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Preventing the radicalisation of children by fighting the root causes

Report¹

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

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Summary

The terrorist attacks perpetrated in several European and neighbouring countries over the past year have been the painful result of a most worrying trend: an increasing number of children and young people being drawn into extremist movements in their search for identity and a meaningful place in society. Profound feelings of injustice and frustration about their social exclusion are amongst the main root causes contributing to young people's vulnerability and increasing their willingness to adhere to extremist, sometimes violent groups, which offer an apparent social purpose to them.

The Parliamentary Assembly should call on the Council of Europe member States to do their utmost to ensure the social inclusion of children and young people at risk through education and training, as well as through targeted prevention, deradicalisation and rehabilitation programmes. It should also promote awareness-raising campaigns – both against radicalisation itself, and against hate speech and discrimination which push yet more minors into radical movements –, reinforced dialogue within and with religious communities and measures aimed at specific contexts where children and young people are exposed to extremist movements, such as prisons or social media.

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 13778](#), Reference 4134 of 22 June 2015.



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A. Draft resolution²

1. The phenomenon of “home-grown” Islamist radicalisation has seen a significant increase in recent years. Young people, including many minors, sensitive to ideological discourse and the apparent “sense of social purpose” offered to them by radical Islamist organisations, are drawn into extremist movements involved in violent conflict, for example in Syria and Iraq, and carrying out terrorist acts, including in Europe.
2. The Parliamentary Assembly is very concerned about these developments. It believes that prevention is key. Preventing children and young people from turning to extremist movements must start at an early age when values and beliefs are formed. Prevention, deradicalisation and rehabilitation strategies must target the individual in his or her specific context, be comprehensive and based on multi-agency local partnerships.
3. Hate speech, Islamophobia and discrimination against young people of Muslim background or Muslim communities as such (including refugees arriving in Europe) reinforce religious radicalisation. Whilst the European response to terrorist activities must be provided in a highly targeted manner by specialised agencies, including information services, the judiciary and law-enforcement services, the endogenous root causes should be tackled at the national and in particular the local level, in the daily living environment of children and young people. Relevant strategies need to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms in order to avoid inciting further resentment.
4. In the light of these concerns, the Parliamentary Assembly calls on the Council of Europe member States to:
 - 4.1. as regards social inclusion via education and training:
 - 4.1.1. provide all children and young people with equal opportunities, life perspectives and a sense of social purpose, as well as perspectives for social mobility;
 - 4.1.2. educate children and young people on democratic citizenship and European values such as respect and tolerance, including by encouraging child and youth participation;
 - 4.2. as regards targeted strategies:
 - 4.2.1. support dedicated institutions and civil society organisations, appoint local reference persons and develop targeted programmes for prevention, deradicalisation and rehabilitation purposes, including gender-specific approaches;
 - 4.2.2. offer specific training for all parties involved (law enforcement, social workers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), families), providing them with the tools for preventing the (further) radicalisation of at-risk children;
 - 4.2.3. actively support the deradicalisation of young people leaving extremist movements, facilitating their rehabilitation to prevent them from being used as “multipliers” for terrorist causes;
 - 4.2.4. implement specific programmes for young people in prisons;
 - 4.2.5. promote multi-stakeholder partnerships building on mutual trust, with clear “firewalls” between reporting and supporting services;
 - 4.3. as regards urban policies, invest in improving disadvantaged neighbourhoods and their social infrastructure;
 - 4.4. as regards social action and dialogue more generally:
 - 4.4.1. facilitate the dialogue between religious communities and families to identify children and young people at risk and to foster mutual understanding and respect between religions;
 - 4.4.2. develop campaigns and targeted measures against Islamophobia and other forms of hate speech which may further reinforce vicious circles of discrimination and the mistrust between political and religious systems that fuel extremism;
 - 4.5. as regards safer Internet policies:
 - 4.5.1. encourage families and schools to educate children on Internet use in order to make them aware of extremist content and critical of the manipulative methods used by radical organisations;

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 15 March 2016.

4.5.2. fight the dissemination of radical propaganda and hate speech via the Internet, social media and other communication technologies by reinforcing alert mechanisms;

4.6. as regards law enforcement and intelligence services, create systems to identify and facilitate the exchange of information on radicalised persons and convicted offenders in order to monitor their movements across European borders and prevent future crimes, while respecting their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

5. The Assembly further invites member States to:

5.1. sign, ratify and implement, if they have not yet done so, the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism (CETS No. 196) and its Additional Protocol (CETS No. 217);

5.2. support and implement the Council of Europe Action Plan on “The fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism (2015-2017)”, the Guidelines for prison and probation services regarding radicalisation and violent extremism adopted by the Committee of Ministers in March 2016, as well as the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016–2021) to be launched in April 2016, which also aims at preventing the radicalisation of children;

5.3. exchange information and good practice with regard to the best strategies and tools aimed at preventing radicalisation, deradicalising young people concerned and rehabilitating returnees from foreign conflicts and extremist organisations.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Sevinj Fataliyeva, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. The terrorist attacks committed by radical Islamists in Paris (France) on 13 November 2015 hit Europe like a shock wave. The French attacks were perceived as an open assault on the fundamental European values of living together peacefully in a multicultural society. Something had changed overnight. While massive terrorist attacks had hit other European countries, such as Turkey, and neighbouring countries, such as Tunisia, in previous months, many people, in Western Europe in particular, started wondering if they were still safe going about their daily business.

2. In November 2015, people realised that the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks were not foreign nationals but young people who were born and had grown up in Europe as members of European communities and lived as European citizens. They were neighbours, acquaintances, friends or relatives drawn into extremist movements, thus “radicalised”, a process often unnoticed by those around them. Since the latest attacks, government officials and experts have started calling for preventive action against youth radicalisation, including measures tackling the “root causes”.

