

MONITORING RADICALISATION AND EXTREMISM

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A policy is only as good as the feedback tools that inform it and the institutional set-up that underpins it. This is all the more true in areas such as radicalisation and extremism where a number of dormant and hidden factors are at work. Over the last decade, these have become issues of particular concern for Europe. New risks of Islamist and far-right radicalisation have impelled the introduction of policies, the effects of which are only now being evaluated. As radicalisation that risks escalating into violence is more amenable to prevention than repression, having the capacity to detect early warning signs and trace the spread of extremist activity over time is critical. In Europe, such capacity is unevenly available, especially in countries with limited or no experience in counter-radicalisation.

This brief outlines a **set of methodologies for monitoring the risk of radicalisation and the trends in extremism** based on an integrated approach to the indicators being monitored and the institutional mechanism doing the monitoring. These methodologies are designed to equip stakeholders — both governmental and non-governmental — with a tool which fuses a broad range of informational inputs. The brief also puts forward specific recommendations for increasing the monitoring capacity in three pilot countries — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Greece.

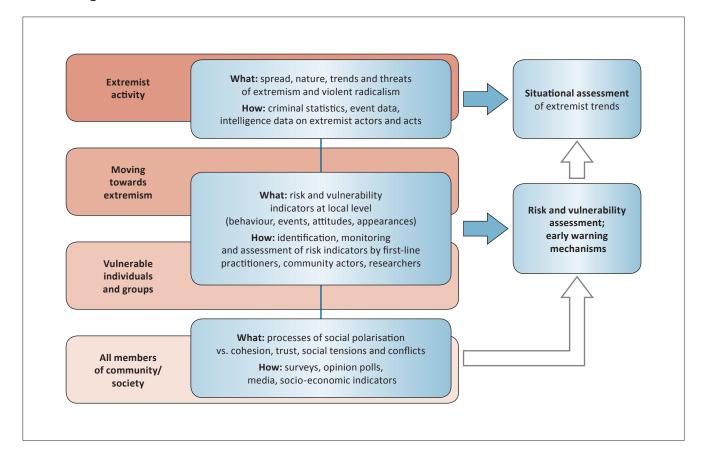
Radicalisation results from the combined effect of individual push factors – biographical exposure, intrinsic motivations, grievances – and pull factors – exposure to ideologies and recruiters and an enabling environ-

KEY POINTS

- Policies against radicalisation need accurate monitoring tools capable of detecting early signs of risk and tracking developments over time.
- Two methodological tools have been designed to support this: a framework of risk indicators for identifying risk and vulnerability to radicalisation early on and a situational assessment methodology to capture trends over time in extremist activity and actors.
- ➤ The framework of cognitive and behavioural risk indicators provides the basis for developing tailored early warning mechanisms for frontline practitioners for the purposes of prevention.
- ➤ The situational assessment of trends in extremism is concerned with the end products and manifestations of radicalisation, such as violent and non-violent extremism. Its core indicators present the national threat picture, while subject-specific ones providing in-depth information on areas of interest.
- Data gathering under these tools requires an integrated approach. A coherent policy against radicalisation necessitates clear designation of stakeholder roles, intra and inter-institutional mechanisms, and cooperation between governmental and non-governmental institutions.
- ➤ A pilot testing of the tools in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Greece formulated recommendations for improvement of national data collection/monitoring of radicalisation and extremism.



Monitoring framework



ment. Detecting its emergence early enough, therefore, requires a monitoring mechanism that looks into a broad range of processes. Such comprehensive monitoring goals could be achieved by the two methodological tools presented here, to be implemented either separately or in complementarity, depending on the specific national context and needs. The framework of risk indicators provides the basis for the design of indicators for identifying risk and vulnerability to radicalisation early on; it can be adapted to context of individual countries. The situational assessment methodology can serve to capture trends over time in extremist activity and actors (both violent and nonviolent). While the first tool can serve preventive purposes, the second could provide grounds for informed strategy formulation in countering radicalisation and extremism.

