



Funded by
the European Union



Project 101073440 – VORTEX.

Policy Brief

TOWARDS IMPROVED KNOWLEDGE INFRASTRUCTURES IN PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM (P/CVE)

BACKGROUND

Effective prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism depends on evidence-informed decision-making — on stakeholders being able to draw on refined, policy-relevant, and evidence-based insights to design appropriate countermeasures. Yet across the field of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), the shared knowledge base this requires is still lacking. Much of the relevant data sits in police and intelligence files that researchers cannot access, while some of the repositories that once contained vital practical knowledge have been archived. Since national data on radicalisation is scattered and of uneven reliability also comparative work establishing which findings travel between contexts remains rare. Generally, core concepts and categories are not harmonised across EU member states, hampering such exchanges further. At the same time, the public that these institutions ultimately serve often lacks the tools and training to navigate competing sources of information about radicalisation, violent extremism and its countermeasures. This policy brief brings together recommendations for EU institutions, national governments, civil society/practitioners, and researchers regarding a common evidence base and knowledge infrastructure in P/CVE.

FOUR AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

1. Data is inaccessible and underutilised.

Much of the data on radicalisation is gathered by the police and intelligence services. These institutions keep them under lock and key, imposing significant barriers that prevent researchers from analysing them and thus generating knowledge from which countermeasures could be derived.

2. Knowledge is archived instead of shared.

The field is currently experiencing a shutdown of knowledge access (e.g. publications of the former Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) and the EC Research e-Library on Radicalisation). These sources are now archived under the EU Knowledge Hub, yet inaccessible, which reduces transparency and restricts the open circulation of knowledge on which evidence-informed P/CVE depends.

3. Data is scattered and the public unequipped.

Knowledge on radicalisation and violent extremism and their prevention is scattered. Beyond the research field itself, the wider public struggles for the same reason: with the growth of diverse journalistic sources, online disinformation and politically oriented readings, it is not always easy for the public to get a clear view of a particular event, and cross-referencing sources and fact-checking require skills and time that many populations do not possess. Hyper-partisanship compounds this — it has reduced complex political issues into a strict us-vs-them binary, effectively eliminating room for nuance or moderate voices, fuelling societal division and preventing communities from addressing multifaceted challenges with equally dynamic solutions.

4. Evaluation is disconnected from strategic decision-making.

In most countries, evaluation remains ad hoc, project-based and weakly connected to strategic decision-making. Short-term funding cycles compound this problem: lessons from effective P/CVE are routinely lost when project cycles end, leaving programmes unable to learn and adapt over time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A. To EU institutions

- Harmonise concepts and categories.

Create a Horizon Europe (Pillar 2) call funding a pan-European project on harmonising concepts and categories for legal and political use, around types of violent extremism beyond the often-used tripartite framework of far-right, far-left, and radical Islamism, as well as the phenomena of radicalisation and terrorism.

- Open research access to sensitive data.

Create special “research passes” or authorisations that allow easier access for researchers to sensitive or private data. This would allow for better quality research and faster output generation, ensuring that research is up-to-date and can keep up with sociopolitical changes.

- Restore open access to EU knowledge bases.

Restore open public access to the EU Knowledge Hub knowledge base, reopening its repository of practices, publications and research resources for unrestricted use by practitioners and researchers.

B. To national governments

- Embed research and evaluation as strategic functions.

National governments should treat evaluation as a continuous and integral component of P/CVE — systematically linked to decision-making and funded independently of individual programme cycles. Longer funding cycles, dedicated resources for practice-oriented evaluation and structured feedback loops between policy, research and practice are preconditions for a learning-capable prevention system.

- Strengthen national knowledge hubs with a link to EU debates.

National governments should base their strategic decisions on regular threat assessments and on existing knowledge derived from research and practice. Systematically identifying emerging developments and persistent gaps, and translating these into evidence-informed responses developed in close cooperation with researchers and practitioners, should be the task of national knowledge hubs. As several European countries have already demonstrated, these represent a valuable pooling of diverse expertise. A designated representative of the hub at the EU Knowledge Hub could serve as a link to EU debates and promote the exchange of knowledge across Europe.

- Develop national data institutes and comparison tools.

Develop national and public demographic data institutes, as well as comparative apps for data, policy reports and media information, to enable people to easily compare sources of information.

- Provide compulsory training in media literacy and critical perspectives.

Since radicalisation takes place inside processes of communication, accessible educational programs need to be developed to help citizens understand such issues. In the same way that we already have fire-safety training in the workplace, compulsory training in media literacy and on critical perspectives needs to be provided for workers of all levels and fields. This includes integrating critical media literacy into school curricula, workplace training and lifelong learning initiatives.

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- Disclose the source and funding of data used in public debate.

The use of statistics or academic work in public discussions, be it political debates or journalistic articles, is widespread. Yet these sources are often presented as all equivalent and trustworthy, leaving it unclear where the data is coming from and who produced and funded it. Make it compulsory to disclose in political/journalistic debate where your data comes from but also who funded it.