3. In its [Resolution 2031 \(2015\)](#) “Terrorist attacks in Paris: together for a democratic response” adopted in January 2015, the Parliamentary Assembly called on member States to take “preventive measures aimed at eradicating the root causes of radicalisation among young people” and “measures to combat marginalisation, social exclusion, discrimination and segregation among young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods”. As a direct follow-up to this text, I would like to explore the lines of action which may constitute effective policies against the radicalisation of minors.³

4. As the Parliamentary Assembly’s General Rapporteur on Children and a parliamentarian committed to children’s rights in my own country, Azerbaijan, I am convinced that measures aimed at effectively preventing radicalisation processes, be they of a religious or political nature, must reach out to young people and children from an early age. This report therefore intends to explore, on the one hand, the “root causes” of the radicalisation of children in various contexts, without entirely excluding the young people (up to 24)⁴ they will soon grow into, and, on the other hand, the actions required to prevent children and young people from falling victim to extremist movements of any kind which rob them of their future and endanger their lives and those of others.

5. Fighting radicalisation is not only relevant for European security issues; it is crucial from a children’s rights perspective. Radicalised children and young people are not extremist “by birth”. They are lured into extremist movements by vicious terrorist circles for whom they are an “easy target”, susceptible to influence from political and religious ideologies apparently providing them with a meaningful place within their chosen “communities”. In the most extreme form of radicalisation, that of “suicide bombers”, young people are made to believe that they are the “heroes” of a global cause, whilst being abused for the vicious fight of ideologists ready to sacrifice the lives of peaceful people.

6. To take swift action following the dramatic events of early 2015 in Paris, the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development sought external expertise from Mr Bernard De Vos, Ombudsman for Children’s Rights of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels (Belgium),⁵ as well as through a joint expert hearing on “Preventing Islamophobia while combating radicalisation of young people” with the Assembly’s “No Hate Parliamentary Alliance” in June 2015 (thus before my appointment as rapporteur). I would like to thank the experts involved for their most valuable contributions reflected in this report.⁶

3. For the purpose of the present report, the terms of “minors” and “children” will be used alternatively for designating persons under the age of 18, according to the understanding of children as including “every human being below the age of eighteen years”, provided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC): www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx.

4. According to the UN definition of youth including any person until the age of 24: www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf; NB: Although children are the main focus of the present paper, young people need to be included in present considerations, given that their action at this age often finds its origin in earlier stages of life. The processes of radicalisation start at a young age but often find their visible expression at the adult age, and need to be looked at in a comprehensive manner.

5. Hearing on “Reacting constructively to the radicalisation of children” held in Paris on 24 March 2015.

6. The experts present at the hearing on 23 June 2015 were Mr Tahir Abbas, Professor at the Department of Sociology, Fatih University, Istanbul (Turkey); Mr Bernard De Vos, Ombudsman for Children’s Rights of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels (Belgium); Mr Francesco Ragazzi (PhD), Lecturer of International Relations, Institute of Political Science, Leiden University (Netherlands).

7. Important recommendations for preventing extremism, in particular political extremism, have already been put forward by the Assembly in [Resolution 2011 \(2014\)](#) on counteraction to manifestations of neo-Nazism and right-wing extremism. To present conclusions and recommendations which are complementary to this earlier text, and in the light of the latest terrorist attacks which were carried out with an extremist religious motivation, I will, in this report, examine radicalisation trends driven by Islamist extremists and involving children and young people in particular.

8. Preventing radicalisation has also been defined as a priority for the Council of Europe, as demonstrated by the Committee of Ministers in their Declaration entitled “United around our principles against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism”, adopted in Brussels in May 2015,⁷ introducing a Council of Europe Action Plan on “The fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism”.⁸ These documents shall serve as references when it comes to elaborating relevant actions to be taken by national governments and parliaments, alongside the European Parliament resolution of November 2015,⁹ whilst for action to be developed at the local level, recent texts by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe contain useful recommendations.

2. The issue at stake: minors drawn into radical and extremist movements

9. “There is not a single reason why young people radicalise. ... There is not a single root cause. Radicalisation [is] a process that [can] occur in any society”, Professor Neumann, Director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) at King’s College London affirmed when addressing the United Nations Security Council.¹⁰ I would like to explore some of the facets of the phenomena so as to prepare the ground for subsequent recommendations aimed at immediate action which seems to be urgently required.

2.1. Typical processes and causes of radicalisation

10. Radicalisation can be defined as “the process of supporting or engaging in activities deemed (by others) as in violation of important social norms (e.g. the killing of civilians)”. Experts also distinguish cognitive and behavioural radicalisation according to whether radical ideas are expressed by beliefs or action, as well as different causes of radicalisation including domestic (socio-economic), geopolitical (the influence of international events and terrorist groups) and ideological determinants (ideological justification of violent acts).¹¹

11. Although the most recent terrorist attacks committed by radical islamists have led to the present report I would like to underline that both religious and political movements have similar ways of drawing children and young people into their circle of influence, and that the vulnerability of these age groups to such movements has similar root causes.

12. National prevention and security services in Belgium have noted three phases in the “radicalisation” process:¹² 1) a stage of insecurity, which then 2) finds expression in violence or even 3) terrorism. This type of progression may be observed both in radicalisation processes of political inspiration, such as in the neo-nazi “Blood and Honour” movement present in various countries, as well as in processes of “religious” radicalisation. For both types of radicalisation, individual and social factors play a role. At the origin, the person in question often suffers from feelings of injustice or frustration, for example due to his or her social discrimination or a lack of socio-economic opportunities. In political radicalisation, personal experiences, such as altercations with minorities who make for easy scapegoats (foreigners, homosexuals, etc.), a disadvantaged family background or the loss of employment may accentuate the impact of ideology on a vulnerable person.