These policy-relevant tools incorporate:

 three levels of analysis – the whole of society, vulnerable or at-risk individuals and groups or extremist actors and perpetrators;

- a wide array of possible sources of information and assessment methods;
- the potential analytical and practical outputs.

Perpetrators of extremist acts and radicalisation processes that have not yet led to violence are to be identified through different data sources and assessment methods. Criminal statistics, intelligence data, but also open source data, social media analysis and victimisation surveys serve well to identify individuals engaging in extremist acts and those most actively breaking the law.

The identification and assessment of radicalisation risks and vulnerabilities can rely on early warning indicators observed and reported by frontline practitioners and complemented by research, surveys and analysis of open source data.

Radicalisation is the process whereby individuals come to hold extreme views in relation to the status quo. Not all who begin the process progress to the use of violence. A broader definition refers to violent radicalisation as the "process of socialisation leading to the use of violence".¹

Extremism, in the context of liberal democracies, refers to any ideology that advocates racial, ethnic or religious supremacy and/or opposes the core principles of democracy and human rights. Violent extremism consists in promoting, supporting or committing acts which may lead to terrorism and which are aimed at defending such ideology.

The term Islamist radicalisation is tied to the understanding of Islamism, which holds that Islam is not only a religion but also a social, legal and political code of conduct. Islamists aim to reorder government and society in accordance with Islamic law. Although Islamist ideas stand behind many moderate Islamist organisations, which are ready to participate in the pluralistic political systems, they also inspire various extremist organisations.

Far-right radicalisation is associated with an extremist ideology espousing the myth of the homogenous nation, promoting racism and xenophobia and hostility to liberal, pluralistic democracy.

The policy context

Many European states have been proactive in countering radicalisation and extremism, while others have adopted a trial and error approach relying on untried and untested measures. Consequently, some counter-radicalisation programmes have been criticised as relying upon limited empirical evidence and producing no sound assessment of the extent and nature of radicalisation processes.

Radicalisation diagnostic tools can be distinguished by the policy objective they aim to support, the type of information they measure, the institutions involved and the level of analysis. In terms of policy, three distinct but interconnected categories of objectives can be distinguished – anti-radicalisation (preventing radicalisation from occurring at all within the general population), counter-radicalisation (stop or mitigate radicalisation among the vulnerable or those already on the path to radicalisation) and de-radicalisation (reversing radicalisation). Achieving these objectives requires identifying risks and contributing factors at the different levels and assessing them so that interventions can be designed. In line with these objectives, diagnostic tools can support and guide strategic decision-making (measure and map the macro environment's conduciveness to radicalisation, highlight and assess trends in radicalisation processes and extremist activity) or operational and tactical planning (identify and monitor populations and groups at risk; spot individuals at serious risk for radicalisation, individuals who have already been radicalised, assess the risk that extremist offenders pose upon release).

Depending on the policy objectives, the **information analysed**, the unit and level of analysis will vary significantly. Anti-radicalisation and counter-radicalisation mostly entail broader policies affecting the whole or large sections of the population (macro level), often associated with general developmental goals, which aim to prevent the emergence or stem the progression of nascent radicalisation. More targeted counter-radicalisation policies can be devised for specific groups and individuals (focus on the meso and individual level) identified as being particularly at risk of progressing towards violent extremism. De-radicalisation, dealing as it does with already radicalised individuals and less often groups, is an intervention, largely geared towards the individual level.

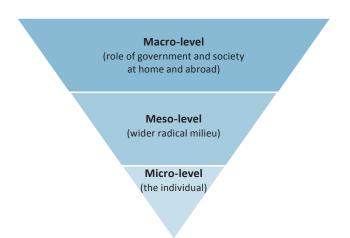
Differences among countries in monitoring and assessment methods correspond to differences in the infrastructure of the implementing institutions. A

For an overview of definitions and theoretical concepts of radicalisation, see CSD (2016) Understanding Radicalisation: Review of Literature. Sofia: Center for the Study of Democracy.

coherent policy against radicalisation necessitates the clear designation of stakeholder roles, intra and inter-institutional mechanisms, channels of communication and cooperation between institutions working horizontally. As it currently stands, few countries have managed establishing such an integrated approach; where integrated mechanisms exist, they build upon already well-established partnerships and channels of cross-agency collaboration, which are adapted for the purposes of counter-radicalisation. For policies against radicalisation to make an impact on prevention – of which risk monitoring is a key component – should be integrated in the day-to-day work and regular responsibilities of those institutions and civil servants that are most likely to come into contact with potentially radicalised individuals.

