



Prevention of radicalisation through intercultural policies

Policy Brief

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INTERCULTURAL CITIES POLICY BRIEFS

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2018

Due to a recent increase in extremist violence and a series of terrorist attacks in Europe and the West, the issue of radicalisation is currently a major subject of concern. As an issue arising primarily from a lack of integration and poor diversity management, it is important to take an intercultural approach when aiming to prevent radicalisation.

The Council of Europe and its partner cities have developed an intercultural approach to issues of integration, which enables cities to reap the benefits and minimise the risks related to human movement and cultural diversity. The key elements of intercultural integration are:

- Setting-up spaces and opportunities for deep interaction and co-creation between people of different cultural origins and backgrounds, to build trust and realise the creative potential of diversity;
- power-sharing – involving people of diverse origins in decision-making in urban institutions, be they political, educational, social, economic or cultural;
- fostering intercultural competence in public, private and civil-society organisations;
- embracing cultural pluralism and the complexity of identities through leadership discourse and symbolic actions; and
- managing conflict positively, busting stereotypes and engaging in a debate about the impact and potential of diversity for local development.

This briefing paper sets out why intercultural policies are important to prevent radicalisation of any kind, whether it be based on religious or political ideologies, directed against migrants, Muslims or the Western world. After recognising the root causes of radicalisation, four intercultural approaches should be taken that complement each other: 1) Fostering a culture of diversity, while encouraging intercultural mixing and interaction as well as political and civic participation, 2) intervening at an early stage and working with those most vulnerable to radicalisation, 3) managing conflict positively, by engaging with – instead of criminalising – those holding extremist views, and 4) combatting stereotypes about Islam and its association with terrorism.

Recognising the root causes of radicalisation

The ideological basis of extremism and radicalisation are versatile. It can be based on *political* ideologies, such as the ETA in Spain, the IRA and the UDA in the British Isles, the Red Brigades (*Brigate Rosse*) in Italy, Baader-Meinhof in Germany or the Quebec Liberation Front (FLQ) in Canada. While these are examples of “domestic” or “homegrown” terrorism, directed at the national in-group, more recently terrorism has also acquired an “international” dimension. In this case, terrorism is directed against migrants and refugees or those supporting them, motivated by racist political ideologies and anger against policies promoting integration or universal access to entitlements. Examples are the terrorist attack in Norway by the ultranationalist militant, Anders Breivik, the attacks in Germany against refugee hostels, the murder of the MP, Jo Cox, in the UK or the rise of nationalism and white supremacy in the US. Next to political ideologies, “*faith-based*” ideologies can also be the grounding of terrorism, as is the case for the Al-Qaeda and ISIS attacks or

attacks directed specifically at Muslims, such as the “National Socialist underground murders” in Germany or the 2017 Finsbury Park Attack in London.

The roots of radicalisation are complex. At the personal level, radicalisation can be triggered by a vulnerability of social, psychological or family origin, via an association of the person with extremist groups. As a societal phenomenon, radicalism can indicate lack of trust in democratic institutions to represent all interests and ideals fairly and give a chance to some political goals to gain political traction. . Economic, social and political marginalisation can generate feelings of exclusion, uselessness and confusion about one’s social belonging. Such individuals are especially receptive to radicalisation, searching for meaning and identity.

The current discourse on radicalisation, however, is based on a strong association between terrorism and Islam, especially fuelled by far-right parties and groups. The focus on religion as the cause of terrorism has led to preventive strategies based on control and exclusion of certain population groups. This only causes more fear and mistrust in societies, from which follows all the more racism and segregation, providing again a fertile ground for radicalisation. This vicious circle can only be broken by intercultural policies that promote inclusion and embracement of diversity.

A culture of interculturality: Promoting intercultural mixing, interaction and participation

The risk of alienation from the rest of society and the feeling of uselessness and inability to participate in that society are especially high in certain deprived neighbourhoods (although radicalisation is not limited to people from underprivileged backgrounds). Anger and frustration is then likely to be directed against other population groups, considered to be responsible, be these migrants, refugees, Muslims or the Western world. It is important to provide these neighbourhoods with more opportunities to connect with the rest of society, to interact with different social and cultural population groups and to participate in political and civil life.