7. CM(2015)74 final of 19 May 2015 (adopted at the 125th session of the Committee of Ministers).

8. CM(2015)74 add final of 19 May 2015 (adopted at the 125th session of the Committee of Ministers).

9. European Parliament / Directorate-General for Internal Policies: Preventing and Countering Youth Radicalisation in the EU, Study for the LIBE Committee, Brussels April 2014:

[www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/509977/IPOL-LIBE_ET\(2014\)509977_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/509977/IPOL-LIBE_ET(2014)509977_EN.pdf); and European Parliament Resolution of 25 November 2015 on the prevention of radicalisation and recruitment of European citizens by terrorist organisations (2015/2063(INI)).

10. King’s College London, News item posted on 29/04/15: www.kcl.ac.uk/newsevents/news/newsrecords/2015/April/ICSR-discuss-young-extremists-at-UN-Security-Council.aspx.

11. Léa Hannaoui-Saulais, Menace within Home-grown Islamic radicalisation in Western Europe: Roots, processes & prevention policies; MA thesis in European Interdisciplinary Studies, College of Europe, Natolin (Warsaw) Campus, 2014-2015.

12. *Comprendre la radicalisation à travers deux cas belges* (Understanding radicalisation through two Belgian cases), www.besafe.be.

13. The social character of certain political movements and gatherings, involving both community activities (concerts, parties, seminars) and distractions (alcohol, drugs), facilitates the acceptance of a political movement's values and dissipates possible suspicion towards the transmitted ideology. Feelings of solidarity, peer pressure and the secretive character of gatherings further push young people into extremist movements and, in the long run, isolate them from other social networks, thus generating the motivation to commit violent acts on behalf of this adopted community.

14. Processes of "religious" radicalisation take place in a similar way, but also include a quest for religious identity and a willingness to commit to certain collective causes, for example to render justice to members of the community suffering abroad. Surprisingly, in many cases, young people are rather secular before they enter the radicalisation processes, which often take place within informal social networks of friends and peers and then social media. An important factor of such processes seems to be the presence of a charismatic person delivering persuasive speeches, in religious places, schools, universities, prisons or through social media.¹³

15. When looking at the causes of radicalisation, we need to distinguish "pull" and "push" factors, that is factors actively drawing people into extremist movements and those pushing them into such movements. Amongst "pull factors" I would see the extremist movements themselves as "seducers", the ideology they offer to new recruits and their methods of convincing people, often children and young people who are vulnerable and influencable. Given that much of the ideology building, but also the recruitment itself, is happening in distant countries or via the Internet and social media, and that financial resources are made available by extra-European organisations (such as the terrorist group known as "Daesh"), these factors need to be addressed by highly specialised law-enforcement and intelligence services.

16. "Push factors" for radicalisation would be endogenous factors linked to living conditions of children and young people in Europe and which can make them vulnerable to becoming victims of extremist or even terrorist movements, and eventually to being exploited by them. The recent terrorist attacks in France have drawn attention to these factors, which are certainly amongst the first to be addressed by public and private action within Council of Europe member States. Of course "endogenous" and "exogenous" factors are closely linked when minors are recruited as fighters for foreign conflicts. However, my main personal interest is focused on what can be done to reduce these children's vulnerability and prevent them from being radicalised, thus the endogenous factors of such processes.

17. The 2014 European Parliament study on "Preventing and Countering Youth Radicalisation in the EU" confirmed that various causes, including root causes reaching far back into childhood, could lead people to become radicalised. It also showed that the State, through domestic living conditions and foreign policy, could – to some extent – contribute to the context in which some people were drawn into extremist movements. In this context, experts recommended speaking of "escalation" and "de-escalation" instead of using the notion of radicalisation (often seen as a one-way street).¹⁴

2.2. Processes of religious radicalisation: general observations made across Europe

18. The radicalisation of minors is an issue of growing concern both in Europe and North America. In the United Kingdom, probably the most researched context in this field, as reported by Professor Abbas from Fatih University (Istanbul) in June 2015, there have been several waves of "jihadism"¹⁵ involving Muslim youth leaving the country to take part in foreign conflicts: 1) in the 1980s in Afghanistan and Kashmir; 2) as of 1990, linked to the first Gulf War, in Iraq; and 3) also in the 1990s, in Bosnia. The current wave of "jihadism" began in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and concerns particularly Syria and Iraq. The phenomenon has attracted the attention of analysts and researchers since the 1980s, but at the time was neither recognised nor penalised by British law.

13. M. Bizina and D.H. Gray, Radicalization of Youth as a Growing Concern for Counter-Terrorism Policy, Global Security Studies, Winter 2014, Volume 5, Issue 1.

14. European Parliament / Directorate-General for Internal Policies: Preventing and Countering Youth Radicalisation in the EU, Study for the LIBE Committee, Brussels, April 2014.

[www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/509977/IPOL-LIBE_ET\(2014\)509977_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/509977/IPOL-LIBE_ET(2014)509977_EN.pdf).

15. Whilst "jihadism" is a term used by the media to describe the ideology of extremist Muslim movements, the word "*jihad*" is used more often by Islam, meaning "effort" or "struggle" (in Arabic), and designating either an individual's internal struggle against baser instincts, the struggle to build a good Muslim society, or a war for the faith against unbelievers, see: www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30411519.

19. The situation changed after the events of 11 September 2001 in New York, with the “war on terror” leading to restrictions of civil liberties and a tighter grip on activities considered to be linked with terrorism. In the United Kingdom, people involved in the first waves of “jihadism” were second-generation British-born Muslims of South-Asian origin (Pakistani and Bangladeshi). They mostly came from urban environments, often from disadvantaged milieu in impoverished cities, with limited socio-economic opportunities and aspirations. Discrimination, resulting from anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment, further affected certain communities, in particular working class people and those with poor educational backgrounds, and made young people even more vulnerable to external influences.