Monitoring radicalisation risk

Radicalisation processes impacting on disaffected and indoctrinated persons and the later involvement of some of them in acts of terrorism are of growing concern for European citizens, their governments and the wider international community. Addressing this threat requires prevention and counter-radicalisation policies which some EU member states have been proactive in developing.



Radicalisation takes place at the **individual**, **group/ community and society level** and often certain causal

factors and drivers can resonate and work at all three levels.²

- a) macro-level, i.e. role of government and society at home and abroad, the radicalisation of public opinion and party politics, tense majority-minority relationships, especially when it comes to foreign diasporas, and the lack of socio-economic opportunities for whole sectors of society;
- b) meso-level, i.e. the wider radical milieu the supportive or even complicit social surrounds, which serves as a rallying point and is the "missing link" with the terrorists' broader constituency or reference group that is aggrieved and suffering injustices;
- c) micro-level, i.e. the characteristics and experiences of the individual, involving identity problems, failed integration, feelings of alienation, relative deprivation, etc.

Diagnostic and monitoring tools in Europe

The diagnostic mechanisms and assessment tools to measure radicalisation trends and risks used in Europe differ in terms of:

- what is measured and monitored risk behaviours and vulnerability factors or violent acts and manifestations of radicalisation;
- at what level individual, group, organisational, society;
- for what purpose identifying individuals at risk in order to deploy interventions, horizontal assessment of trends for strategic priority-setting, etc.

The general trend in the EU, USA and Canada has been to expand the response beyond the exclusive focus on the immediate prevention of terrorist attacks, and to roll out a number of "soft" policies with the aim of identifying and reversing the radicalisation process which often precedes the use of violence.

Based on Schmid, A. P. (2013) Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review, p. 4.; Veldhuis. T. & Staun, J. (2009) Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model. The Hague, Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, p. 24.

Monitoring at the **macro level** involves tools for assessing horizontal threats and trends in extremist activity, actors, drivers and determinants of radicalisation. A widely used method is the national threat assessment report as applied, for example, in the UK, Germany, the Czech Republic, Netherlands, etc.

Monitoring at the **community level** involves mechanisms of a more holistic nature, going beyond the purely methodological framework for risk identification and assessment, or general awareness raising materials on risk indicators. They include a more elaborate system for collection and assessment of information on risks from various sources or vulnerability assessment by professionals, coupled with a referral, response and risk mitigation mechanism, which necessitate a well-functioning institutional infrastructure and procedures.

Monitoring at the **level of the individual** is operationalised through risk assessment methodologies paying attention to contextual factors, such as political views and religious tenets, along with psychological factors, environmental factors and social factors.

These tools are usually aimed at or used by **first line practitioners** (including police officers, correctional personnel, teachers, social and health workers, etc.) or trained professionals (forensics, psychologists, etc.), depending on the aim of the assessment.

Some setbacks in achieving effectiveness include:

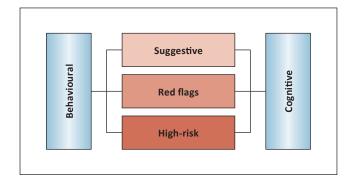
- the nature of vulnerability indicators (most often observable behaviours and outer appearance) is generally more ambiguous in distinguishing worrying from normal behaviour;
- frontline practitioners do not always have the necessary knowledge and understanding to judge the level of vulnerability of an individual or to access additional information to support their judgement beyond their observations of behaviour and appearances.

