



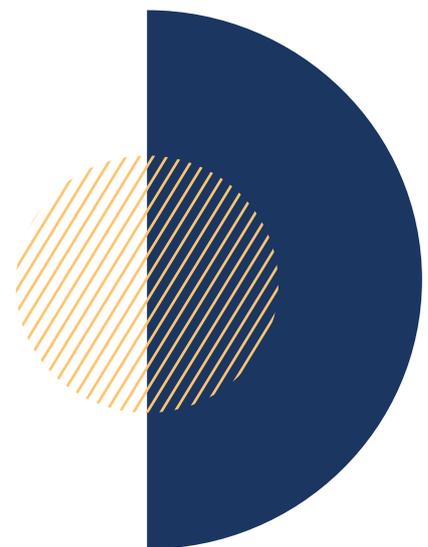
European
Commission



REPORT

on the project-based
collaboration
on strengthening
the knowledge
landscape regarding
radicalisation and
violent extremism

LED IN 2019

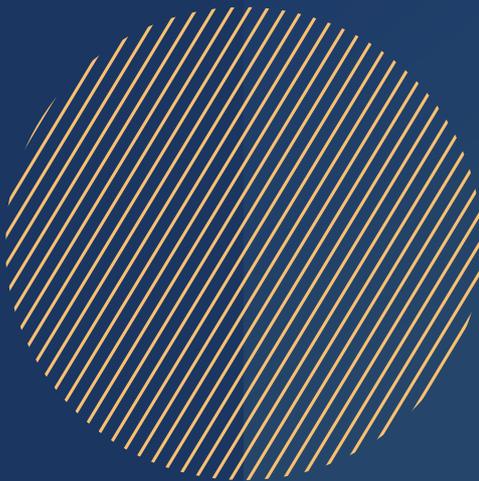


*Migration and
Home Affairs*

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION



General Introduction

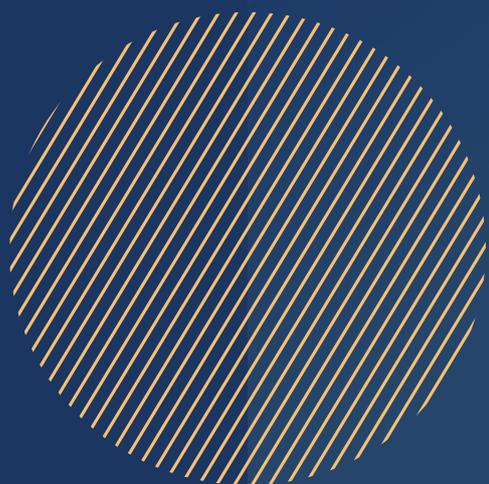
In its final report of 18 May 2018, the high-level Commission expert group on radicalisation (HLCEG-R) recommended creating a new collaborative format: 'project-based collaborations', led by Member States with the support of the Commission.

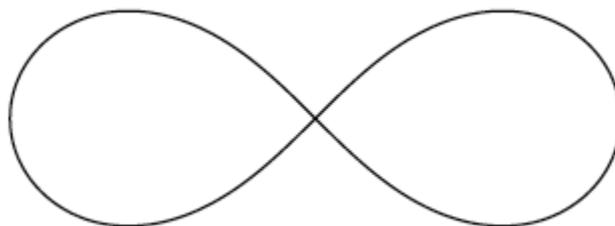
The purpose and added value of project-based collaborations was to allow like-minded Member States to collaborate through a series of meetings to produce specific deliverables that helped implement better policy responses.

Following input received from the Member States, the Commission organised in 2019 seven projects with various formats: study visits, workshops or combination of study visits and workshops.

Each group working on a project validated a final report with guidance and recommendations.

STRENGTHENING THE KNOWLEDGE LANDSCAPE





I. Introduction

On 10 May in The Hague and on 9 October in Copenhagen, two expert meetings were organised as part of the project *Strengthening the Knowledge Landscape*, organised under the project-based collaboration initiative.

The goal of the project was to identify and share best practice and to formulate recommendations to strengthen the relationship between knowledge and policymaking in the field of radicalisation, extremism and terrorism. For some years now, Member States have signalled a significant gap between the two. They feel that more knowledge is needed to further develop policies and practices for effectively tackling the constantly evolving challenges of radicalisation, extremism and terrorism.

This gap is also recognised at EU level. The conclusions of the high-level expert group on radicalisation of May 2018 recommend closer engagement with researchers as part of a strengthened EU coordination mechanism on prevention. The call for tenders for technical support to prevent and counter radicalisation from 2020 onwards also explicitly highlighted strengthening the knowledge base as a priority for further work by the Commission and by the Member States.

II. Participating Member States

The Netherlands led this project and Germany, Denmark and France participated. An expert from the UK took part in the meeting in The Hague. A representative from the European Strategic Communication Network took part in the Copenhagen meeting to jointly moderate the meeting with the Commission.