20. Experts working in other countries, such as Belgium, are not necessarily able to identify a typical profile for young fundamentalists. “Radicalised” young people in Belgium often seem to come from different socio-economic backgrounds and have varying levels of education; however, they all have in common a profound feeling of injustice against them individually or their communities (communities sometimes understood from a global perspective). This may prompt them to express their solidarity with certain “great causes” expressed by religious or political extremism abroad (see focus on the root causes below).

21. In particular, young people of Arabic/North African-Muslim backgrounds in Western Europe very often seem to receive signals of being different from and inferior to people in their social environments, and fail to integrate into society, still being considered as immigrants after many years (or generations) of residence. In such cases, religious extremism, but also delinquency can be a way for them to manifest their difference. It can also be a form of protest against mainstream society’s limitations of expressions linked to religious beliefs (such as the full face veil, feast of sacrifice or fasting during the month of Ramadan). Their increased interest in radical ideology and action often allows these young people to project the blame for their suffering on society.¹⁶

22. At this point, I would like to draw special attention to the recent work by the Parliamentary Assembly on “Foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq”¹⁷ in the course of which the rapporteur, Mr Dirk Van der Maelen (Belgium, SOC), has prepared a detailed analysis of some of the underlying causes leading young people to engage as foreign fighters, including their social conditions and search for identity. In the resolution adopted, the Assembly notably expressed its concern about the growing flow of foreign fighters, men and women from across Europe who travel to Syria and Iraq in order to join violent extremist groups committing crimes against both European citizens and local populations of destination countries, noting that more than 20 000 foreign fighters had joined militant organisations in these two countries nearly a fifth of which were residents or nationals of Western European countries (mostly France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, as well as Sweden and Denmark in proportion to their overall relatively small population).¹⁸

23. The Assembly also rightly drew attention to the most worrying trend of young women increasingly attracted by terrorist organisations such as “Daesh”. Of the estimated 3 000 western migrants, around 550 are estimated to be women and girls.¹⁹ There has been a significant rise in numbers since the declaration of the “caliphate” in 2014. Of the 550 western women, approximately 70 were German, 63-70 French, 60 British, 30 Dutch and 14 Austrian.²⁰ Very often, their role does not consist of fighting in the conflict but rather of supporting the terrorist organisation indirectly, for example by recruiting new supporters.²¹ A study by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 2012 emphasises how important it is to be aware of female radicalisation and that radicalisation factors are often alike for men and women, boys and girls.²² In countering the radicalisation of young women and girls, the following are seen as crucial: the importance of families in posing “barriers to migration”, the key role of the Internet,²³ as well as the importance of “better interact[ing] with small women’s organizations at the grassroots level”.²⁴

16. M. Bizina and D.H. Gray: *Radicalization of Youth as a Growing Concern for Counter-Terrorism Policy*, op. cit.

17. [Doc. 13937](#) and [Resolution 2091 \(2016\)](#).

18. Peter Neumann, “Foreign fighter total in Syria/Iraq now exceeds 20,000; surpasses Afghanistan conflict in the 1980s”, ICSR, King’s College London, news item posted on 26 January 2015, <http://icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/>.

19. Hoyle, Bradford and Frenett, *Becoming Mulan? Female Western migrants to ISIS*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2015.

20. Bakker and de Leede, *European Female Jihadists in Syria: Exploring an Under-Researched Topic*, ICCT Background Note, April 2015.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 9; Badran, *Women and Radicalization*, DIIS Working Paper No. 2006/5; Hoyle, Bradford and Frenett, *Becoming Mulan? Female Western migrants to ISIS*, op. cit.

22. OSCE, *Women and Terrorist Radicalization – Final Report*, February 2013, No. 5.

23. Bhui, Warfa and Jones, *Is Violent Radicalisation Associated with Poverty, Migration, Poor Self-Reported Health and Common Mental Disorders?* PLoS ONE 9(3); Hoyle, Bradford and Frenett, *Becoming Mulan? Female Western migrants to ISIS*, op. cit.

24. Whilst the availability of data varies greatly across Europe, specific country studies confirm the general trends and determinants, such as a recent study on Bosnia and Herzegovina, where 156 men, 36 women and 25 children were observed travelling to Syria (December 2012-December 2014). Amongst the main causes for this movement, experts identified a rapid erosion of socio-cultural values in the post-conflict country, the perception of violence and ideology as the only available measures for self-affirmation and protection and a significant unemployment rate of 44% overall and 63% for young people (the highest in the world), making youth (15-24) a particularly targeted group.²⁵

25. Eastern European countries like my own, Azerbaijan, are also familiar with the phenomenon of Islamist radicalism, following independence from the Soviet Union. My country has notably seen the rise of significant Salafist communities based on an extremist interpretation of Islam and a sectarian division of different Islamic denominations (Sunni and Shia). Radical movements in the country regularly try to recruit Azerbaijani nationals, including young people, as fighters in foreign conflicts, such as in Iraq and Syria. However, research findings show that there has been a relative weakening of the phenomenon of radicalisation in recent years, thanks to several positive measures, such as the revision of the law on religious freedom and the monitoring of mosques, both of which facilitate the detection of early signals of radicalisation. As a multicultural, secular society, which fosters a peaceful cohabitation between different communities and a moderate interpretation of religion, Azerbaijan is regularly seen as a country that could play a more active role as mediator in sectarian conflicts in the Middle East and contribute to a more comprehensive dialogue between the West and the Islamic World.²⁶

2.3. The root causes as observed “in the field”: children’s social status, opportunities and search of identity

26. A most valuable contribution to the understanding by our committee of the root causes of child and youth radicalisation was made by Mr Bernard De Vos, Ombudsman for Children's Rights of the Federation of Wallonia-Brussels, who was invited to speak to the Social Affairs Committee in March 2015. The expert, who has been observing the radicalisation of minors for several years, has notably addressed the issue with young people in disadvantaged areas of Brussels, which has attracted much attention following the latest Paris attacks (as some of the terrorists had grown up in the Brussels district of Molenbeek).