C. To civil society and practitioners

- Participate in knowledge-exchange networks.

Networks for exchanging innovative ideas, insights from research and practice, and challenges exist in different forms across countries. More formalised national knowledge hubs have the potential to enhance the visibility and legitimacy of P/CVE and strengthen links between practitioners and researchers. The prevention field can be strengthened by actively participating in and contributing insights to networks that connect practice with research.

- Develop apps for comparing political information.

Develop apps for comparing political information, to help the public cross-reference sources and fact-check amid diverse journalistic sources, online disinformation and politically oriented reporting.

- Counter hyper-partisanship with diversified understandings of political positions.

Encourage more diversified understandings of political positions, to restore room for nuance and moderate voices against the pull toward strict us-vs-them binaries.

D. To researchers

- Produce research output across timelines and formats.

Conceive of research projects in tripartite timelines of output. For example, after one month of the project, researchers present a literature review; after six months or a year, their first results; and after three to five years, their final results. Each report should take three forms: a condensed single page for higher administrations, a three-page version for professionals with more time, and a full twenty-page version for those who have the capacity to go in-depth.

- Test findings across cases through comparative research.

Findings on effective P/CVE and on violent extremist group behaviour are often generated from single cases, and the particularities of a case can be absorbed into a claim about the phenomenon more readily than intended. Comparative methodologies should be used to study countermeasures implemented in different contexts. Similarities and differences should be used to test hypotheses, build theory and evaluate the effectiveness of practices. Contextual factors may affect outcomes.

- Appoint research-to-practice fellows.

Being an academic is conceptualised as one job, yet in reality it encompasses very different prerogatives such as researching, teaching, managing and translating one's work to a bigger crowd. For the latter, academics are not always well-trained. Appoint "research to practice" fellows who are trained in translating academic research into policy recommendations (see e.g. CREST) for each research centre. These individuals would be responsible for communicating the recent findings of the centre to the political and practitioner spheres as well as to the media.

RECOMMENDATIONS AT A GLANCE

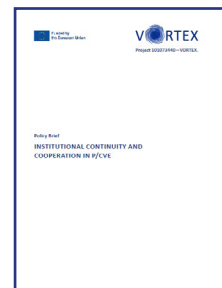
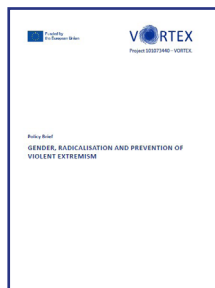
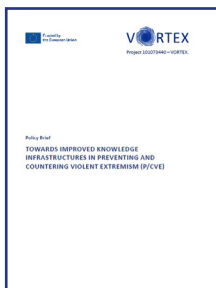
Actor	Timeline	Recommendation
EU institutions	Immediate	Harmonise concepts and categories (Horizon Europe call)
	Immediate	Create research passes for access to sensitive data
	Long-term	Restore open access to EU knowledge bases
National governments	Immediate	Embed research and evaluation as a strategic functions
	Immediate	Disclose the source and funding of data used in public debate
	Mid-term	Provide compulsory training in media literacy and critical perspectives for the public
	Mid-term	Strengthen national knowledge hubs with a link to EU debates
	Long-term	Develop national data institutes and comparison tools
Civil society/ practitioners	Immediate	Participate in knowledge-exchange networks
	Mid-term	Develop apps for comparing political information
	Long-term	Encourage diversified understandings of political positions
Researchers	Immediate	Produce research output across timelines and formats
	Mid-term	Engage in comparative research to test findings across cases
	Mid-term	Appoint research-to-practice fellows

CLOSING

This policy brief identified multiple areas of improvement in the current knowledge management on radicalisation and violent extremism and their countermeasures: Among them the non-harmonisation of core concepts across EU member states, the inaccessibility and scatteredness of data for research, the archival of vital practical knowledge or the lack of tools for the public to navigate competing sources of information. Each of the four audiences addressed in this brief – EU institutions, national governments, civil society/practitioners and researchers - can contribute to a common knowledge infrastructure: What is needed for a stronger evidence-base and knowledge infrastructure in P/CVE is conceptual harmonisation, workable research access as

well as restored accessibility to publications at the EU level. Moreover, national knowledge hubs and public data institutes should be linked to European debates while active practitioner participation in the networks can further connect research and practice. Finally, public-facing tools and training can support public engagement with information on radicalisation, violent extremism, and countermeasures.

This brief is based on the “White Paper on Radicalisation into Extremism and Terrorism”. It is part of a series of four policy briefs: “Towards Improved Knowledge Infrastructures in P/CVE”, “Gender, Radicalisation and Prevention”, “Rethinking Monitoring and Threat Assessment for Terrorist, Violent Extremist, or Radical Groups or Individuals”, and “Institutional Continuity and Cooperation”.



MORE INFORMATION ABOUT VORTEX

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