The La Duchère Major Urban Project (2002-2018) in Lyon (France) is an example for promoting interaction and social/cultural mixing by transforming a poor and relatively homogenous neighbourhood into an open, socially mixed area. While housing units were being rebuilt, the residents were rehoused and then given the option to return or not. At the same time, social housing units were rebuilt into non-social housing, which attracted middle-class residents. The new neighbourhood now encourages more interaction (through gymnasiums, schools, libraries), allows for better mobility (through better connection to the public transport system and cycle tracks leading to the city centre) and provides new premises for businesses.

The La Duchère neighbourhood also uses culture as a tool to encourage intercultural interaction through the festival *D’art et d’air* that combines traditional cultural products with artistic creativity from the neighbourhood.

In a mixed and diverse neighbourhood, it is challenging but important to give all residents the opportunity to shape the space they live in, to bring up the difficulties they are facing or to propose their ideas for future developments. A governance system that allows and encourages participation of even the most marginalised communities is therefore vital.

The system of governance in Lewisham (London) is a good example of local diversity management, allowing for diverse religious groups to be heard and to participate in political and civic life. The local authority communicates with its residents especially through their membership of faith groups, particularly through a “Faith in Lewisham Network” and a series of “Faith in Lewisham” conferences. The Council also has a dedicated Faith and Social Action Officer and has a specific budget offering grants of up to £2,500 to faith-based organisations.

At the same time, it is important to foster a shared culture of diversity that every child grows up in and that is part of everyone's daily life. It is important to draw attention to a city's diversity, as part of the city's identity and cultural heritage, and to encourage people to realise the personal and societal advantages of diversity. The cultural and artistic sector as well as education play a central role in conveying the diversity advantage and a sense of interculturality. From intercultural festivals and exhibitions to public debates and lectures or intercultural school projects – There are many creative ways of bringing diversity and interculturality into people's every-day lives.

The television programme “Culture and Diversity”, run by the company *Acte Public* in [Lyon](#), is a good example of addressing diversity through a combination of art, debate and education. The programme includes a background documentary on a specific issue, a debate and exchange of views and opinions and, lastly, a performance that presents a given performer's view on the issue discussed. Some schools take part in the programme's debate, preparing throughout the year by covering topics around interculturality and diversity. Pupils are also encouraged to actively participate in the television programme by making short films about these topics.

Early intervention: Working with those most vulnerable to radicalisation

It is important to also identify and actively reach out to those most vulnerable to radicalisation, that is those most deprived and marginalised in society, to prevent them from developing extremist views and reaching out to extremist groups.

The production school “[Spacelab](#)” in [Vienna \(Austria\)](#) is dedicated to young people (aged 15 – 24) having difficulties in their transition from school to employment. Disappointed in society and feeling excluded or unable to contribute, these young people are given support in identifying their interests and skills, in organising themselves and managing the bureaucracy of employment. The school offers various activities and courses, from vocational training and knowledge workshops to sports and cultural activities. Project evaluation has shown that already after 3 months, 33% of the participants are back to education, training or have found employment.

The project “[VoisinMalin](#)” (“Smart Neighbour”) in [Paris \(France\)](#) aims at supporting people from disadvantaged communities by creating a social network through which people can exchange practical information and form bonds with others in their neighbourhood. Specific community members of different cultural/ethnic origins, usually speaking several languages, are trained as “smart neighbours” to provide their “new neighbours” with information on housing, transport, access to education, social benefits, cultural activities, etc. Actively reaching out to them and knocking on their doors, they encourage those new and/or excluded to connect with others from their community and to participate in social life. Up to this stage, the “smart neighbours” have reached nearly 40,000 families across Paris and Lille.

Managing conflict positively: Engaging with those holding extremist views

Instead of punishing and labelling those holding racist and extremist views, it is important to *engage* with these individuals, to try to understand their views and concerns, encouraging them to reflect on these. Giving these individuals a voice and respecting their views will also increase their feeling of participation and value in society, thereby preventing the outreach to violent extremist groups.