27. In his work with children and young people in Brussels, M. De Vos identified two main root causes for their radicalisation: 1) feelings of profound injustice, segregation or marginalisation, often due to exclusion from “mainstream” society and discrimination experienced by themselves or others (for example in accessing higher education or the labour market); and 2) a lack of social purpose and utility. These feelings lead young people to develop an interest in any social action proposed to them, including by radical leaders who are skilful in approaching young people in different contexts (Internet, communities, associations, detention centres).

28. Many young people, in Belgium and elsewhere, are discriminated against in the national educational framework from the very start, and in employment opportunities later on – a development which can certainly be seen as a time bomb and one of the main root causes for radicalisation. Other young people find themselves stigmatised after having left radical movements and have even more difficulties re-integrating into society. We can therefore see that discrimination and radicalisation are two elements of the same vicious circle, first pushing young people towards extremist ideas, then making it more and more difficult for them to leave extremist movements once they have been in contact with them. In this context, ideology often allows young people to “be someone” in a way seemingly legitimised by a religious-political framework, and “the fundamental desire to matter, to be someone, to have respect [becomes] a key element in the paths towards violent extremism”.²⁷

29. To counter the negative dynamics observed in the field, experts call for a non-ambiguous public discourse, which clearly points to radical movements or terrorism, but does not confound them with Islam as such. Interreligious and interethnic dialogue should go beyond religious rituals, addressing problematic cultural habits (like the “little prince” education for boys in some cultures, as well as the excessive social control exercised over girls). As part of the solution, European societies need to break such cycles of

24. OSCE, Women and Terrorist Radicalization – Final Report, February 2013, No. 23.

25. Asinovic and Jusic, The lure of the Syrian war: the foreign fighters’ Bosnian Contingent, Atlantic Initiative, Sarajevo, 2015.

26. European Foundation for Democracy, Secularism in Azerbaijan and the Threat of Radicalisation in the Region, “Counter Extremism Project”, Brussels, June 2015.

27. Léa Hannaoui-Saulais; footnote 11 above.

disadvantage by providing equal opportunities to all young people as well as by fighting the “Islamophobia” (see below), as for example expressed at times through the mass media. At an individual level, the moral resistance of children and young people needs to be reinforced and a meaningful place in society should be given to each one of them, either through education and employment or civil engagement. At a collective level, the concept of community needs reinforcing. Radicalisation is primarily a socio-economic challenge, with young Muslims not being given the same opportunities as their peers, and Islamophobic hate crimes on the rise.²⁸

2.4. Islamophobia as an aggravating factor

30. Islamophobia, defined as an “unfounded hostility towards Muslims, and therefore fear or dislike of all or most Muslims”²⁹ is, in my view, not one of the root causes of radicalisation, but can be an aggravating factor in some of the vicious circles leading people into extremist movements. Radicalisation and Islamophobia are therefore closely interconnected and are products of the same social context in many countries. We all regularly observe misrepresentation and disinformation regarding European Muslims. The spotlight on terrorism and extremism takes our attention away from the lives of ordinary Muslims, living as peaceful citizens throughout Europe. It is also important to note that European-born Muslims are very minimally involved in violent “jihadism”, considering that Muslims account for as much as 5% to 10% of the population even in Western countries like Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands or the United Kingdom.

31. As regards the United Kingdom, Professor Abbas explained to our committee that Islamophobia had emerged only in recent times. Previously, there had been no real concept of a Muslim community in the United Kingdom, but rather of a community of Asian heritage, with little religious connotation. Today, however, Islamophobia is a real and concrete threat, in spite of efforts to counter it in the media and in political spheres. At global level, the last few decades have seen the emergence of a thesis on the “clash of civilisations”, with growing incomprehension between the Western world and Muslim countries. Against this background, some young Muslims who do not have a precise understanding of Islam could consider “jihad” as a form of salvation, providing empowerment through acts which their radicalisation renders justifiable. Very recently, and both in the light of the latest terrorist attacks and the refugee crisis, it seems that Islamophobia and hate speech against Muslims more generally, and migrants in particular, are welcomed by international terrorist movements given that they make yet more people receptive to extremist discourse.

32. In this context, the current refugee and migrant crisis Europe is facing following, amongst other causes, the seemingly endless violent conflicts in Syria and Iraq, is another sensitive development. Various European countries currently see an uprise of anti-immigrant and often anti-Muslim attitudes and acts, such as those in February 2016 in Germany, where refugee buses and camps were attacked by small, but furious crowds protesting against their arrival.³⁰ Such events are bound to further fuel the marginalisation of young people with an immigrant background and, subsequently, their sensitivity to extremist discourse. They also show how extremist movements of different backgrounds, religious and political, can be closely linked to each other.

2.5. The Internet as a place of recruitment

33. International research undertaken by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recently confirmed that the Internet has increasingly been embraced by violent extremist groups, who use this technology to promote hatred and violence based on ethnic, religious and cultural grounds, to recruit young people, and to create on-line communities with a global reach, in which violent extremist views and behaviour can be encouraged, thereby contributing to processes of radicalisation. As UNESCO notes, the Internet has become a strategic tool for enhancing the visibility and influence of groups advocating sectarianism and thriving as virtual communities even as they also develop an offline presence on the margins of society. It is therefore important for the international community to arrive at a clearer understanding of the role of the Internet as a recruitment tool for extremism and radicalisation and subsequently craft effective tools in response.³¹

28. Bizina and Gray, *Radicalization of Youth as a Growing Concern for Counter-Terrorism Policy*, op. cit.

29. According to the definition provided by the Center for Race & Gender, University of California, Berkeley (United States): <http://crg.berkeley.edu/content/islamophobia/defining-islamophobia>.

