

Think globally, act locally

A comprehensive approach to countering radicalisation and violent extremism

Introduction

On 1-2 February the conference Think globally, act locally took place in Amsterdam, organized under the banner of the Netherlands Presidency of the European Union, by the Ministry of Security & Justice of the Netherlands in cooperation with the Radicalisation Awareness Network Centre of Excellence (RAN CoE). Thank you for sharing your experiences RAN style with the other attendees. It was an inspiring event, with a lot exchange of practices, approaches and challenges. During two days interaction between national policy makers, researchers and first line practitioners from all over Europe took place in Amsterdam. The conference counted some hundred participants. During plenary sessions and break-outs into smaller working group sessions the participants looked into different aspects of radicalisation and the local preventive approach.

General findings of the conference

- Local governments are often the first line of defence when it comes to terrorist threats and attacks. It is important that actors at the local level are empowered to take their role. Support from the central government is needed, in terms of resources, capacity and expertise. However, a differentiated approach is key, as small towns and capital cities may have different needs.
- Information exchange on the local level between relevant partners is necessary. This requires a mutual effort from local partners as well as national police or intelligence organisations, as information should flow both ways. It requires a relationship built on trust.
- Prevention and repression complement each other and stakeholders should be aware of the risks involved in approaching radicalisation only from a law enforcement perspective. Interventions aimed at increasing the resilience of local communities and promoting an inclusive dialogue are necessary in order to prevent (further) radicalisation in the future. Furthermore, preventive measures are cost effective, compared to repressive measures such as monitoring and imprisonment.
- For the implementation of policies to counter radicalisation and violent extremism, it is possible and effective to build on existing structures that are already in place on a local level to help youngsters susceptible for criminal behaviour, gang membership and/or sexual exploitation.
- Building long term (trust) relationships – not only during crises – with communities is paramount. Engaging communities by cooperating with civil society organisations is key to both handling specific cases of radicalisation and preventing radicalisation on a societal scale. Community organisations and individuals that play key roles in their communities are credible and able to use fast, practical, and local interventions, while using their religious or cultural background and connections where needed. Furthermore, it is possible to include friends and family members in specific cases.

Workshops

Attendees participated in three of the four workshops on local preventive approach. During each workshop participants focussed on an other aspect of the local preventive approach.

1. Individual case management: Individual risk analysis at local level
2. Local preventive approach (RAN)
3. The role of women and girls
4. Engagement with local communities

In this section you find short descriptions and outcomes of the workshops. The workshop on the local preventive approach was delivered by the RAN LOCAL co-chairs, the recap of this workshop is therefore more detailed than of the other workshops.

1. Workshop Individual case management: Individual risk analysis at local level

The NCTV offered an interactive workshop where participants could experience the way multi agency case management is being executed in the Netherlands. The exercise was about a returnee from Syria. The participants received a role instruction and were challenged to play one of the seven roles in a fictional multi agency case management meeting: local government, criminal investigation unit, child protection, school counsellor etc. The exercise was an effective way to showcase the Dutch approach.

Findings

- The role and influence of a peer group and social network is strong, which poses risks but can also be used beneficially. A good strategy could be to use peers as coaches, buddy's and alternative role models. Furthermore, when endeavouring to disconnect someone from an extremist environment, make sure to offer alternatives for the loss of their existing social network and friends.
- There is a tendency to have discussions about a (potentially) radicalised individual or returnee, rather than engaging directly with them. In the prevention phase, it is important that (potentially) radicalising individuals can voice their frustrations and are being heard in general, not only directly linked to their radicalised way of thinking. In case of a returnee, engagement is important for gaining crucial information which makes a deliberate threat assessment possible

2. RAN workshop Local preventive approach

The workshop local preventive approach was led by the two co-chairs of the RAN Local working group Jessika Soors and Suzanne den Dulk. In this workshop the participants discussed local prevention strategies from different perspectives by reflecting on a real-life situation. This situation was introduced by William Baldet, the prevent coordinator for Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland (UK). He presented the situation of Leicester where two English Defence League (EDL) marches occurred just 14 months apart. The EDL is a far-right street protest movement which focuses on opposition to what it considers to be a spread of Islamism and Sharia in the United Kingdom. The first march stirred a lot of commotion and led to polarization between the different communities in Leicester. When this extremist group descended on Leicester for the second time there was anxiety and hostility against these marches in the local Muslim communities. There were quite consistent rumours that some young men were about to plan an attack or some kind of counter event during the march. The participants were asked to invent local strategies in order to prevent this second march to cause a lot of damage and violence in short-term and the prevention of attacks and how to deal with the anxiety, hostility and tension between the communities in Leicester long-term.

Findings

Networks -> information

- Community building
Invest in long term relationships and networks with AND between: Police, Mosques, Churches, Sport clubs, Working unions, Big employers, Youth clubs, existing social services, teachers, . It is important to develop these network offline and online. Create resilience. This ensures a good information position when needed.
- Round-table meetings

Create round-table meetings where all these parties can develop these relationships and make use of mediators

- Key persons and credible voices
Identify key persons and credible voices gateways to communities. However you need to reach out to groups that are not represented by these key persons. Be aware of the role key persons play in their community and that they never represent the entire community. Not only use the usual suspects.
- Reach out in innovative ways
Be creative in the ways of reaching out / reaching silent supporters
 - Reach out by having an offer in return: cycle-classes for mothers
 - Help them to get their messages out

Communication strategy

- The effect of social media is still being underestimated and authorities should invest in more strategic, targeted and personalised social media intervention strategies.
- Make the Media, especially the local media, responsible for their influence. Create partnerships with them to spread the message of inclusion and tolerance
- Invest in empowering the mainstream voice – against polarization

Quick wins

- Make use of existing structure as a crisis team
- Make use of the existing networks
- Close cooperation between local authority and police is necessary, but no securitized model.

Practices mentioned

- Neighbourhood Managers – Frankfurt – Germany
- Police Youngsters – Sweden
- Municipality Council, leaders police & local and state of community – Norway

3. Workshop The role of women and girls

In this workshop the increasing role of women and girls in radicalisation processes and the increasing number of radicalised women and how to deal with this was discussed. It is important not to underestimate the role of women and girls, as they can have a considerable spin-off effect as recruiters and facilitators. Therefore, tailor made approaches with a focus on gender aspects are required, for example by matching female mentors and safeguarding very young girls.

4. Workshop Engagement with local communities at risk

During the workshop ‘Engagement with local communities at risk’, the importance of working with civil society organisations and individuals from relevant communities was highlighted. Working with communities enables one to not only act more swiftly in specific local cases, but also contributes to the resilience of communities itself. This, in turn, contributes to the prevention of societal tensions and

radicalisation on a national level. While discussing specific cases from key figures from the Dutch Expertise Unit Social Stability and the German organisation 180° Wende, it was concluded that there are several practical benefits of working with local communities at risk. For instance, community actors have an understanding of which cultural or religious aspects are relevant in a specific cases. Investing in relationships built on trust between (local and national) governments and communities is – not only in times of crisis – crucial in preventing radicalisation.

Now what...

All in all this conference was a good start to getting the necessary EU wide interaction between national policy makers and first line practitioners up and running. Exchanging local experiences and practices between and within EU member states is important to develop effective strategies to counter radicalisation and violent extremism as an integral part of national CT strategies. The need for further exchange between member states was widely shared and the connection between relevant actors from different countries can be strengthened.

The Netherlands Presidency is currently exploring options for more structural knowledge exchange and a stronger connection between relevant actors in the EU member states. RAN CoE supports this initiative.