A framework for radicalisation risk indicators

The early identification of far-right and Islamist radicalisation can play key role for the purposes of prevention. This approach relies on careful formulation of indicators observable by frontline practitioners. Such indicators must capture trajectories towards radicalisation and extremism of individuals who have not yet committed acts of violence. The indicators are designed on the premise that processes of radicalisation have certain manifestations in the actions, behaviour and attitudes of an individual, which can be noted by their social environment or by public sector employees (frontline practitioners) coming into contact with the person. Early warning indicators do not present a tool to identify radicalised individuals but serve to flag risks and vulnerabilities so that early prevention can be applied. They can be applied only in combination and assessed in light of the local context and individual circumstances, paying particular attention to the aspect of change in behaviours.

The framework is composed of indicators that are divided into two categories and concern mainly the individual level: **1) cognitive** (expression of opinions, beliefs and attitudes at verbal level) and **2) behavioural** (including changes in practices, actions, appearance) and in turn, they are divided into three categories – suggestive, red flags and high risk, depending on the degree of immediacy of risk they indicate.

Structure of the vulnerability and risk indicators



Suggestive indicators are signs of vulnerability and are intended to support a more in-depth, professional

assessment of potential vulnerabilities and cannot be viewed in isolation from one another. They provide supportive information that may be useful in considering the complexity of a situation. Red flags are stronger indicators of risk-relevant behaviours and attitudes, but also need to be viewed in combination and put into context.

Cognitive indicators

The term "cognitive opening" refers to the process within which a person is becoming receptive to extremist ideas including those allowing the use of violence for the achievement of certain (political) goals. Therefore, certain cognitive indicators should be designed and considered for the purposes of early warning and prevention. Such indicators should aim to capture different stages of advancement in receptiveness to extremist ideologies.

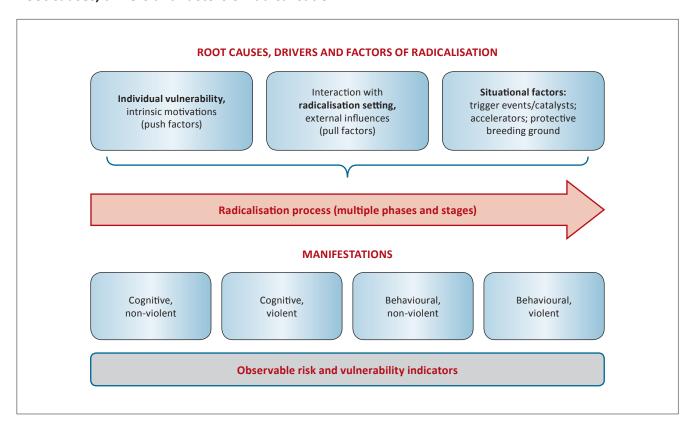
Suggestive

Openly voicing grievances. This could be the first and more benign stage before expressing more aggressive attitudes. However, in countries experiencing economic difficulties or where corruption is high and trust in government is low, the expression of grievances may not be indicative of a process of individual radicalisation.

Expressing a dichotomous worldview (us versus them). While this may not be indicative of outright readiness to commit violence, it is a sign of the embrace of rhetoric that is characteristic for radicalised groups or individuals and may signify a risk to a path to potential radicalisation.

Expressing disrespect or rejecting the legitimacy of (secular) authorities. This signifies a graver risk of radicalisation if it is tied to convictions and calls for the need of political and societal change. In the context of Islamist radicalisation such calls would be directed to

Root causes, drivers and factors of radicalisation



³ See Wiktorowicz, Q. (2004) *Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam*. Department of International Studies, Rhodes College.

the change of secular, democratic societies into ones under the religious values and norms of early Islam. In the context of far right radicalisation such calls would be directed to the overthrow of government, abolition of the political parties, arming of citizens, etc.

Monitoring **hate speech** towards different groups and individuals could assess the degree to which, an individual is embracing radical ideas at the cognitive level.

Red Flags

Propagating ideas for **non-legitimate radical change of secular democratic societies.**

Openly voicing support for terrorist organisations and causes. In order for such indicator to be recognised and correctly understood, a list of such organisations needs to be provided; a reliable reference in this respect is the EU List of persons, groups and entities involved in terrorist acts and subject to restrictive measures.