30. *The Guardian*, “Mob chanting at bus of refugees in Germany shames politicians”, 19 February 2016: www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/19/mob-chanting-bus-refugees-germany-politicians.

31. See information provided in the framework of a UNESCO conference organised in June 2015: <http://en.unesco.org/events/youth-and-internet-fighting-radicalization-and-extremism>. http://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/concept_note_-_youth_and_internet.pdf.

34. Particularly as regards Europe and the United Kingdom, the Rand Corporation's study of 15 violent extremists and terrorists found that the Internet played a role in radicalisation.³² The study confirms that the Internet is a key source of information, communication and propaganda, which creates more opportunities to become radicalised, and acts as an "echo chamber", providing stronger confirmation of existing beliefs than offline interactions. However, the study concludes that the Internet is (only) one aspect of radicalisation, and that it is essential for future research to look both online and offline to fully understand relevant processes and inform the development of new strategies and policies.

3. Action taken and recommended by stakeholders from European to local level

3.1. Radicalisation in the light of Council of Europe standards

35. Freedom of expression is a fundamental right protected by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and one of the foundations of democratic and pluralistic societies. As such, it is applicable not only to ideas that are favourably received, but also to those which may offend, shock or disturb the State or the population, as expressed by the case law of the European Court of Human Rights ("the Court").

36. This fundamental freedom must, of course, respect other fundamental rights and the rights of others; it may therefore be considered necessary to prevent and sanction all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify hatred based on intolerance.³³ In my view, this includes expressions made by radical movements against democratic societies and their fundamental values, but also comprises any expressions of hatred against religious movements present in Europe (such as "Islamophobia", see above). However, as confirmed by the Court's case law, any "restriction" or "penalty" imposed in the sphere of freedom of expression must, of course, "be proportionate to the legitimate aim pursued".³⁴

37. The fight against terrorism at Council of Europe level is backed up by a strong legal framework comprising the Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism (CETS No. 196) and its Additional Protocol (CETS No. 217), the Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime, concerning the criminalisation of acts of a racist and xenophobic nature committed through computer systems (ETS No. 189), as well as other texts. Whilst good progress has been made in recent years with regard to the adherence to and implementation of these instruments, it is regrettable that important recommendations by the Parliamentary Assembly have not been taken into account, such as those expressed in [Opinion 289 \(2015\)](#) on the draft additional protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism where a reference to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child had been proposed.

38. Besides its debate on "Terrorist attacks in Paris: together for a democratic response" in January 2015, the Assembly has already expressed its concern about the growing dissemination of hate speech, especially in the political sphere and on the Internet, as well as anti-immigration political parties and populist and extremist movements, and has encouraged member States to develop specific strategies and action plans in these areas.³⁵

39. The Council of Europe Action Plan on "The fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism (2015-2017)", adopted by the Committee of Ministers at its 125th Session in Brussels on 19 May 2015, calls on member States to reinforce the legal framework against terrorism and violent extremism, and to prevent and fight violent radicalisation through concrete measures in the public sector, in particular in schools and prisons, and on the Internet. All Council of Europe member States should be invited to support the implementation of this action plan, including through reinforcing their legal framework and more specific measures taken at the national level in the areas of education, prisons and the Internet.

40. Further action at Council of Europe level, worth being mentioned here and interesting as a source of inspiration for national action, comprises activities in the educational field (notably on competences for democratic culture, intercultural dialogue and access to education and employment for refugees and migrants)

32. Rand Corporation/Rand Europe (Behr, Reding, Edwards, Gribbon): Radicalisation in the digital era. The use of the Internet in 15 cases of terrorism and extremism, Cambridge/Brussels, 2013, www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR400/RR453/RAND_RR453.pdf.

33. European Court of Human Rights, Factsheet on Hate Speech, November 2015: www.echr.coe.int/Documents/FS_Hate_speech_ENG.pdf.

34. *Handyside v. the United Kingdom*, judgment of 7 December 1976, paragraph 49.

35. See Assembly [Resolution 2011 \(2014\)](#) on counteraction to manifestations of neo-Nazism and right-wing extremism and [Resolution 2069 \(2015\)](#) on recognising and preventing neo-racism.

on intolerance and discrimination (through the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) for example). In this context, I would in particular like to underline the importance of the “No Hate Speech Movement” Campaign which has been extended until 2017. The Assembly has strongly supported this initiative in recent years, and will continue to do so through its “No Hate Parliamentary Alliance”, a network with which my committee has closely collaborated in preparing this report. Further initiatives at Council of Europe level are under way with regard to child participation, such as the work done by 1 200 schoolchildren on “tolerance and living together in peace” for the World Forum for Democracy to be held in Strasbourg in autumn 2016.

41. With a view to local action against radicalisation, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe adopted a Strategy to combat radicalisation at grass-roots level in January 2015, and completed it in September 2015 through its Guidelines for local and regional authorities on preventing radicalisation and manifestations of hate at the grass-roots level. It recommends local multi-agency strategies, the setting up of local safety partnerships, the consideration of education as an important vector, the involvement of civil society, the development of exit programmes for those wishing to leave extremism, as well as the allocation of necessary funds in local budgets to allow sustainable funding of prevention programmes.³⁶

42. Finally, I wish to refer to an event organised by the Council of Europe’s European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre), with support from the European Union, in the framework of the programme “Towards Strengthened Democratic Governance in the Southern Mediterranean”: the Lisbon Forum 2015 on “How to combat radicalisation and terrorism: Prevention tools and shared knowledge in the Mediterranean and European space”, held in Lisbon on 3 and 4 December 2015, to which I contributed on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly. In their conclusions, conference participants highlighted the strengthening of democratic governance and the promotion of citizen participation at the local level as safeguards against radicalisation and terrorism, whilst underlining the importance of education, intercultural dialogue, inclusive societies and multi-agency approaches in local communities.