The [Think Project](#) in [Swansea \(UK\)](#) is an educational programme aimed at individuals with a higher risk of far-right extremism. In a 3 day course, participants discuss and reflect on diversity issues and their own attitudes and views, engaging in open dialogue as well as experiential learning. The Think Project employs a non-criminalising approach, listening to their concerns and exploring the experience and information underlying their negative attitudes. After the course, participants are encouraged to engage in intercultural interaction, such as volunteering in a refugee charity. The project has proven to be able to transform young peoples' worldviews and thinking about diversity and societal change.

The [Lewisham Council](#) (London) has implemented a programme ("Channel") to support people that are vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism as part of the UK Government's Prevent strategy. It focuses on identifying the true sources of radicalisation and adapts its support and intervention to the individual's specific needs and vulnerabilities. Interventions can take various forms, from directly addressing extremist ideologies and working on attitudes and behaviours to activities promoting education, employment opportunities or health awareness. Interventions may also address social skills or anger management and in some cases provide housing- and family support or substance misuse interventions. Channel emphasises the importance of co-operation of local authorities and partners across different sectors and addresses radicalisation of *any* kind and people of any faith, ethnicity or background.

For more information on the Channel Programme, see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/channel-guidance>

The Centre for the Prevention of Radicalisation Leading to Violence in [Montreal \(Canada\)](#) works with young people holding extremist attitudes by taking a "social reintegration approach", promoting resilience and community cohesion. Next to direct support for individuals and their families through counselling, the Centre also provides training for practitioners, conducts research and engages the community through awareness raising campaigns or education on the issue of radicalisation.

The campaign "What if I was wrong? When we talk, we learn!" raises awareness and encourages young people to develop critical thinking skills to protect themselves against extremist discourses. The campaign consists of various activities, workshops and projects, such as an art competition based on the five "campaign themes" ("I don't fit in here", "one vision for all", "us against them", "that's none of my business", "they're all the same"). The winner receives a grant 1000 CAD from the Centre and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO presents their art work at a UN conference. The campaign has reached 72 municipalities across Canada and 542 high schools. For more information on the campaign's activities, see: <http://etsijavaistort.org/>

Combatting stereotypes about Islam

Stereotypes about Islam and the association between terrorism and Muslims is currently poisoning the discourse around radicalisation, shifting the focus away from its true sources, promoting anti-Muslim extremism and exclusion of Muslim citizens.

According to the Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (2017) carried out by the Fundamental Rights Agency, 42% of Muslim respondents who had been stopped by the police over the last year said this happened because of the migrant or ethnic minority background and 31% of those Muslims seeking work felt discriminated against over the last five years. At the same time though, the survey shows a higher trust amongst Muslims in democratic institutions than amongst the general population. The majority of Muslim respondents also show a strong attachment to their

country of residence and an openness to people with different religious background. For example, 92% say that they are comfortable with neighbours of a different religious background and 48% would feel 'totally comfortable' with a family member marrying a non-Muslim person. These survey results indicate that Muslims are generally well integrated into society, whereas many claim them not to be. These false assumptions about a lack of integration and other stereotypes and rumours about the Muslim faith strengthen the association between radicalisation and Islam. Education and dialogue can make a valuable contribution to combating this association.

The Abraham Group in Lyon is a good example for encouraging dialogue between people of different faiths and promoting knowledge and understanding about one another's faiths. The group, for example, hosts a radio broadcast, where young peoples' views of their own faith and the faiths of others are openly discussed.

The city of Lutsk (Ukraine) organised an open public discussion titled "Ask the Muslim", aiming to clarify and educate about Islam and the Muslim world and to reduce stereotypes. The spiritual leader of the Ukrainian Muslims Sheikh Sayid Ismagilov, the Ukrainian translator of the Quran Mikhail Yakobovich, and the city community, including Muslims were invited.

It is important though to avoid the misconception of faith and culture as being distinct and stable. Such dialogue aimed to discuss and understand each other's beliefs can, in some cases, only strengthen the "you – me" or "we – them" mentality. To avoid this, it is important to simultaneously promote intercultural/interfaith interaction in everyday life, where faith and culture are not central. In everyday interactions (such as at the workplace, in sports, on festivals or in schools) the focus should ideally shift on other aspects of identity, whereby commonalities rather than differences are brought to the surface and bridges can be built.