Openly expressing certain attitudes supporting violence, or against an expressed target. The focus on violence presents an additional aggravating factor of the risk beyond more general sympathies with a terrorist cause or group. This might be expressed through or accompanied by speaking of the importance of action now, the imminence of harm from a hostile group and justifying breaking the law in the name of a cause or ideology.

Behavioural indicators

• Suggestive

Cutting ties with family and friends, socially withdrawn. Such behaviour could signify increased vulnerability to being drawn to extremist ideologies and that the person might be undergoing a process of search for meaning, purpose or answers. In countries of Central and Southeast Europe where empirical evidence on violent radicalisation is lacking, this indicator should be considered with the caveat that such behavioural changes might be the outcome of various other circumstances (such as family problems or abuse, addictions, experience of discrimination, etc.) and do not necessarily indicate risk of radicalisation.

Noticeable change in religious and other every-day routines. This would include a personal change from not practicing religion at all to suddenly paying attention to and strictly following rules of religious practice, to a point where these become central to someone's life and other regular activities (such as school, work, social activities, etc.) become secondary or are abandoned to accommodate the newly adopted practice.

Having contacts with or being under the influence of a religious or ideological leader or recruiter. This might be manifested in the individual starting to mention new role models or ideological leaders (in school, at home, among friends or during conversations with pedagogical and social services staff) and rejecting advice from others.

Group isolation and capsulation. These do not automatically translate into exposure of members of such communities to radicalisation but, if compounded by other factors at the individual level, they could enhance the vulnerability to potential radicalisation.

Red Flags

Possessing or disseminating extremist propaganda materials, for example, glorifying violence or fighting for a terrorist cause. If literature possessed or disseminated contains information on military training, handling weapons or making explosives this points to even graver risk of radicalisation.

Organises, leads or attends rallies for extremist causes. The indicator is relevant for the professional group of first line police officers and those specialised in securing mass events. A more systematic approach to monitoring such events is necessary and greater awareness among community police officers of the different extremist groups active in the country.

Contacts with or membership in extremist groups abroad or at home. Associating with extremist groups would likely come in combination with other indicators, such as changes in outer appearance, participating in the group's activities (such as rallies and demonstrations), going to certain places where the groups is known to convene, etc. Monitoring such contacts can only be part of the functions of intelligence services rather than a monitoring component in the daily routines of first line practitioners, although they may come across other warning signs associated with such engagement.

Engaging in criminal activity. Criminal engagement can be both a contributing factor and a symptom of a radicalisation process being underway.

High-risk signs

Travel to risk countries/conflict zones. This is a serious indication of intent to take part in terrorist activity, or at least to travel to countries where the risks of being drawn into it increase dramatically; a list of risk countries needs to be provided.

Taking part in combat/military training. This is primarily relevant for monitoring by intelligence officers or law enforcement specialists.

Buying weapons, explosives and related materials. The interception of activities relating to the acquisition of weapons, explosives and related materials fall directly in the functions of law enforcement officers.

Monitoring trends in extremism

A well designed **situational assessment methodology** can provide a viable mechanism for monitoring and assessment of the current state and developments over time in extremism-related acts and actors on the national level. It can help capture the current state as well as variations in time in the capabilities, activeness and attractiveness of extremist actors and ideas through measuring group membership, the proportion of different types of extremist acts

committed as part of the general crime environment in a country and the spread of radical views among the population at large.

The situational assessment methodology is concerned with the end products and manifestations of radicalisation, such as violent and non-violent extremism and associated crimes (including hate crimes and hate speech) and terrorism. It consists of core and supplementary indicators.