43. Finally, specific recommendations have also been made by the European Parliament through its Resolution of 25 November 2015 on the prevention of radicalisation and recruitment of European citizens by terrorist organisations, which calls for action including both various repressive and law enforcement measures. I fully agree with the European Parliament and its rapporteur, French MEP Rachida Dati, that a severe and truly European response is needed.³⁷

3.2. Good practice by civil society organisations

44. In regular co-operation with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the European Forum for Urban Security (Efus) has, over the past years, been carrying out a series of activities aimed at strengthening the capacities of local authorities faced with the phenomenon of violent extremism, and will continue to propose training sessions for local authorities in 2016.³⁸ On 18 November 2015 in Aarhus (Denmark), the Forum organised a conference on the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism, resulting in the so-called “Aarhus Declaration”, emphasising the key role of local authorities in implementing anti-radicalisation strategies and setting up early warning systems.³⁹ I would like to underline the importance of civil society players for reaching out to children and young people in their daily environment, as some of the following good practice examples will also show. It is therefore evident that anti- or deradicalisation strategies, in particular at the local level, need to follow multi-stakeholder approaches.

3.3. Examples of good practice observed in different member States

45. Interesting approaches to deradicalisation are, for example, to be found in the United Kingdom, such as the “West London Initiative” (WLI).⁴⁰ The WLI is an NGO working in first-line deradicalisation with young people of Muslim background at risk of developing extremist beliefs propagated by extremist ideologues. The

36. See document CG/2015(29)5 adopted at the 29th Session of the Congress, 20-22 October 2015.

37. Article by the European Parliament/Justice and Home Affairs, “Rachida Dati on the radicalisation of EU citizens: ‘A truly European response is needed’”, 19 November 2015: www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20151016STO98139/Dati-on-the-radicalisation-of-EU-citizens-A-truly-European-response-is-needed:

38. For more information on these upcoming training sessions, see: <http://efus.eu/en/topics/risks-forms-of-crime/radicalisation/efus/10651/>.

39. See the “Aarhus Declaration”: <http://citiesagainstextremism.eu/conclusions-and-reporting/>.

40. The WLI is a member of the European Network of Deradicalisation: www.european-network-of-deradicalisation.eu/profiles/68-west-london-initiative.

agency's targets are converts, as well as second- and third- generation Muslims born and brought up in the United Kingdom, and their families. In close co-operation with governmental agencies, the WLI pursues a broad range of objectives aimed at ensuring young people's participation in mainstream society and building bridges for peaceful dialogue and initiatives. At the national level, the Channel programme supports local panels and their partners in the framework of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (the CT&S Act).⁴¹ Data gathered for this programme has shown to what extent children are affected by processes of radicalisation: of the 796 individuals referred to the government's programme for possible intervention, 312 were found to be under 18.⁴²

46. Other countries, such as France, have expanded preventive approaches in the wake of the recent terrorist attacks. Whilst the private Centre of Prevention of Sectarian Derivatives linked to Islam (Centre de prévention contre les dérives sectaires liées à l'Islam (CPDSI)) has been operational for several years, the creation of public deradicalisation centres has just been announced by the French Government.

47. Useful preventive strategies are, once again, to be found in Belgium, where a Federal Programme for Preventing Violent Radicalisation was adopted in 2013 (to implement the relevant European Union Strategy and Action Plan of 2005). The Belgian programme is based on six pillars: 1) improving general awareness about radicalisation; 2) an action plan against frustrations that could lead to radicalisation; 3) increasing the moral resistance of vulnerable groups; 4) support for local authorities; 5) involvement of communities and diasporas; and 6) the fight against radicalisation on the Internet.⁴³

48. Several local authorities in Belgium have also used interesting approaches, such as the town of Verviers, which has set up a prevention unit composed of radicalisation experts, psychologists and social workers, as well as a platform for multidisciplinary concertation between all services concerned (police, judiciary, youth support services, radicalisation experts, schools and youth associations).⁴⁴

49. In 2014, the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security presented an Action Plan Against Radicalisation and Violent Extremism, detailing comprehensive lines of action, including a section on international crime prevention (notably in the context of Nordic countries) and prevention of radicalisation and recruitment via the Internet.⁴⁵ With regard to the latter, an enhanced police presence is specifically recommended in order to prevent discrimination, harassment and hate speech, and to increase knowledge about how to take action against undesirable experiences on the Internet.

50. According to a 2010 European Union study, Denmark was considered a "lead country" on deradicalisation and disengagement. In 2009, the country presented its first national strategy to prevent radicalisation and extremism, both left- and right-wing, as well as militant Islamism. Like other initiatives, the plan had a strong focus on direct contacts and dialogue with vulnerable young people (for example in disadvantaged areas, prisons, etc.) and local partnerships.⁴⁶ Although a few years have passed since this study, we may certainly consider that Denmark is amongst the pioneer countries in this area as is also shown by a 2012 conference organised under the Danish EU presidency.⁴⁷

41. HM Government (UK), 2015, Channel Duty Guidance on "Protecting vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism": www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/425189/Channel_Duty_Guidance_April_2015.pdf.

42. "Large proportion of those referred to UK deradicalisation scheme are under 18", *The Guardian*, 8 October 2015, www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/oct/08/large-proportion-of-those-referred-to-uk-deradicalisation-scheme-are-under-18.

43. Delafortrie and Springael, Programme fédéral de prévention de la radicalisation violente (Federal Programme for Preventing Violent Radicalisation), article published on 19 April 2013 by the Chancellery of the Belgian Prime Minister: www.presscenter.org.

44. Roxanne Baguette, La cellule de prévention et une plate-forme multidisciplinaire luttent contre le radicalisme à Verviers (The prevention unit and a multidisciplinary platform fight against radicalism in Verviers), article in the *Journal de la Police*, 10 June 2015, www.besafe.be.