"Positive Islam" is an initiative implemented in Fribourg (Switzerland) by the Swiss Centre for Islam and Society in collaboration with the Fribourg Association Frislam (an association of young Muslims). "Positive Islam" is a community of young bloggers engaging in the debate about radicalisation and diversity through articles, drawings and videos. The community consists of Muslims as well as non-Muslims and is therefore a good example of combating the negative discourse on Islam without strengthening the categories of Muslims and non-Muslims, but rather creating unity between those holding common values.

The media also plays an important role when tackling the association between terrorism and Islam. For example, in the case of a terrorist attack, it is important to take the attack out of the religious, ideological or migrant context and rather focus on issues such as integration of vulnerable groups in general. Far-right extremism linked to "white supremacy" and religious extremism currently linked to Islam must be portrayed equally, just as should the fear and sorrow amongst *all* religious and cultural communities.

In Barcelona (Spain), an interconvictional ceremony was organised in memory of the victims of the terrorist attack in 2017. It was organised and attended by different religious and non-religious communities and organisations, which drew attention to the common values of respect and non-violence and portrayed the sorrow of all, independent of their belief. The ceremony was reported by various newspapers and broadcast by different TV and internet channels.

For further policy recommendations regarding intercultural communication, please see the ICC policy brief on "[Political communication and intercultural messaging in times of crisis](#)".

Lastly, the [Anti-Rumour Strategy](#) is a promising way to combat the association between terrorism and Islam. The strategy is understood as a public policy and involves the identification of rumours, falsifying these with data and emotional arguments, creating an anti-rumour network and raising awareness through anti-rumour campaigns. Good practice examples of the Anti-Rumour Strategy can be found in the [ICC online database](#).

Conclusion

This paper calls for intercultural policies to foster an environment that is resilient to extremism and radicalisation of any kind, including far-right anti-migrant or anti-Muslim extremism as well as Islamic extremism. Intercultural policies that valorise and make use of diversity, promote equality and encourage interaction are central for preventing radicalisation. Specifically, we recommend:

- **A radicalisation prevention unit on a national as well as local level** to co-ordinate collaboration between all governmental levels and sectors. A unit should include the civil society, practitioners, academics as well as local authorities and may include representatives of the various sectors and areas relevant to young people (education, employment, health, etc.). A precondition is the training and education in cultural competence and on the intercultural policy approach to radicalisation.
- **Promoting intercultural mixing and interaction** in marginalised and deprived neighbourhoods by creating public spaces, promoting mobility and attracting citizens from other areas through new social and professional opportunities.
- **Encouraging political and civic participation** by setting up a local governance system that allows the various population groups of a city or neighbourhood to be heard. Including representatives of specific community faith groups can be a promising way to reach different religious groups.
- **Identifying those most vulnerable to radicalisation and intervening early** by supporting them to integrate themselves and to increase their life opportunities and aspirations. Programmes and projects aiming to build community, promote education and increase employment are promising approaches.
- **Engaging with - instead of criminalising - those holding extremist views** by directly addressing these views in dialogue and encouraging them to develop reflective and critical thinking skills.
- **Combatting stereotypes about Islam and its association with radicalisation** through education and dialogue as well as by monitoring the portrayal of Muslims within the media, but also by promoting interfaith interaction, shifting the focus on commonalities, connecting people around common goals and encouraging identification with one another.

Although it is important to also implement a certain level of control and security (for intercultural policies on policing, please see the ICC policy brief "[Intercultural approach to urban safety](#)"), authorities should be aware that this may only *increase* fear and cause greater segregation, providing a fertile ground for extremism and radicalisation. Instead of focusing on fighting *terrorism*, policies should rather focus on fighting *exclusion*. The key to preventing radicalisation is fostering trust, social cohesion and embracement of diversity in cities.

Based on the report "Adaptation of policies, stakeholders and actions to the challenge of preventing ideological recruitment and radicalisation – The role of cultural policies" by Ivana d'Alessandro.