Core indicators are intended to present the national threat picture. They consist of three sub-sets:

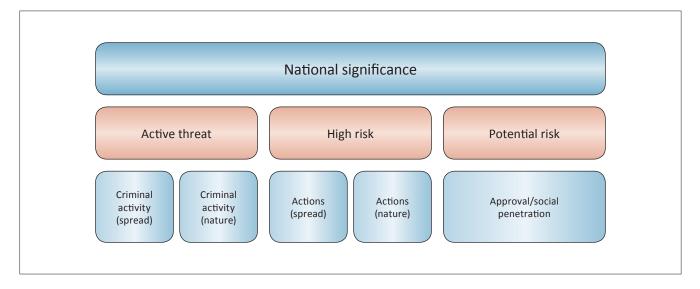
- The spread and nature of criminal activity measuring incidence, share in violent criminal activity, and share in overall criminal activity. This set of indicators accounts for the number of crimes and how they figure in the general crime picture in a given country. It also captures the nature and differences between extremist offences proportion of specific crime subtypes.
- The spread and nature of actions pertaining to the active supporters of the extremist scene, as denoted by notable events and their participation, as well as the propensity of such gatherings to turn violent.
- The penetration of extremist ideas in society measured by the participation in extremist or support organisations, share of the population offering only electoral support or active support beyond electoral, and general approval of radical ideas.

The core indicators are distributed in **five domains of national level threat and risk picture**:

- spread of criminal activity;
- nature of criminal activity;
- spread of actions;
- nature of actions; and
- approval/social penetration.

Subject-specific and supplementary indicators provide more in-depth information on specific areas of interest (e.g. right-wing extremism, left-wing extremism, Islamist extremism). These include the pro-

Core indicator domains and national threat significance



filing of perpetrators, as well as reviewing the core characteristics of major known extremist organisations or movements in order to assess their intent and capability to cause harm. Supplementary indicators include analyses of extremist content, activity and engagement on the internet through different techniques.

The foundation of the tool based on statistical data (the core indicators) captures the core violent and non-violent manifestations of extremism, while the adjustable (qualitative) component (supplementary indicators) allows for an in-depth analysis of all facets relevant to specific phenomena of interest in the national setting.

Situational assessment of extremist trends in Central and Southeast Europe

Pilot national studies to test the situational assessment methodology in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Greece evaluated the data collection and analytical capacity of all relevant national institutions, reviewed extremist trends as per available data and formulated recommendations for improvement of national data collection systems in view of the preparation of regular situation assessment reports of extremist trends.

In the **Czech Republic** an annual situational report on extremism is already in place and there is a well-established tradition in monitoring, statistical reporting and assessment of extremist trends since the 1990s. Still, the existing approach has some shortcomings in terms of analytical depth and the scope of indicators covered.

In **Greece**, there is no dedicated situational report on extremist trends released by government institutions. Several institutions, however, have rich raw data that form a solid starting basis for the compilation of core as well as supplementary indicators, given that a more systematic approach to data quantification, extraction and subsequent analysis is introduced.

In **Bulgaria**, there are several practical obstacles, which currently impede the direct application of the situational assessment tool due to specifics of the criminal law framework and the lack of a unified system for statistical recording of relevant crimes across the respective institutions. Crimes with xenophobic or racist motives cannot be distinguished in the statistics from those with hooligan motives, which makes the calculation of core indicators on extremist criminal acts impossible at present.

Recommendations

The needed institutional infrastructure for addressing radicalisation risks

A coherent policy against radicalisation necessitates the clear designation of stakeholder roles, intra and inter-institutional mechanisms, channels of communication and cooperation between institutions working horizontally. A mechanism for monitoring of radicalisation trends and risks would work best based on the collation of data from a variety of sources, including official statistics, media, first line respondents, reporting from members of the public, consultations with NGOs and community organisations, and with the vulnerable groups or victims themselves. In countries with limited experience in countering and preventing radicalisation, governments should focus first and foremost on obtaining accurate evidence-based picture of the spread and nature of risks, as well as on enhancing institutional preparedness to identify and respond to these risks. The indicator framework proposed here requires a more pro-active approach by all concerned institutions, which should proceed from a proper recognition and prioritisation of radicalisation-related issues in strategic planning and day-today activities. To achieve this, the following policies could be brought forward:

At the national level, a **central coordination body** on countering and preventing radicalisation can be created and tasked with providing guidelines and expertise, centralising information and analysing threats, coordinating the work of territorial structures involved in prevention, designing trainings and raising awareness, ensuring cooperation between relevant stakeholders, designing and evaluating prevention programmes.