45. See Action Plan: www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/6d84d5d6c6df47b38f5e2b989347fc49/action-plan-against-radicalisation-and-violent-extremism_2014.pdf.

46. Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs of Denmark: The challenge of extremism, Examples of deradicalisation and disengagement programmes in the EU, Copenhagen, October 2010, www.youthpolicy.org/library/wp-content/uploads/library/2010_Challenge_Extremisme_Deradicalisation_EU_Eng.pdf.

47. www.strategicdialogue.org/Tackling_Extremism_-_Conference_Report.pdf.

51. Of course, many other countries have taken far-reaching and exemplary action, but I will not be able to cite them all here. However, on the route to effectively preventing the radicalisation of children and young people across Europe, exchanges of good practice at government, parliament, local authority and civil society levels will be essential; and as a parliamentarian committed to children's rights and protection, I am deeply engaged in promoting such exchanges.

3.4. Effectively fighting the radicalisation of children and young people – expert recommendations

52. International organisations and experts approach the matter of radicalisation of children and young people from different angles. The most hands-on approach is certainly followed by experts working in the field with minors. Some of the most convincing elements against child and youth radicalisation were therefore, in my view, presented by the Belgian Ombudsman who called for the following, quite comprehensive, set of measures:

- fighting the discrimination, segregation and marginalisation (and subsequent feelings of injustice) of children of all ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds;
- providing all children and young people with equal opportunities, life perspectives and a sense of purpose and social utility, as well as perspectives for social mobility;
- using education as a resource for integrating children from an early age, including through specific education on democratic citizenship;
- preventing “dysfunctional” family situations, notably by involving women as the main “educators” of children in the family;
- building veritable partnerships at the local level by mobilising the capacities of local communities instead of isolating them, and by “pacifying” the relationships between young people and the institutions that serve them (schools, police, social services and others), including by making families understand the purpose of such institutions;
- avoiding the stigmatisation of children and young people who were previously involved in radical movements;
- avoiding verbal generalisations and attacks against Islam, overcoming an excessive focus on religious symbols (and engaging an interreligious dialogue on essential issues and in a context favourable to religious pluralism) and distinguishing Islam as a world religion separate from extremist religious movements, such as the terrorist group known as “Daesh”;
- continuously monitoring radical movements but avoiding “ethnic profiling” in law enforcement.

53. In his presentation to our committee in June 2015, Federico Ragazzi from the University of Leiden (Netherlands), one of the authors of the European Parliament study, added that one of the main challenges in fighting youth radicalisation was the current absence of a clear division (“firewall”) between social integration work and police work (i.e. those helping should not be reporting). To effectively fight youth radicalisation, EU experts further recommend improving data collection, examining the human rights impact of anti-radicalisation policies, rebuilding trust in existing democratic institutions, avoiding limits to fundamental freedoms which may provoke further radicalisation, defining clear rules and limits for police and intelligence intervention (for example limiting peer reporting), and basing judicial action on acts committed (and not anticipated).

4. Conclusions and recommendations

54. Through the first international strategies, as well as expert analyses, we can see that the radicalisation of children and young people is a complex social phenomenon of the 21st century. As General Rapporteur on Children of the Parliamentary Assembly, I would once again like to underline the importance of working with children and young people from an early age. To fight radicalisation effectively, it is important to orient young people in their life choices before crucial decisions influence their socio-economic development and while their identities and political opinions are still developing.

55. As former rapporteur on “Ending child poverty in Europe”,⁴⁸ I believe that education and employment are key aspects of social inclusion: As a parliamentarian, I regularly meet with children, teachers and families, and can see that education and professional training are essential for giving a meaningful place in society to

48. See Assembly [Resolution 1995 \(2014\)](#) on ending child poverty in Europe.

all children and young people, for allowing them to take ownership of the fundamental values of European societies and to be aware of the risks of being lured into radical movements through the Internet and social media.

56. I personally believe that awareness raising and dialogue should be promoted in all European societies: interpersonal dialogue between children, their families and other educators, dialogue and communication between States jointly fighting the increase in radical movements, groups and hindering the cross-border movement of terrorists, and last but not least, interreligious dialogue striving for peaceful co-existence instead of violently combating other political, societal and religious systems.

57. As rapporteur, I am also strongly convinced that the effectiveness of preventive action against radicalisation increases dramatically when these actions are carried out in close co-operation with the target populations. Anti- and deradicalisation strategies must be led by local authorities and communities and with families and young people's peers. All these stakeholders need to be involved as partners and not as "clients" of top-down and theoretical approaches. In various institutions, reference persons should be specially trained on radicalisation trends and deradicalisation strategies to help them interact with children in their daily environment.

58. As politically active members of European societies, we must not forget that we are also observing a general rise of extremist ideas in our societies. Several European countries are currently experiencing an increase in extremist political parties and movements, be it against a background of an enduring economic crisis or the massive arrival of refugees asking for asylum. The fight against extremist ideas does not only serve the purpose of protecting us against terrorist attacks, but is to our societies' benefit as such, by preserving the highest standards of democracy and human rights. We may therefore all feel concerned by the list of measures included in the draft resolution.

59. Whilst my main focus here was on the "endogenous" root causes found in the immediate environment of children and young people, there certainly is the need to strike the right balance between repressive action preventing further crimes by "religious" or political movements ("exogeneous" root causes) and preventive community action avoiding discrimination and abuse of vulnerable youth. However, I strongly believe that a committed fight against international terrorism must be vigilant about respecting fundamental rights and the rule of law. Anti-radicalisation strategies in all Council of Europe member States must be accompanied by measures against Islamophobia and other forms of hate speech which, left unchecked, might further reinforce vicious circles of discrimination and the mistrust between political and religious systems that fuel extremists.