III. Main insights

One of the principal findings of the project is that the joint work the Commission and Member States want to develop in this area do not have to start from scratch. There are already important initiatives underway to bridge the gap. All Member States that participated in the project have developed or are developing structures to boost knowledge management in the field of radicalisation and extremism and to strengthen the links between policy and research. These structures can be very different in their set up. COSPRAD in France works with a scientific board of researchers, while the Danish Centre for the Prevention of Extremism has chosen to establish a network of related researchers.

Apart from the structure, active steps are being taken to make research more transparent and better accessible to stakeholders. Both France and Germany are working on internet portals and search tools that help make relevant research accessible to interested researchers, policymakers, practitioners and others. In France, COSPRAD is developing a web-based *Cartographie de la Recherche sur la Radicalisation* and in Germany, BKA/EENeT is creating SeCoR, a web-based *Service and Contact point for Radicalisation Research*.

On top of that, a number of – often very practical – initiatives are being taken to improve communication, contacts and exchanges between policymakers and researchers (as well as with practitioners). CREST leads the way in spending 20-30% of its budget for communication of research (results), through not only dedicated research-to-practice initiatives for its staff, but also round table discussions, road shows, lectures and workshops. Funding PhD positions is an important part of the mix, as well as seminars and conferences. Both CREST, COSPRAD and the Danish Centre do this.

All the Member States that participated in the project subscribe to the need to promote as much as possible knowledge-based policies and/or initiatives. Denmark aims specifically to educate practitioners about the knowledge base of projects implemented with the Centre's support. It produced a knowledge synthesis bringing together insights from 65 key research publications (selected out of 1700), the combined knowledge of which forms the cornerstone of the Danish approach to preventing extremism.

Initiatives run in the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, France and the UK seem to offer a good foundation and inspiration for further developing the knowledge 'lemniscat', a continuous feedback loop between research, policy, practice and (professional) education, both at national and EU levels. The attached reports of both meetings give more information on this, at national level (report 1) and on the recommendations for further work on both national and EU levels (report 2). In summary, the main findings and recommendations from the project are:

Finding No 1: a research-led policy approach suffers from CT fatigue

All participants agree that mechanisms to include research as a permanent feature in policymaking are vulnerable, especially when set up as stand-alone structures. They could be among the first to be axed in times of austerity. The example of COSPRAD in France shows that political support is of the utmost importance. It is important to educate politicians on the importance of knowledge development and the need for continued research to create an evidence base for taking action. Obviously, the same 'perverse' incentives are at play also in the field of knowledge as in the wider CT/CVE field. When the threat is high, there is room

for extra budget, also for research. When threat level falls, there is a risk that CT fatigue kicks in. Funding is increasingly cut, undermining the sustainability of policies and projects.

RECOMMENDATION: make the connection between research and policy (and practice) sustainable in the long term

All participants agreed that a research-led approach to CT and CVE cannot be an ad hoc solution, but should become part of governments' mindset, general approach and organisational structure. The example of COSPRAD in France shows that political support is of utmost importance to make sure this shift in approach materialises and sustainable structures are implemented and supported with stable financial and human resources. It is important to educate politicians and ministers about the importance of permanent knowledge structures, knowledge development and the need for continued research to create an evidence base to underpin action and about the benefits of having permanent knowledge structures.

SPECIFIC ACTIONS

- Build an independent network of trusted researchers to enable regular engagement with academia. Experience from Germany, Denmark, France and the United Kingdom shows that there are various formats to do this. It could be a scientific council, or a network structure, for example.
- Support networking and informal activities between researchers, policy makers (and practitioners) to ensure flexible and responsive dialogue. This could include supporting a network of civil servants and researchers.
- Provide independent funding (also through independent entities) to support research and set up a continuous dialogue process between government and researchers to identify policy priorities.

EU SUPPORT

- Explore the possibility to link national and/or existing networks of researchers to work at EU level to bring policy and research closer together.
- Increase the policy relevancy of EU funding by having a clear idea of what knowledge is needed (where are the policy-relevant knowledge gaps) and, for example, by requiring strong baseline analyses for project funding and using monitoring and evaluation matrixes to obtain this type of funding.
- Stress the need for national (and EU) policy makers to collect data and research on policies and initiatives to monitor the effectiveness of prevent policies and approaches over the long term.
- Stress the need for national (and EU) policy makers to anchor policies, strategies and initiatives - as far as possible - in actual research findings and or explain when this cannot be done.

Finding No 2: researchers and policy makers do not speak the same language

Discrepancies in expectations between policy makers and researchers are not uncommon. This stems from their cooperation having different priorities and ultimate objectives. Sometimes this is related to the complexity of the language used by researchers in their publications, which contrasts with the need for front-line practitioners and policy makers to receive simple, actionable insights. On a very practical, literal level, all participants agreed that at the EU level, linguistic differences are a barrier to accessing research published in

other languages than the mother tongue or English and this considerably limits exchanges of knowledge across the EU.