Develop a multi-agency prevention and coordination mechanism at the local level to identify, monitor and prevent radicalisation. The mechanism should include setting up expert groups or local multi-agency panels with clearly defined coordination roles.

Develop an **early warning system** for identification and monitoring of radicalisation risks. This system should clearly define the mechanisms through which information on risk signs is reported and by whom; how and by whom risks are evaluated and prioritised, as well as on the follow-up procedures based on the needs of each individual case. The framework for key risk indicators outlined in this brief serves as a basis on which to build such a system and develop further indicators tailored to the specific context.

In order for preventive work to be gradually integrated in the day-to-day work of **frontline practitioners**, their **skills**, **knowledge and capabilities** to identify and address radicalisation should be significantly increased.

More research is needed into the factors precipitating radicalisation, the paths to violence, the forms and manifestations of radicalisation, and the impact which various ideologies, internet recruitment and role models have in the local context. Research findings should be at the core of any early warning and intervention measures.

Monitoring trends in extremism: country specific policy recommendations

Czech Republic

Include in **situational reporting data on hate crime** perpetrated by individuals not affiliated with any specific radical organisation in order to ensure for a more comprehensive representation of extremist criminal tendencies.

Draft clear **guidelines on how crimes are to be recorded** in order to minimise mistakes in registration by police officers.

Deepen the degree of analysis. More reflection is needed on figures presented both in the extremist actors and activities section as well as in chapters on criminal statistics.

Institute a systematic approach for assessing the degree of agreement with radical ideas among the general population in order to be able to account and anticipate rises in popularity of extremist actors.

Fine-tune terminology and data collection practices of the respective institutions to ensure comparability of statistics.

Greece

The Hellenic Police should try to increase their data collection capacity across the area of far-right events, as quite often such events pave the way for racist attacks.

The Hellenic Police should **quantify the available data** regarding prosecuted individuals for potential hate crimes. It should further adopt indicators on the proportion of hate crimes sub-types in order to extract as much information as possible from the victims' testimonies regarding the qualitative characteristics of racist attacks.

The Racist Violence Recording Network (RVRN) should quantify the qualitative information at its disposal, which concerns the modus operandi, characteristics, perpetrators, victims, and sites of racist attacks. It should improve data collection on attacks against religious and ethnic minorities. It should also draw on public opinion survey data in order to complement its own data.

RVRN and the Hellenic Police should **start collecting data regarding online hate speech** on a regular basis.

The General Secretariat of Transparency and Human Rights should **ensure the validity and reliability of collected data** by producing a single template, which will be used and completed by competent authorities during data collection process. Each incident of racist violence that is reported to the Hellenic Police should be assigned a unique ID number, which will enable the General Secretariat of Transparency and Human Rights to follow-up each case at a later stage.

Bulgaria

Amend the *Criminal Code* to include racist and xenophobic motives in the qualified constituent elements for violent crimes. A more immediate solution can be the introduction of a requirement to record the motivation behind the crime in police, prosecution and court data.

Develop clear **definitions of core legal concepts** such as racist and xenophobic motivation, fascist and antidemocratic ideology, etc., to facilitate identification, investigation and prosecution under the appropriate *Criminal Code* provision.

Establish data gathering mechanisms that allow for the release of aggregated data along the proposed indicators that do not compromise confidentiality and actively encourage its publication to foster analysis by actors outside of law enforcement.

Develop an **institutional mechanism for the collection of data** on the relevant indicators and designate a responsible authority for the compilation of the situational assessment as part of its functions.

Conduct **regular victimisation surveys** in order to assess the share of latent criminality and regular surveys of the public attitudes towards extremist ideas and agendas in order to assess the level of penetration of radical and extremist ideas within society.

Further reading

CSD (2017) *Monitoring Radicalisation: A Framework for Risk Indicators.* Sofia: Center for the Study of Democracy.

CSD (2017) Situational Assessment of Extremist Trends. Sofia: Center for the Study of Democracy.

CSD (2016) *Understanding Radicalisation: Review of Literature*. Sofia: Center for the Study of Democracy.



