU funded projects and the support provided to policy makers, practitioners, and researchers via two framework contracts of up to 60 Million EUR in 4 years), ensuring coherence with related policy areas and including a stronger link between the internal and the external dimension.

Each action is meant to reflect different perspectives, with the contribution and collaboration of policy makers, practitioners and researchers.

In terms of policy coordination and exchanges at EU level, the NPPM will not only prepare Steering Board meetings, but also discuss policy topics of general interest and to exchange on innovative initiatives and foresight work in preventing radicalisation.

PBCs will continue complementing the exchanges in the NPPM. A number of like-minded MS will dive in specific topics to which they are more exposed, with regular reporting back to the NPPM and thematic policy recommendations. PBCs are, where applicable, enriched with perspectives of experts, researchers and practitioners for a holistic approach to the topic. Early 2021, Member States will decide which 2020 PBCs will be further developed in 2021 and which ones will be added to deliver on these strategic orientations.

The specific challenges related to the online dimension will also be tackled from different angles: the Commission will make sure that the main collaboration between policy makers, law enforcement (Europol) and Industry (mainly internet providers) under the EU Internet Forum will continue to be meaningfully complemented by the contribution of NGO and civil society partners under Civil Society Empowerment Programme, as well as by the work on communication and narratives from a practitioner's point of view in the RAN.

As to the local dimension, under the initiative "EU Cities against Radicalisation, the Commission will furthermore continue engaging with municipalities to better understand the specific challenges and to develop a more sustainable and strategic approach to prevention of radicalisation at local level. The Commission will ensure that any developments under EU Cities against Radicalisation are closely articulated with other local initiatives supported by Member States (e.g. EU Strong Cities network, Nordic Safe Cities...). The work under the RAN LOCAL working group will meaningfully complement these efforts, also with new initiatives such as the Practitioners' Exchange Programme. The Commission will coordinate and facilitate the bridge between actions at city level and national level of these strategic orientations.

The Commission will complement these initiatives by providing a more targeted support to policy makers in their prevent work, and efforts in the field of strategic orientations, via thematic workshops, individual consultancies and train-the-trainer courses for a targeted knowledge building. It will also propose to organise, if requested by a Member State and on a voluntary basis, peer evaluation of practices, possibly combined with counselling and advice.

The Commission will also continue supporting practitioners and their knowledge building and transfer, focusing as much as possible on creating synergies between them and among them and policy makers in thematic working group meetings, but also via webinars and new forms of collaboration such as the practitioners' exchange programme.

As of 2021, the Commission will also enhance relationships with and among researchers to strengthen the evidence base for further policy development and the design of concrete approaches and interventions. It will not only create an Advisory Board of researchers and a Research Community, but will also pool and compile research findings and gradually increase accessibility to research outcomes by policy makers and practitioners. EU funded projects will be more involved in the policy cycle and analysis and research reports, also based on confidential information, will inform the Commission and its Member States on arising threats in order to strengthen the capacity to anticipate trends.

Against this background, the Commission will therefore deploy all its resources to support knowledge building and exchanges between policy makers (including at the local level), practitioners and researchers also by providing, via its contractors, various platforms for exchange and will compile learnings by creating joint outcomes.

These integrated efforts will not only increase the capabilities and skills of policy makers, practitioners and researchers, but will also enhance the cooperation with and among stakeholders at local, national, European and international level and will strengthen our evidence base and capabilities of preventing radicalisation in a more effective way at EU level.