RECOMMENDATION: Identify a common language between policy makers, practitioners and researchers

It is important to establish transfer mechanisms to make research available and accessible to policy makers. In this regard, CREST, with its emphasis on communicating research results and diversified outputs, and the Danish Centre for the Prevention of Extremism, which transfers knowledge via 'info-houses', are successful examples. These mechanisms are not limited to knowledge transfer, they also create an active working relationship between policy makers and researchers, fostering flexible working relations that can adapt fast to the ever-changing threats.

SPECIFIC ACTIONS

- Establish intermediate bodies/structures at national level, either in-house or external policy structures that can strike the balance between policy makers and researchers' needs and objectives/expectations.
- Make sure that national CT and CVE policy teams have dedicated capacity, even when they do not carry out research themselves, and preferably have a background in research to liaise with researchers and more generally streamline communication with the research community.
- This capacity should also support translating (figuratively) research results into practical knowledge for policymakers and politicians (i.e. making the research results accessible).
- Translate (literally) key academic research and in-house government analysis (at least) into English to aid the exchange of practice and understanding across the continent.

EU SUPPORT

- Provide funding to translate research and analysis from and to other EU languages than English.

Finding No 3: although academic research runs for many years, policy makers needs quick actionable insights

Closely connected to the need for a common language is the trade-off between speed and depth. There is a general observation that, from a policy perspective, research projects are too long and do not respond to the (direct) need of policy makers. This is exacerbated by a rigidity in research funding, especially EU level funding. Procedures are cumbersome and do not always respond to the need to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances and priorities. However, just as the need for speed is a feature of policy making in political priority areas, fundamental research takes time and needs to be in-depth and rigorous.

RECOMMENDATION: make a distinction between fundamental and applied research and make sure the two complement each other.

There are ways to meet the need for speed, by for example asking researchers to map available research in a certain area. This can be done relatively quickly. These kind of inventories can be carried out alongside more fundamental, long-term research.

SPECIFIC ACTIONS

- Set up (see first point above) and empower representative bodies/networks of researchers to have swift access to government data so that they can provide swift research and respond to policy needs.
- Establish constructive dialogue between universities and governments to guarantee that researchers working in security will reach the necessary career milestones for them to advance.
- When tendering multi-year research contracts, provide several interim reports that will underpin further research to ensure complementarity between long and short-term research programmes.

EU SUPPORT

- Next to funding for regular (multi-annual) research programmes, the policy units responsible for CT and prevention within the Commission (DG HOME) should have funding available for ad hoc financing of short-term papers, analysis, research mapping etc. by external researchers to be able to act quickly in response to sudden developments in the threat landscape and/or political urgencies.

Finding No 4: research struggles to provide policy makers with foresight scenarios to anticipate what may come next

In recent years, the threat landscape has evolved swiftly. Participants expected that this landscape will continue to change over the coming years, reflecting (inter)national political and societal developments. Technological innovation and the risk of abuse by extremists are likely to only magnify this trend. It is therefore important that governments and researchers alike carry out forward-looking work and anticipate future developments.

Participants felt that, also due to the perceived distance between policy and research, researchers do not always focus on the most relevant topics or that they continue work on beaten tracks, running the risk of duplicating research that has already been carried out. At the same time, researchers' ability to conduct relevant work and make predictions or anticipations depends greatly on the public authorities giving them access to data. They recognised that this also means that researchers should be better informed about threat analyses.

However, policymakers and those working in counter terrorism cannot expect that outsiders, even researchers, ascribe the same degree of urgency to developments as they do themselves. This means that they should actively reach out to researchers to convey this sense of urgency.

RECOMMENDATION: be predictive

Researchers should be encouraged to be more predictive and to focus on future threats and trends, including technological developments. Governments should help researchers to build forecast models based on existing information and past events.

SPECIFIC ACTIONS

- Stimulate communication between intelligence agencies and/or fusion centres on the one hand and with researchers on the other, especially regarding threat analyses.
- Set up fast tracks to give trusted researchers access to relevant data and enable them to carry out forward-looking research and/or analysis.
- In research tenders (both education and government entities), make sure that a certain level of agility is embedded, to allow research to adapt in real time to the fast changing threat landscape and policy priorities.

EU SUPPORT

- Insert a requirement to include specific ‘forward-looking’ sections in EU-funded research.
- Encourage EU bodies to provide forecast scenarios as part of their assessment to guide future monitoring of events.

The Member States that participated in this project suggested that the findings and recommendations would be taken on board in the work that is or will be carried out to further strengthen the knowledge base of EU work on prevention to avoid duplications and maximise synergies. This can be done by continuing the work of the PBC and by feeding this into the work to support a knowledge structure under lot two of the framework contract for technical support to prevent and counter radicalisation from 2020 onwards.

